

# 1. German Cinema and the Neoliberal Turn: The End of the National-Cultural Film Project

## Abstract

This chapter examines two films about the transitional status of cinema around 1980, Wenders's *The State of Things* (1982), and Gusner's *All My Girls* (1980). Situating these films in relation to Deleuze's influential *Cinema* books, written in response to the crisis of cinema that both films narrate, I analyse these films as exemplifications of Deleuze's crystal-image, a figure that helps explicate the way they make visible the cinematic confrontation between time and money. Both films discursively anticipate events of the neoliberal turn, demonstrating the impending triumph of market principles over the national-cultural film project represented by the New German Cinema and DEFA. This chapter offers a feminist-queer reading of how both films disrupt normative timelines to open up alternative imaginaries.

**Keywords:** Wim Wenders, Iris Gusner, Gilles Deleuze, New German Cinema, DEFA, crisis of cinema

'The taxpayer does not want to be provoked, he wants to be entertained.'

– Friedrich Zimmermann, West Germany's Minister of the Interior<sup>1</sup>

'Cinema is not about life going by. People don't want to see that.'

– Gordon, Hollywood film producer in Wim Wenders's *Der Stand der Dinge*

'The people don't want to see themselves...they'll turn the channel'

– Ralf Päsche, East German film student in Iris Gusner's *Alle meine Mädchen*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Böhme, Jenny, and Lersch, 'Spiegel Gespräch.'

<sup>2</sup> Creech also uses this quote as an epigraph for her chapter on Gusner's film. Creech, *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts in East German Women's Films*, 141.

In the concluding episode of *Der Stand der Dinge* (*The State of Things*, FRG/Portugal, 1982), the German film director Friedrich Munro tracks down the Hollywood producer Gordon, who is hiding out from loan sharks in a mobile home parked on the Sunset Strip. Munro has travelled to L.A. from Portugal to find the absent producer in the hopes that he will restore financing to Munro's bankrupt film. With its story about a German director shooting a Hollywood-financed picture with an international cast on location in Portugal, *Der Stand der Dinge* weaves a tale of trans/national cinema, in which conflicts between art and commerce and between authorial vision and the mandate to entertain play out in protracted negotiations over production and financing. At stake is Munro's choice to shoot his film in black and white (as his cinematographer explains, 'Life is in colour, but black and white is more realistic'); the film's fragmentary, elliptical narrative; and its slow pacing, all qualities associated with European art cinema. As the mobile home careens around the streets of night-time Los Angeles, Gordon summarizes the conflicts that underpin Wenders's film: 'If I would have shot that same film with an American director and an American cast in colour, I'm sittin' on top of the world in six months. [...] All you had to do is just—you've got to have a story, Friedrich. [...] Fuck reality. Cinema is not about life going by. People don't want to see that.' Alluding to the rise of 'Global Hollywood' and the concomitant imperative to create films with the broadest possible commercial appeal, Gordon's statement points to the increasing saturation of culture by economy in the early 1980s and its direct implications for German cinema.<sup>3</sup>

With its staging of opposed conceptions of what cinema is 'about', *Der Stand der Dinge* narrativizes the significant debates taking place in the Federal Republic at this time around the role of cinema in the promotion and legitimization of national culture, and the place of state support in underwriting filmmaking. Wenders's film situates these local debates in the context of transformations at stake for cinema at large, including the possibilities for cinematic representation posed by the emergence of new technologies and the globalization of media industries. Exhibiting the circuit of exchange (both financial and cultural) between Europe and Hollywood, *Der Stand der Dinge* has been received as a narrative about the demise of the auteur-driven New German Cinema, but it is also, more broadly construed, a key parable of cinema's neoliberal turn.

Gordon's exhortation that people don't want to see the reality of 'life going by' in the cinema echoes a similar statement made by the East German film

3 See Miller, *Global Hollywood*.

student Ralf Päsche in Iris Gusner's DEFA film *Alle meine Mädchen* (*All My Girls*, GDR, 1980). When he first learns of the film school thesis project he has been assigned—a television documentary about an all-female work brigade in a Berlin lightbulb factory—Ralf is outraged: 'The people don't want to see themselves [...] They'll turn the channel! My god, brigades! What do I know about them?! And even worse: They're women!' Ralf's statement alludes to the widespread fatigue among GDR audiences at the project of socialist realism—with its depictions on screen of collective solidarity, the worker as hero, and the experience of everyday life—which led viewers to turn away from East German film and television in the 1980s. Like Wenders, Gusner employs the self-reflexive device of a film-within-a-film to stage a narrative about cinema's transitional status around 1980. While *Der Stand der Dinge* foreshadows the marketization of cinema beginning to take hold in the Federal Republic, *Alle meine Mädchen* foregrounds the shifting terrain of representation at DEFA during a period of increased economic pressure, due to the conflict between state-mandated ideological and aesthetic principles, on the one hand, and the project of popular filmmaking, on the other. As Ralf Päsche's proclamation 'And even worse: They're women!' emphasizes, *Alle meine Mädchen* specifically underscores the implication of gender (including male authorship and the representation of women) in the ideological, formal, and economic transformation of cinema, developing a systematic focus on 'the state of stories and the relation of women to narrative' that also underpins Wenders's film.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter considers the specific contexts that shaped the transformation of German cinema on both sides of the Wall, mapping the particular trajectory of encroaching neoliberalization in Germany (East and West)—home to a significant national cinema tradition that came under new pressure and scrutiny beginning in the early 1980s. With reference to Gilles Deleuze's account of the 'death of cinema' and the figure of the crystal-image, I demonstrate how the metacinematic narratives of *Der Stand der Dinge* and *Alle meine Mädchen* discursively anticipate significant events signalling the end of the national-cultural film project in both Germanies: the change in film subsidy laws initiated by Minister of the Interior Friedrich Zimmermann in West Germany beginning in 1983; and the so-called 'Father' Letter, a much-discussed 1981 letter to the editor of the newspaper *Neues Deutschland* that criticized DEFA films for failing to give adequate representation to East Germany's achievements. These emblematic events help to trace the contours of the neoliberal turn in

4 Gemünden, 'Oedi-Pal Travels', 211.

German cinema, demonstrating the interrelationship of globalizing media structures, economic change, and national constellations.

I use the term 'neoliberal turn' to describe an amalgam of changes in regimes of film production and consumption that began around 1980 and continue to unfold in the present day, including the increasing predominance of corporations and commercial considerations, a mandate toward privatization, and the erosion of autonomous spheres of cultural production. As this chapter shows, German cinema provides a key site for analysing cinematic neoliberalization because of the specific social, political, and economic context of filmmaking in divided Germany during the postwar period. Thomas Elsaesser has observed that 'West Germany was the first capitalist country where the State, directly via its Ministry of the Interior, indirectly via grant-awarding bodies, assumed for film-making the role of patron traditionally associated more with education and performing arts than with cinema.'<sup>5</sup> As a consequence, many aspects of the West German filmmaking enterprise were largely exempt from market mechanisms during the postwar years.

Indeed, as John Davidson has demonstrated, the New German Cinema (NGC) emerged via the efforts of politicians, filmmakers, and (largely foreign) audiences in the postwar period to achieve the renewal of an internationally accepted West German cinema. Although these groups were by no means unified, and indeed they pursued disparate goals, nonetheless their efforts ultimately created

space in the market for a cultural product that [would] serve two distinct functions: first, this new cinema should be a site of cultural resistance, both a sanctioned and contained space, yet one in which serious aesthetic and political opposition to dominant policy could be expressed and processed; second, this new cinema should act as a kind of filmic Olympic team, winning international recognition for individual filmmakers and the nation. At first glance, these functions seem incompatible, but over the course of the 1960s and 1970s they evolve as complementary characteristics of NGC.<sup>6</sup>

5 Elsaesser, *New German Cinema*, 28.

6 Davidson, 'Hegemony and Cinematic Strategy', 52. As Davidson further argues, even in an age of increasing globalization, national cultural production and reception continued to play a significant role such that 'the genre of NGC helps negotiate the precarious balance between the international and national in the identity of the West' (62).

Davidson emphasizes the ‘cultural-diplomatic function’ of NGC in the project of representing and legitimating the West German state, a function that was underwritten by that state’s economic support of film production.

Likewise, the state-controlled cinema of the GDR was produced outside of a commercial context, with fixed subsidies flowing directly to DEFA from the Ministry of Culture, ensuring film’s key role in representing and promoting socialism. Only in the last decade of its existence did financial pressures begin to take a serious toll on feature filmmaking in East Germany. As Hans-Joachim Meurer explains, ‘Particularly from the late seventies onwards, cultural officials were strongly committed to increasing the efficiency of the DEFA studios and rationalising the film production process in an attempt to come to terms with the rising cost of feature film production.’<sup>7</sup> At the same time, however, ‘The political instrumentalization of audio-visual production by the East German state was gradually tightened from the early eighties onwards’<sup>8</sup>—due to both internal opposition in the GDR and escalating pressure from the West, leading to a paradoxical and simultaneous movement of doubling down on state censorship while opening up to new forms of internationalization at DEFA.<sup>9</sup>

In both Germanies, the *culture* of cinema took precedence over economic concerns in the postwar period, so that the abrupt reversal of this hierarchy in the early 1980s brings the emergent cinema of neoliberalism into sharp focus. In the atmosphere of heightened competition that followed the economic downturn of the 1970s, profitability, marketing, and the principle of *Wirtschaftlichkeit* (economic efficiency) increasingly shaped German film production, distribution, and reception. In the FRG, official film policy changed in the 1980s to regard economic criteria as crucial in establishing eligibility for subvention through national funding structures. Producing a film in the Federal Republic required (as it still does) assembling a complex funding package drawn from regional, federal, and (often) international sources, with a significant contribution coming from television, which now became the *de facto* sponsor of German cinema.<sup>10</sup> In the GDR, concerns about the viability of East German cinema (as a part of the failing economy at large) led to, on the one hand, the increased suppression of the variety of both DEFA films and imports, in the effort to exert new forms of control on both filmmakers and audiences,

7 Meurer, *Cinema and National Identity in a Divided Germany*, 91.

8 Meurer, *Cinema and National Identity in a Divided Germany*, 97.

9 See Wedel et al., eds., *DEFA international*.

10 Elsaesser, *New German Cinema*, 35.

and on the other hand, the turn to new types of financing deals—including international co-production deals and key deals with West German television—in a last-ditch effort to secure foreign investment.<sup>11</sup> After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of DEFA, economic criteria continued to define the landscape of filmmaking in post-unification Germany, contributing to the boom in domestically popular genre cinema and the rise of internationally successful prestige pictures since the 1980s, as well as to the heightened role of television in underpinning a fundamentally intermedial German film production.

Under the sign of neoliberalism, the increased marketization of German cinema since 1980 has led to the resurgence of popular filmmaking with immense audience appeal, to a wave of global blockbusters, and even to the rebirth of the German art film in the 21st century. As Pierre Gras has argued, ‘Consistently finding new filmic forms to depict this constant constellation of problems in Western societies is certainly among the key strengths of contemporary German cinema’, and Gras highlights how German films’ emphasis on local conditions allows them to represent universal connections.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, though, marketization has also fundamentally altered the production and reception contexts of German cinema, transforming the range of stories and genres, formal languages and aesthetic styles, and ideological affinities and political agendas available to German filmmakers and audiences. The move away from a national-cultural film project toward the embrace of a transnational, commercial model is evident both in the changing formal and generic modes and in the narratives of German films, which archive the late 20th-century ‘crisis of cinema’.

## Cinema in Crisis

During the early 1980s, forms of production, distribution, exhibition, and reception that had characterized the medium of cinema were revolutionized by the epochal transformations taking place worldwide, including globalization, technological innovation, and rapid changes in space, time, and society that can be understood through the lens of neoliberalization.

11 See Schieber, ‘Anfang vom Ende oder Kontinuität des Argwohns’; Wedel et al., eds., *DEFA international*; and Heiduschke, *East German Cinema*.

12 Gras, *Good bye, Fassbinder!*, 117.

These transformations affected the cinema in ways that were perceived and described through a discourse of crisis.<sup>13</sup>

While film industries everywhere recalibrated in response to factors like deregulation, privatization, and the emergence of digital technologies, the case of Germany (both East and West) provides an especially stark example of these structural, institutional, and aesthetic changes, culminating in the marginalization of auteur cinema, the dismantling of DEFA, and the consolidation of new forms of internationally legible popular filmmaking, among other developments that characterize recent German film history. The German case is especially illustrative because, in contrast to countries like France, Germany responded to the emergence of the New Economy and the competition of Global Hollywood not by doubling down on protectionist policies and developing rhetorical strategies to defend national cinema, but by ushering in a new era of deregulation of the media industries, including film and television. As Jonathan Buchsbaum demonstrates, the market share of domestic productions plummeted throughout Europe in the early 1980s, while the market share of Hollywood productions rose dramatically; audiovisual policies set in motion to respond to neoliberalization varied dramatically. French policies designed to protect French cinema succeeded to the extent that, by 2012, French cinema held a domestic market share of 41 percent vs. the U.S. market share of 46 percent. By contrast, in Germany, which eschewed such protectionism, the market share of German cinema in 2012 was seven percent vs. a whopping 81 percent U.S. market share.<sup>14</sup>

While the deregulation and privatization of media industries in Germany and elsewhere took place under the sign of free market ideology, by the 1990s these processes had paved the way for media conglomeration, as the outlets and venues for diverse forms of film and media production and consumption eroded and consolidated. Deregulation opened up the broadcasting sector to private television, undermining the longstanding West German consensus that broadcasting should provide a public good and serve as a vital factor in the functioning of democracy: 'The public broadcasters' explicit remit was to deliver a quality service providing more than mainly mass-entertainment', a remit that now began to deteriorate.<sup>15</sup> Deregulation specifically facilitated the expansion of two dominant German media conglomerates, Bertelsmann

13 Wedel underscores the reflexive tendency to conceptualize film history in general—and German film history in particular—through the metaphor of permanent crisis; he identifies 1982 as a watershed year for one such crisis in German cinema. See Wedel, *Filmgeschichte als Krisengeschichte*.

14 See Buchsbaum, *Exception Taken*, 166-167.

15 Humphreys, 'Germany's "Dual" Broadcasting System', 24.

and the Kirch Group (the latter operating in tandem with the Springer Concern)<sup>16</sup>; and favoured a new producer-driven cinema, exemplified by the massively successful Bernd Eichinger, whose filmmaking practice sustained itself through ties to global capital (see Chapter 2).<sup>17</sup>

However, it is crucial to underscore that, although the criteria and stakes of financing changed, the neoliberal turn did not put an end to the public subvention of film in Germany. Like other small national cinemas, German cinema has always relied on state subsidies and continues to do so today. Albeit with different aims and goals, state subvention of the film industry has been a constant in Germany since the founding of Ufa in 1917. As Oliver Castendyk puts it, “The vision that economic liberals like to conjure up of the good old days when the film industry survived solely through crowd-pleasing films and without the “sweet poison of subvention” existed only for very short periods, if at all.”<sup>18</sup> In the course of the 20th century, different regimes pursued various forms of economic subsidy with the aims of diversifying and expanding the German film industry, improving German cinema’s viability on the global market, and, often, of consolidating state power over the filmmaking enterprise. Because of the high cost of filmmaking and the relatively small domestic audience, subvention has proved crucial for improving infrastructure and contributing to the competitiveness of German film; while German film policy has always been economically driven, the cultural prestige of German cinema also played a key role. Deliberations regarding film subvention in Germany have therefore always revolved around the question: ‘Should the economic success or the cultural reputation of German film be improved?’<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the issue of film subvention has been taken up largely within the context of the many cinema debates that have punctuated German film history since the early 20th century, debates revolving around the question of whether cinema should promote art or commerce, educational and moral guidance or mass entertainment.

These debates reached their apotheosis during the early 1980s. In West Germany, the spectacular flourishing of the New German Cinema—whose success was made possible by a film policy favouring cultural subvention—was followed by the *Filmkrise*, characterized by the rise of new media and

16 Humphreys notes that, by 1994, the ‘television oligopoly’ that emerged accounted for 80 percent of total television advertising revenue (and 90 percent of private television advertising revenue). Humphreys, 33.

17 The Kirch Group later declared bankruptcy. On Eichinger and the emergence of a German producer’s cinema see Baer, ‘Producing Adaptations.’

18 Castendyk, *Die deutsche Filmförderung*, 25.

19 Castendyk, *Die deutsche Filmförderung*, 24.



home video formats, external competition, decreasing market shares for German cinema, plummeting attendance at movie theatres, and a general consensus that the quality of German films was in decline. As Eric Rentschler describes it:

The crisis of film production in the 1980s was ultimately not a specifically German phenomenon, but rather part of a widespread international crisis. Crowded out and displaced by expensive American productions, filmmakers worldwide responded with uncertainty and resignation. The crisis was less one of film than one of the cinema itself, an indication of the structural transformation of society and a symptom of the functional transformation of the fantasy-ware film. No longer dependent on a special place and a fixed time, films increasingly circulated in the form of video cassettes and laser discs as readily available consumer articles.<sup>20</sup>

As Rentschler suggests, the West German *Filmkrise* reflected the global crisis of cinema in the 1980s, but it is crucial not to lose sight of the tensions between the broader global context and the specific local contours that defined its emergence in the FRG. As I describe in more detail below, the reorientation of film policy toward market principles in the early 1980s signalled the intersecting failure of both the New German Cinema and the social market economy as representational projects.

Driven by a related but slightly different set of factors, the East German *Filmkrise* or *Kinosterben* (death of cinema) arose in response to a similar constellation of competition from imported films (now increasingly from the U.S.) and (West German) television, waning interest in and attendance at the movies, conflicts between ideological mandates and artistic practices, and the perceived failure of DEFA to create a cinema that would reflect the achievements of state socialism in the GDR. Within DEFA, the combination of financial problems and political uncertainty led to representational conflicts and a concerted bracketing out of contemporary issues since 'one didn't know what the requisite films were supposed to look like now'.<sup>21</sup> These conflicts were encapsulated in the 'Father' letter, whose indictment of DEFA pointed to the failure of socialist realism as a representational project—and socialism as a mass utopia—signaling the 'beginning of the end' and foreshadowing the collapse of the GDR.

20 Rentschler, 'Film der Achtziger Jahre', 281.

21 Qtd. in Poss and Warnecke, *Spur der Filme*, 343.

## The End of the National-Cultural Film Project and German Cinema's Neoliberal Turn

The crisis of cinema in East Germany entered widespread public awareness just one year after the debut of Gusner's *Alle meine Mädchen*, whose narrative about appropriate forms of representation at DEFA anticipated the events of 1981. That year, the official party newspaper *Neues Deutschland* published a letter in its commentary section signed by Hubert Vater, a head mechanic at the VEB Kraftverkehr Erfurt [people's enterprise transportation firm in Erfurt].<sup>22</sup> Entitled 'What I wish for from our filmmakers', the letter enjoined DEFA to develop stronger representations of the accomplishments of socialism on screen:

In terms of both theme and artistic expression, I find hardly a single one of our recent films noteworthy. [...] I sense in them too little pride in the great things accomplished by the working class and its party in alliance with all working people in our country during the decades up until today. Where are the art works that make visible the—as I call it—titanic achievement that is evident in the establishment, development, and growth of our stable and blossoming Workers' and Farmers' State? [...] Problems arise that move every one of us. How does one solve them with an eye toward the future? What accumulated experience from the life of the people, what political and moral decision-making support—if one may describe it thus—do our films offer?<sup>23</sup>

As Elke Schieber has documented, the letter's paternalistic tone and the symbolic name of its signatory, 'Vater', led to the widespread speculation that the 'Landesvater' [father of the state] Erich Honecker himself had actually penned it. The blanket indictment of DEFA's recent production roster articulated by the letter shocked artists and critics alike. At a point when cultural officials in the GDR were attempting to increase the efficiency of the DEFA studio due to the rising costs of feature filmmaking, an attempt that led to diversification in style and genre as well as a concerted effort to internationalize, the 'Father' letter inaugurated a period of increased censorship and self-censorship, as studio leaders and filmmakers alike tried to find an appropriate idiom for contemporary film.

<sup>22</sup> Poss and Warnecke, *Spur der Filme*, 342–343.

<sup>23</sup> Qtd. in Schieber, 'Anfang vom Ende oder Kontinuität des Argwohns', 267.

Meurer provides a detailed description of the paradoxical situation that emerged, giving rise to an era of incoherent film policies that continued through the end of the GDR. On the one hand, the unstable political circumstances in East Germany led officials to focus on instrumentalizing film for state purposes. On the other hand, given the GDR's catastrophic financial situation, DEFA increasingly turned to international co-productions, but due to the political isolation of the GDR, ironically 'producers from the FRG, the officially declared enemy of East Germany, emerged as the only co-production partners who were prepared to contribute capital investment' to DEFA-conceived projects such as Rainer Simon's *Die Besteigung des Chimborazo* (Climbing the Chimborazo, FRG/GDR, 1989).<sup>24</sup> Though the 'Father' letter ostensibly called for a renewal of socialist filmmaking, its effect was less to offer a path forward than to signal the overall failure of the thirty-five year-old DEFA studio to achieve its remit of creating an East German national cinema that would both represent and legitimate socialist culture. In this regard, the letter portends the unravelling of socialist cinema—and of the GDR itself—that culminated in the fall of the Wall and the dismantling of DEFA less than a decade later.

The termination of state-sponsored national cinema as a project of cultural legitimization took a different but parallel path in West Germany. If Fassbinder's death of exhaustion and drug use in 1982 exemplifies the end of the New German Cinema, Wenders's *Der Stand der Dinge* represents the narrative and aesthetic culmination of NGC as movement and discourse; its metacinematic focus on Global Hollywood and commercial financing anticipates the symbolic interventions of Friedrich Zimmermann, West Germany's conservative Minister of the Interior, into filmmaking in the FRG.

Just six months after *Der Stand der Dinge* premiered at the Hof Film Festival in 1983, Zimmermann announced his decision to revoke a film subsidy payment to director Herbert Achternbusch, whose film *Das Gespenst* (The Ghost, 1982) had recently debuted in theatres. Achternbusch's tragedy-comedy, which imagines Jesus climbing down from the cross to take a walk in present-day Munich, was initially well received by critics.<sup>25</sup> However, after a publicity campaign hit the tabloids accusing the film of blasphemy, *Das Gespenst* became the subject of a short-lived public controversy.<sup>26</sup>

24 Meurer, *Cinema and National Identity in a Divided Germany*, 105.

25 In fact, a protestant organization, the *Jury der evangelischen Filmarbeit*, named *Das Gespenst* its film of the month in April 1983. See 'Film Widerwärtig, Säuisch.'

26 The campaign was organized by the Springer press, and included numerous articles in *Bild*, *Bild am Sonntag*, and *Welt am Sonntag*. See 'Filmschaffende, Rechtsum, Rückwärts Marsch!'

Seizing on this opportunity, Zimmermann denied Achternbusch the final instalment of a DM 300,000 subvention.<sup>27</sup>

The first film in the 33-year history of the Federal Republic's film subsidy programme to have its funding rescinded, *Das Gespenst* quickly came to symbolize the marked shift in West German cultural policy taking shape at the dawn of the Kohl era.<sup>28</sup> Zimmermann justified his decision to retract federal funding from *Das Gespenst* by invoking a little-known legal clause allowing the withdrawal of subvention payments to films that 'are injurious to moral or religious sentiments'.<sup>29</sup> However, in speeches and interviews he made clear that his real aim was the transformation of a federal subsidy system that rewarded artistic quality rather than profitability and mass appeal: 'Film [...] is there for the many, not for the few. Subventions should therefore be given with the goal of creating films that interest, speak to, and move a large share of the population.'<sup>30</sup> Pairing a rhetorical emphasis on conservative values with a call for market-driven policy reforms, Zimmermann's decision to revoke funding from *Das Gespenst* signalled the conservative government's intention to consider chiefly commercial measures in its evaluation of subsidy-worthy films.

In a 1983 speech held in the aftermath of the *Gespenst* controversy, Zimmermann announced changes to film subsidy policy designed to promote films with mass appeal, not least comedies, while also underscoring the fact that West German 'film is not a state cinema and shouldn't become one, but rather it operates as a private enterprise and therefore, in principle, it should also be responsible for its own cost effectiveness'.<sup>31</sup> This speech

27 Zimmermann's decision followed the election of Helmut Kohl to Chancellor, in October 1982, and came shortly after the March 1983 federal elections which solidified the power of the newly formed coalition government (CDU/CSU and FDP). The decision was the subject of a decade-long court case, which Achternbusch ultimately won.

28 Decrying Zimmermann's decision as censorship, filmmakers gathered at the first annual Munich Film Festival on 21 June 1983, to formulate a protest declaration. Despite its reminder that 'the political evaluation of art has a tradition in our country, it touches the darkest chapters of our history', and its proclamation that 'an attack on [the New German Film] is an attack on imagination and creativity', the 'Munich Declaration' rings anemic in comparison with previous film manifestos, since it fails to formulate any collective goals or strategies of resistance. In fact, it would prove to be the last document of its kind, a swan song of the cooperative spirit that had characterized the filmmaking enterprise of the New German Cinema in the post-Oberhausen era. See 'The Munich Declaration (1983).'

29 'Filmschaffende, Rechtsum, Rückwärts Marsch!'

30 Qtd. in Blumenberg, 'Am Ende der Schonzeit.'

31 Excerpt from Zimmermann's speech on the occasion of the presentation of the German *Filmpreise*, 25 June 1983, in Berlin, rpt. in 'Dokumentation zur Auseinandersetzung um Herbert Achternbuschs *Das Gespenst* und um Bundesinnenminister Zimmermanns Förderungskonzept.'

proved remarkably prophetic, suggesting a change in the course of German filmmaking that would become evident in subsequent decades.

Zimmermann's speech and the 'Father' letter signalled the death knell of the national-cultural film project that had followed ideologically specific but parallel trajectories in the FRG and the GDR; together these signal events heralded on a symbolic level the neoliberal turn in German cinema. Released shortly before these overt public proclamations of the failure of NGC and DEFA, Wenders's *Der Stand der Dinge* and Gusner's *Alle meine Mädchen* narrativize the end of these respective representational projects, at the same time that they exemplify key tendencies of them. Symptomatic texts for the moment of crisis, both films hold in tension competing conceptions of what cinema is and should be.

### Deleuze and the 'death of cinema'

In the 1980s, the perception of a film crisis was taken up directly by filmmakers such as Wenders and Gusner as well as by film historians and theorists, driving a prolific aesthetic and theoretical investigation of cinema's status and potential at the moment of its ostensible demise. Notable among these is Gilles Deleuze's wide-ranging study of film history, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (1983) and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985), conceived and written during the period of neoliberal intensification. Indeed, as Deleuze suggests in the concluding chapter of the second volume, in *Cinema* he was thinking through—and writing against—the implications of the end of art cinema, the so-called 'death of cinema', along with the rise of television and digital media, developments that must be understood in relation to global finance capitalism.

Deleuze argues that World War II brought about a break in narrative cinema: 'The movement-image of the so-called classical cinema gave way, in the post-war period, to a direct time-image.'<sup>32</sup> Postwar films in particular reveal that 'time is out of joint'; they display the coexistence of multiple nonchronological layers of time. Significant to this break between the movement-image and the time-image is the betrayal by National Socialism and Stalinism of film's potential as an art of the masses: 'The revolutionary courtship of the movement-image and an art of the masses become subject was broken off, giving way to the masses subjected as psychological

32 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, xi.

automaton.<sup>33</sup> *Cinema* traces a reversal, then, from the medium's attempt to extend representation to the masses to its instrumentalization for the domination of the masses (so that the project of 'the movement-image' culminates in the films of Leni Riefenstahl). Deleuze delineates how, after the betrayal of its revolutionary ideal (the crisis of the action-image), cinema turned inward on itself: '[H]aving no more stories to tell, [cinema] would take itself as object, and would be able to tell only its own story (Wenders).'<sup>34</sup> As his citation of Wenders suggests, the New German Cinema constitutes a central focus for Deleuze's exploration of the time-image, for in addition to exhibiting direct representations of time, the films of Wenders, Straub/Huillet, Fassbinder, Schroeter, and others also emphasize the 'missing people' who no longer comprise the political subject of cinema, turning their focus instead toward the exchange relation that conditions cinema from within, the camera/money exchange.

In this regard, one of the most well-known contributions of Deleuze's *Cinema* is the central metaphor of the crystal-image. Among other things, the crystal-image describes how cinema makes images of time directly visible by indiscernibly combining the bygone moment indexed by the preserved image and the present experience of its viewing. Among the so-called *chronosigns* through which cinema reveals time, the crystal-image makes visible 'the hidden ground of time, that is, its differentiation into two flows, that of presents which pass and that of pasts which are preserved'.<sup>35</sup> Bearing two distinct sides, the crystal-image is innately double. Like a mirror, it functions as a site of reversal or exchange between the visible and the invisible, the virtual and the actual, the performative and the hidden. The crystal-image is a figure whose

indiscernibility constitutes an objective illusion; it does not suppress the distinction between the two sides, but makes it unattributable, each side taking the other's role in a relation which we must describe as reciprocal presupposition, or reversibility. The indiscernibility of the real and the imaginary, or of the present and the past, of the actual and the virtual, is definitely not produced in the head or the mind, it is the objective characteristic of certain existing images which are by nature double.<sup>36</sup>

33 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 264.

34 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 76.

35 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 98.

36 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 69.

As a figure marked by indiscernibility, reversibility, and ambivalence, the crystal-image helps to conceptualize the double-edged quality of neoliberal cinema. Fundamentally ambivalent, neoliberal cinema develops new formal and generic interventions into audiovisual language to make visible the structures and affects of the present, even as its worth is defined increasingly by commercial appeal and potential.

Indeed, it is no coincidence that, when discussing the crystal-image, Deleuze turns to the topic of money as a central facet of filmmaking for the first time in *Cinema*: 'The cinema as art itself lives in a direct relation with a permanent plot [*complot*], an international conspiracy which conditions it from within, as the most intimate and most indispensable enemy. This conspiracy is that of money; what defines industrial art is not mechanical reproduction but the internalized relation with money.'<sup>37</sup> Equating the double-sided crystal-image with time ('the transparent side') and money ('the opaque side'), Deleuze emphasizes that in the postwar period '*the cinema confronts its most internal presupposition: money, and the movement-image makes way for the time-image in one and the same operation*'.<sup>38</sup> Here, Deleuze implies that the shift from movement-image to time-image came about not only because of the reversal of cinema's political project in the aftermath of World War II, but also due to the seismic economic shifts emerging in its wake.

A number of metacinematic films that bear diegetic traces of cinema's confrontation with money form the nexus for Deleuze's analysis. He argues that metacinematic films, which introduce a film within a film as mirror-image or in seed-form (or both), uniquely express the relationship between the movement-image and the time-image ('The film is movement, but the film within the film is money, is time'), ultimately emphasizing the primacy of the latter over the former.<sup>39</sup> The key instance for Deleuze is Wenders's *Der Stand der Dinge*, whose film within a film exemplifies the crystal-image by demonstrating 'a constitutive relation between the film in process of being made and money as the totality of the film'.<sup>40</sup> As Deleuze's emblematic deployment of *Der Stand der Dinge* in *Cinema 2* suggests, and as the following analysis of Wenders's and Gusner's films attests, German film marks the confrontation of cinema with its 'internal presupposition'—money—in a uniquely visible way around 1980.

37 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 77.

38 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 78.

39 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 78.

40 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 77.

### *Der Stand der Dinge*: Time is Money

Staging a dialectical conflict between American and European styles of filmmaking, embodied by the characters of Hollywood producer Gordon (Allen Goorwitz) and suggestively named German director Friedrich ‘Fritz’ Munro (Patrick Bauchau),<sup>41</sup> *Der Stand der Dinge* reflects the financialization of European filmmaking in an era marked by the rise of a *Produzenten kino*, or producer’s cinema, and the decline of autonomy for auteur-directors. In fact, the production conditions of Wenders’s film—which determined both its formal-aesthetic language and its story line to a great degree—derived precisely from the changing circumstances for filmmaking around 1980, which exacerbated longstanding conflicts between Hollywood and world cinema.

Shot without a script, *Der Stand der Dinge* was, in Wenders’s terms, a ‘found film’,<sup>42</sup> which offered the director an unexpected opportunity to ruminate on his own aesthetic vision, directorial career, and ambivalent relationship to Hollywood. On his way from Berlin to New York in 1981, Wenders stopped over in Portugal to deliver some unused canisters of film to the set of *The Territory*, where Chilean director Raúl Ruiz had run out of film stock, stranding his cast and crew (which included Wenders’s girlfriend at the time, actress Isabelle Weingarten) on the shut-down set. Wenders was on hiatus from his vexed Hollywood directorial debut, the film *Hammett*, which he was shooting at the invitation of producer Francis Ford Coppola. Unhappy with the shape of the film, Coppola had interrupted production to demand a full script rewrite. When Wenders arrived on Ruiz’s set in Portugal, he found an apparently idyllic situation—a small group collaborating closely on a shoestring—that contrasted sharply with the big-budget producer-driven Hollywood set of *Hammett*. Wenders asked Ruiz’s cast and crew to stick around, and two weeks later he returned from New York to shoot *Der Stand der Dinge*. An international (German-Portuguese) co-production filmed in Portugal and the United States with post-production taking place in Germany, shot in English and French and featuring an international cast, *Der Stand der Dinge* arose from and reflects the transnationalization of German film production that would increasingly predominate in the 1980s and beyond.

41 The name is a portmanteau of Friedrich Murnau and Fritz Lang, both European-born, German-speaking directors who made successful careers in Hollywood.

42 Interview with Wim Wenders.



While it ultimately follows a rather closely conceived three-act structure<sup>43</sup>, the film begins abruptly in what appears to be a post-apocalyptic setting as we follow characters dressed in metallic suits navigating their way through an irradiated landscape that threatens to melt their skin on contact. It is only about fourteen minutes in, when the camera pulls back to reveal a film crew shooting what seems to be a science fiction movie about a nuclear catastrophe, that we realize we are watching a film within a film; as the director yells, 'Cut!', the title sequence of *Der Stand der Dinge* begins. Shortly thereafter, the cinematographer Joe Corby (Samuel Fuller) informs Munro that the film is all used up and he can no longer shoot the picture.

The second act of *Der Stand der Dinge* unspools slowly and episodically, as the cast and crew shift their attention from work on the movie to a range of unhurried creative and interpersonal pursuits: painting, photographing, making music, reading, bathing, having sex. Interspersed with these leisurely, markedly 'non-productive' (unmonetized) activities, we witness Munro's attempts to track down the producer Gordon, to arrange delivery of the necessary film stock, and to ensure that his film, *The Survivors*, does not fall apart. To the extent that events happen during this middle stretch of the film, they are presented in an unspectacular and anticlimactic way, as when an especially strong wind hurls a large piece of driftwood through the glass window of Munro's hotel room, smashing the glass, or when Joe Corby learns that his wife has died back in Los Angeles, so that he must hastily depart for Lisbon to catch a flight home. These events constitute narrative touchstones, but their enigmatic and elliptical representation—accentuated by Jürgen Knieper's slow-paced and eerie score—suggests a rejection of Hollywood standards, including plot development, characterization, and entertainment value. This rejection is underscored by the phrase 'Stories only exist in stories, whereas life goes on in the course of time without the need to turn out stories,' spoken by Munro and preserved on a scrap of paper by the actress Anna (Weingarten), a motto that punctuates this sequence of the film.

43 Kathé Geist has persuasively argued that the film's three-act structure can be viewed in dialectical terms. *Der Stand der Dinge* begins with a self-reflexive synthesis of Wenders's own aesthetic practice, combining qualities of Hollywood and European filmmaking in the film-within-the-film, *The Survivors* (a film idea that Wenders—in his endlessly self-reflexive fashion—later developed into the feature *Bis ans Ende der Welt/Until the End of the World* (1991)). This synthesis is followed by segments that distinctively isolate and contrast the elliptical narrative style and slow pacing of European art cinema with the action-driven mode of mainstream Hollywood, culminating in the violent deaths of both the German auteur and the Hollywood producer. Geist, *The Cinema of Wim Wenders*, 90-100.

However, the tone and pacing of *Der Stand der Dinge* shift again in the third act, when Munro flies to L.A. An abrupt transition takes us from the abandoned landscape of the Portuguese coast to an airport parking garage at LAX; replacing Knieper's spectral electronic music, the punk band X's anthemic 'Los Angeles' ushers in a quick succession of images—big cars, highways, and oil derricks—that crystallize the European view of America. After visiting landmarks like a downtown skyscraper (prominently displaying a Bank of America sign), the corner of Hollywood and Vine, Fritz Lang's star on Hollywood Boulevard, and Joe's modernist glass house in the Hollywood Hills, Munro happens upon his producer Gordon, who is hiding out from loan sharks in a mobile home parked at Tiny Naylor's drive-in on the Sunset Strip.

The marked emphasis on mobility in the editing and mise-en-scène of this third act returns us for a moment to the mode of the movement-image, but only to accentuate the broader magnitude of the time-image, and the dialogue of the film's penultimate sequence underscores the imbrication of time and money in *Der Stand der Dinge*. This conversation between Gordon and Munro, which takes place as the mobile home careens around night-time L.A., condenses the broader themes of Wenders's film, including the problem of financing art cinema, the relevance of black and white cinematography, European-American relations, as well as the question of storytelling. As Gordon tells Munro of his financiers, 'They're looking for a fucking story. They're not looking to kill me. They wanted a fucking story. They had a hundred thousand dollars they were willing to shell out, if I only had a story. Without a story you're dead. You can't build a movie without a story. You ever try building a house without walls?' Gordon's analogy, which likens the walls of a house to the supporting framework of a story in crafting a film, directly contradicts Munro's earlier statement that 'A film isn't a prefab house. It has a life of its own', a life that the straitjacket of Hollywood genre convention threatens to drain out of the cinema.

While Gordon ultimately expresses sympathy with Munro's style of filmmaking, including his choice to film in black and white ('I absolutely loved it!'), he is unable to convince the loan sharks—predatory lenders who represent the violence of capitalism—that *The Survivors* makes a profitable investment, and he therefore fails to secure completion financing for the film. In the end, as Gordon and Munro exit the mobile home at sunrise, they are gunned down, an event that Munro films with a handheld camera (see Illustration 2)—and it is this perspective that structures the final, tilting, subjective shots of the film. As Munro has told Gordon, 'All stories are about death,' the one thing both producer and director can agree on.



2. A symbolic death to male cinema in all its forms: Director Friedrich Munro (Patrick Bauchau) shoots his own death in Wim Wenders's *Der Stand der Dinge* (*The State of Things*, 1982).

In Deleuze's recurrent phrase, 'And the film will be finished when there is no more money left...', a precept of the time-image that *Der Stand der Dinge* makes patently visible.<sup>44</sup>

The film's contrast between European and Hollywood styles of film-making notably counterposes two forms of temporality: the slow time of the characters who are on hiatus from their jobs on the film, with their desultory waiting; and Friedrich's race against time to secure the funding for his film. As Deleuze puts it:

Wenders [...] shows the deserted, run-down hotel, and the film crew, each of whom returns to his solitude, victim of a plot whose key is elsewhere; and this key is revealed in the second half of the film as the other side, the mobile home of the producer on the run who is going to get himself murdered, causing the death of the film-maker, in such a way as to make plain that there is not, and there never will be, equivalence or equality in the mutual camera-money exchange. This is the old curse which undermines the cinema: time is money.<sup>45</sup>

Itself a form of the crystal-image that constellates with Wenders's failed Hollywood film *Hammett*, *Der Stand der Dinge* figures the cinematic confrontation with money through its distinctive foregrounding of time along

<sup>44</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 78.

<sup>45</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 77.

multiple vectors. The film's contrasting temporalities (the slow pacing and emphasis on ordinary life when the production stops vs. the fast tempo and action of the sequences in Hollywood) open up questions of historicity raised by the threat of (art) cinema's demise.

Indeed, *Der Stand der Dinge* carefully and obsessively documents the moment of its own making in a mise-en-abyme of self-reflexivity that makes an aesthetic virtue of its 'found' production context. Specifically, the film repeatedly counterposes imagery of the emergent digital age with the swiftly vanishing remnants of the analogue world. The digital is represented most poignantly by an Apple IIe computer in Gordon's abandoned house, which scrolls through secret financial data about Munro's production, and a dot matrix printer, which spews out pixelated stills from his film. In contrast to these spectral images that associate the emergent digital with finance capitalism, Wenders's camera dwells on the analogue culture represented by the telephone, typewriter, Polaroid camera, metronome, globe, and ticking clock that occupy the attention of the film's creative personnel during their unexpected reprieve from filming.

By calling attention to the way the labour of filmmaking is disrupted, deferred, and delayed when the money runs out, the film's overt contrast of temporalities associated with Europe and the U.S., the analogue and the digital, leisure and work, foreground what Elizabeth Freeman has referred to as '*chrononormativity*, or the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity'.<sup>46</sup> Freeman's analysis emphasizes how temporal and sexual dissonance are often intertwined, demonstrating how queer and feminist artistic practices foreground narrative ruptures and gaps in time in order to put the past into 'meaningful and transformative relation with the present'.<sup>47</sup> Freeman argues that dissonant temporalities queer conventional or linear modes of narrative time, juxtaposing them with archaic or futuristic traces in order to defy the 24/7 timelines of neoliberalism and open up alternative imaginaries.

My aim here is not to make a case for *Der Stand der Dinge* as a queer or feminist film, but attention to the ways Wenders deploys temporalities does suggest a disruption of totalizing narratives that resonates with Freeman's critique of chrononormativity. As Gerd Gemünden has argued, *Der Stand der Dinge* more than any other of Wenders's films displays a self-critical rigor with regard to the aporias of the director's filmmaking practice that extends specifically to the intertwined problems of the exclusion of women and the

46 Freeman, *Time Binds*, 3.

47 Freeman, *Time Binds*, xvi.

refusal to tell stories. As with all of Wenders's films, *Gemünden* detects in *Der Stand der Dinge* a search for the (cinematic) father, evident in the recurrence to a range of father figures within the diegesis and metatextually (Gordon, John Ford, Fritz Lang, F.W. Murnau), as well as a narrative focus that in general revolves around men (rather than women), foregrounds male protagonists who are uncomfortable with women, and displays failed attempts at heterosexual interaction. As *Gemünden* argues, 'Although Wenders's cinema (like Hollywood) does not avail the female viewer a position, it still deviates from dominant cinema because it renders forms of masculine identification problematic.'<sup>48</sup> Although women play a limited role in *Der Stand der Dinge*, the narrative exclusion of women is overtly questioned by Friedrich's girlfriend Kate (played by the actress Viva). In an extended audiovisual meditation, we view Kate sifting through a stack of Polaroids taken by her daughter and hear the feminist critique of the photos that she records into her Dictaphone:

What's really interesting are these Polaroids that Julia made. Here Friedrich is perfectly framed and I am only half in the picture. Here is a beautiful framing job of Friedrich, looking very dapper, and I'm not visible at all. And Mark right in the middle of the picture with Anna totally out of the shot, just her head remains. Dennis and Robert couldn't be more beautifully framed—they have plenty of space all around, even the curtains look good here. Whereas Joan only seems to have her entire body in the photograph because Dennis is on one side of her and Joe is on the other side of her; and of course Julia had to get both of these men, so Joan wins by default.<sup>49</sup>

Kate comments on the fact that Julia's photographs reflect the patriarchal aesthetic practices of Friedrich's (and in turn Wenders's) masculinist cinema, centring men, especially the father, and marginalizing women, not least the mother. An artist herself, Kate becomes the diegetic spokesperson for a critique of male aesthetics on several occasions throughout the film, including when she paints a landscape in India ink and subsequently offers an explanation to her daughter of the mimetic effects of black and white. Notably, Kate's character is abandoned when Friedrich departs Portugal for L.A. in the film's third act, leaving his family behind. However, while Wenders kills off both the German auteur director Friedrich and the Hollywood

<sup>48</sup> *Gemünden*, 'Oedi-Pal Travels', 211.

<sup>49</sup> Cited in *Gemünden*, 'Oedi-Pal Travels', 212–213.

producer Gordon at the end of *Der Stand der Dinge*, serving up a symbolic death to male cinema in all its forms, the fate of the film's female image-makers is left wide open. A meditation on the key crystal-image of time/money that makes visible art cinema's confrontation with its own impending financialization, *Der Stand der Dinge* negotiates the relation between past and present by holding in tension a series of interrelated binaries (Europe/US; analogue/digital; leisure/work; male/female) whose asymmetry, mutual co-constitution, and instability the film thereby evokes. Wenders's prescient attention to changing (cinematic) timelines simultaneously archives what is being lost in the neoliberal turn and signals the potential for new aesthetic constellations to emerge in its wake.

### *Alle meine Mädchen: Watching Women Work*

If *Der Stand der Dinge* ultimately equates the 'death of cinema' with the symbolic demise of the male filmmaker, the self-reflexive take on female authorship in Iris Gusner's *Alle meine Mädchen* presents a less Oedipal account of the transformation of filmmaking around 1980, albeit one that also emphasizes the gendered components of this turn. One of only a handful of East German feature films ever directed by a woman, *Alle meine Mädchen* stages a metacinematic story that visualizes and interrogates the patriarchal cinematic practices memorably summarized by Laura Mulvey's dictum 'woman as image, man as bearer of the look'.<sup>50</sup> With its plot about a male film student assigned to make a documentary about an all-female work brigade at the NARVA lightbulb factory in East Berlin, *Alle meine Mädchen* calls attention to the gendering of the gaze in dominant cinema.

Intervening in the state-sponsored cinematic depiction of collective labour and the worker as hero that had been the hallmark of socialist realism, Gusner's film narrativizes the changes taking place at DEFA and in the GDR more broadly during this period of ideological ambivalence. Its metacritical focus on the depiction of women signals a transition away from the tendency to foreground female characters as embodiments of socialism, instead showing women's lives as key sites for emergent neoliberal restructuring in the realms of individualism, subjectivity, and work. In its metacinematic attention to both the representation of labour and film's confrontation with money, *Alle meine Mädchen*, like *Der Stand der Dinge*, archives the neoliberal transition.

50 Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', 62.

The film's opening shot already signals its self-reflexivity and focus on the politics of representation: a close-up frames an image of Charlie Chaplin hanging askew on the wall of a professor's office at the Film Academy. As the camera pulls back to a medium shot, we see the professor hanging posters of Federico Fellini and Mikhail Romm beside the image of Chaplin. Together, the three directors comprise a triumvirate of influences on DEFA cinema in general and Gusner in particular: Chaplin was revered as a genius in the art of conveying social criticism through comedic form; Fellini, and Italian neorealism more broadly, inspired DEFA filmmakers aesthetically and politically; and Mikhail Romm, Gusner's own advisor at the Moscow Film School, served as a model for the DEFA *Alltagsfilm* of the 1970s by attending to ordinary life and the complexity of the individual in his late films.<sup>51</sup>

Gusner's opening sequence thus pays homage to these influential directors, but it also juxtaposes their work with the contemporary task of filmmaking in East Germany, exemplified here by would-be director Ralf Päsche, who complains about his assignment to depict women's collective labour. As Jennifer Creech has argued, the choice to cast a male actor as the diegetic filmmaker in *Alle meine Mädchen* allowed Gusner to foreground power relations in the GDR: 'As a member of the intellectual class, Ralf embodies the discursive and political power of art, and his gender difference from his filmic object overtly marks his social and political difference from them.'<sup>52</sup> Gusner's film exposes the gender and class hierarchies that structured social relations in East Germany despite claims of universal social equality; at the same time, as Creech points out, this gendered critique in a woman-directed film developed by the largely female production group *Gruppe Berlin* suggests 'a metacommentary on the practical absence of a female vision at DEFA'.<sup>53</sup> As a diegetic stand-in for the women filmmakers behind *Alle meine Mädchen* (including, in addition to Gusner, artistic advisor Tamara Trampe and screenwriter Gabrielle Kotte), Ralf thus underscores the film's gendered critique of representation, while also signalling the distance of the artist-intellectual from the everyday reality of East German workers.

From the outset, *Alle meine Mädchen* contrasts the artistic labour of filmmaking with forms of productive manual labour, as in the opening sequence when Ralf complains to his professor about his thesis assignment just as a team of cleaners arrives and begins to laboriously wash the office

51 Creech, *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts in East German Women's Films*, 150.

52 Creech, *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts in East German Women's Films*, 158.

53 Creech, *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts in East German Women's Films*, 159.

windows. As Ralf departs for the lightbulb factory, he encounters a group of fellow students on their way to the pub, calling out to them, 'You slackers! The Republic is working and you're partying.' When he arrives at NARVA, one of the women in the brigade remarks, 'Man, you've got it good: standing around watching while other people work!' Later, Ralf asks the brigade leader Marie if he can take a place at the assembly line in order to ground his documentary in experience, but she flatly refuses ('We make 10,000 units per shift!'), underscoring the adverse effect his lack of manual skills would have on the brigade's productivity.

However, while Ralf is ostensibly assigned to observe the women's brigade, in fact it is the women who regularly observe him. Throughout the opening sequence and beyond, the five female workers (Susi, Anita, Gertrud, Ella, and Kerstin) turn the tables on Ralf, reversing conventional looking relations in ways that overtly objectify, diagnose, and construct knowledge about the male director. Their look is tracked by a camera that pans swiftly from one woman to the next, figuring a collective female gaze that is the formal hallmark of Gusner's metacommentary. The opening scene in the lightbulb factory concludes with a humorous acknowledgement of this unconventional structure of looking in which women control the gaze when Susi (Madeleine Lierck), puffing on a cigarette, winks at Ralf. In a reverse shot, which shows Ralf tightly framed within the metal fixture of a machine, he blushes and winks back.

The reversal of the gaze—so that women become the subject rather than the object of looking relations—figures the increasing role the brigade takes on throughout the narrative of *Alle meine Mädchen* in mediating Ralf's representation of them. The women intervene both discursively and physically into Ralf's direction, cinematography, and editing, forcing him (and the audience) to evaluate critically conventional forms of depicting women and work in GDR cinema. The formally and generically disjunctive film that Ralf ends up completing—which we view together with a diegetic audience comprised of the women's brigade and Ralf's film school professors late in the film—is deemed a failure for the way it departs from the expectations of a documentary about collective labour. It is precisely through its formal and generic incongruity that Ralf's diegetic film forms a crystal-image with Gusner's film, which itself asserts a changed form of representing women that is contingent on a deferral of normative time, a point I will discuss in more detail below.

Gusner's metacommentary on gender, labour, and representation is developed not only through the character of the diegetic filmmaker, but also via a narrative focus on the conflicts involving Marie (Lissy Tempelhof), who repeatedly experiences a lack of autonomy in decision-making, although she



is tasked as brigade leader both with ensuring a higher production quota at the lightbulb factory and with fostering collective solidarity among the women working on the assembly line. Marie's authority is undermined by the (male) managers and union representatives who fail to consult with her about long-term plans, at the same time that her leadership methods are challenged by the younger generation of (female) workers in her brigade, who demand a more equitable and transparent work environment. As Gusner has explained, 'Beginning in the early 1980s I made women the focus of my films and narrated the stories from their perspectives. Through my own example, I had recognized that the condition of a society is expressed much more clearly in the way it treats women than men; social problems generally affect women much more bluntly.'<sup>54</sup> Indeed, by focusing on the representation of women, Gusner brings into sharp relief the double jeopardy faced by women in late socialism (and emergent neoliberalism). As a female leader, Marie experiences the inequities of the GDR's social hierarchies, and especially the contradiction between the ideology of workers' emancipation and the reality of a state run from the top-down by (male) managerial technocrats, in a particularly blunt fashion. Marie's situation also serves as a catalyst for the emergent feminist camaraderie of her brigade, who recognize that solidarity among women across class and power differences is the only way to combat the oppressive forces that have crushed Marie (even if, tellingly, this solidarity is ultimately realized only through private forms of resistance and pleasure).

Early in *Alle meine Mädchen*, Ralf is privy to a conversation in which Marie learns that she has not been consulted about a managerial decision to break up the brigade and send the women to work elsewhere during a six-month period when the factory will be retrofitted with modern equipment. Though Marie has protested the decision, the workers are infuriated to find out that they are the last to learn about the fate of their brigade—even the outsider Ralf knew before they did. When they challenge Marie about her hesitation to inform them, she counters by questioning the women's commitment to their work, bringing out the notebook in which she has painstakingly recorded over a period of several years every missed shift and extended bathroom break in order to quantify to the minute the brigade's losses in productivity. Flabbergasted by her surveillance of their labour, the women experience Marie's fixation on chrononormativity (in Freeman's sense of organizing bodies toward maximum productivity) as the ultimate betrayal of both their trust and their commitment to the brigade. This constellation

54 Gusner and Sander, *Fantasie und Arbeit*, 182.

of worker surveillance, optimization, and responsabilization points to an overlap in the discursive frames of late socialism and neoliberalism; this convergence—manifest in the erosion of collectivity and solidarity among workers and a concomitant emphasis on the economization of social relations—is underscored by the factory supervisor's response when the women complain to him about the decision to break up their brigade: 'Die Ökonomie diktiert das' ['The economy dictates it']. Ultimately, Gusner's film exposes the cruel optimism common to both state socialism and neoliberalism: the fantasy that hard work will be rewarded with a better life.<sup>55</sup>

The driving conflict of the film, the confrontation between the workers and their brigade leader results in Marie's nervous breakdown and institutionalization; it is also strongly implicated in the eventual failure of Ralf's documentary. Although Ralf and his cameraman have captured the entire conflict on film—and both the fact of the film crew's presence and Ralf's revelation about the break up of the brigade have played a central (and perhaps intentional) role in inciting the conflict to begin with—Ralf eventually chooses not to include this footage in his documentary. His choice is driven by the mediations of the women, especially Kerstin (Viola Schweizer), who overtly challenges how Ralf's conception of filmmaking is informed by patriarchal conventions, an emphasis on sensationalism, and a narcissistic notion of authorship.

At several junctures in *Alle meine Mädchen*, Kerstin places her hand directly over the lens of Ralf's camera, foreclosing upon the images he is shooting; she also visits the editing suite, taking hold of a strip of film and insisting that Ralf exclude it from the documentary. In a pivotal scene for the film's metacommentary on representation, Kerstin directly accuses Ralf of pursuing an exploitative and self-interested form of filmmaking when she asks whether, if given the opportunity, he would have filmed Marie's nervous breakdown. Ralf replies affirmatively, citing as a model for his own film practice the documentary genre of direct cinema, with its unflinching representation of the war in Vietnam, and rather perversely comparing himself to the Argentine-Swedish cameraman Leonardo Henrichsen, who filmed his own murder during the failed 1973 coup against Salvador Allende in Chile. As Ralf puts it, his aim is 'to show what's happening here'; in a phrase that resonates with Erich Honecker's 1971 proclamation about socialist art in the GDR, Ralf exclaims, 'There are no taboos!' Like Fritz Munro in *Der Stand der Dinge*, Ralf presents himself as an aspirational practitioner of cinema as a tool for capturing action and exposing violence, an aspiration

55 For a more thorough elaboration of a similar argument, see Stewart, 'Women of DEFA.'

that is challenged by the women in the brigade and explicitly contrasted to Gusner's own very different experiment with formal language. At a moment characterized by the crisis of cinema, *Alle meine Mädchen* reflects on the urgent question of filmic representation and its imbrication with gendered authorship, suggesting—like *Der Stand der Dinge*—that the crisis is not so much one of cinema itself as one of male aesthetics.

When their assembly line is shut down to be retrofitted, deferring both their work and the documentary shoot, the women travel together with Ralf to the sanatorium in the country where Marie is recuperating. Like the diegetic cast and crew in *Der Stand der Dinge* after their production runs out of money, the brigade in *Alle meine Mädchen* experiences the delay at the factory as an opportunity to escape the persistent demand for labour productivity in favour of non-productive pursuits like dancing, drinking, and debating that culminate in a formally and representationally remarkable sex scene. After the evening spent at the bar during which Kerstin has challenged Ralf's filmmaking practice, all six characters end up in a hotel room together in a sequence that counterposes the more overtly political forms of representation favoured by Ralf in the preceding conversation with a new way of depicting pleasure, affect, and bodily sensation. Characterized by an elliptical editing style, a mobile camera, and almost no dialogue, the sequence departs from the dominant form of the film's narrative, literally creating a 'time out' within the film, similar to a dream sequence, in which normative conventions and practices are suspended.

The scene begins when Ralf returns to his hotel room to fetch a jacket for Kerstin and discovers Susi and Anita (Barbara Schnitzler) in his bed, with only their giggling faces and naked feet sticking out from under the comforter. Ralf makes as if to leave, but then changes his mind and steps into the room, shutting the door behind him. Departing from the shot/reverse shot editing that has predominated up until now, the camera pans away from Ralf as he enters the room, making a wide sweep to the left and coming to rest on a large mirror set in the wardrobe door. Ralf re-enters the frame, and we now see him reflected in the looking glass. Demonstrative of the various forms of reversal (of the gaze, of the economy, of representation) explored by Gusner's film, this shot also marks the temporal and sexual dissonance of the subsequent sequence. We watch Ralf strip down to his underwear and pull the comforter off the bed to expose the two women lying beneath. As he does so, the camera makes a 270-degree pan away from the mirror, sweeping around the room to present Susi and Anita in full view (and fully clothed), laughing hysterically at having pulled one over on Ralf by making him believe they were naked under the blanket. Ralf exhorts

them to take off their clothes, and as they begin to undress Kerstin walks into the room, followed by Ella and Gertrud. Wearing only undergarments, Ralf, Susi, and Anita collapse laughing in a pile on the bed. Ella turns on the radio, and the song that is playing replaces the diegetic soundtrack, so that we no longer hear the sounds made by the characters, who now pass around a goblet of wine and begin to touch, kiss, and caress one another as they roll around the big hotel bed. We see close-ups of nipples under see-through bras, bra straps falling down to reveal supple shoulders, satin underwear over bare bottoms, and fingers stroking breasts and thighs. As Creech notes, *Alle meine Mädchen* is one of only a handful of DEFA films to represent same-sex desire and intimacy among women: 'Privileging the female point of view and female desire for the female body, the camera constructs the spectator's voyeuristic look within a lesbian continuum by positioning the women simultaneously as subjects and objects of desire. The camera emphasizes, through close-ups, the women's delight in each other's bodies,' developing a unique filmic vocabulary to convey female pleasure.<sup>56</sup>

Non-normative sexuality is paired with dissonant time in this sequence, not only in the way temporality is marked across multiple registers as suspended and deferred, but also in the way the scene juxtaposes archaic and contemporary forms of representing women on screen, opening up, in Freeman's sense, onto alternative imaginaries. In the final shots of the scene, Anita picks up a long, sheer scarf and, as the music changes to a faster paced disco beat, she begins to dance, draping the scarf over the camera lens, and then snaking it around herself and twirling its long ends. Anita's performance recalls the serpentine dances that were a popular subject of early cinema, for example in the Skladanowsky Brothers' renowned Wintergarten programme, where the short *Serpentinentanz Mlle. Ancion* (*Mademoiselle Ancion's Serpentine Dance*, 1895) debuted alongside other sensational subjects in early Bioscope exhibitions.

As Tom Gunning has famously argued, the 'cinema of attraction' represented by early variety show films solicited the attention of the spectator with spectacular displays of visibility, exerting a power to show things and make images be seen, and thereby demanding a form of viewing very different from the absorption created by later forms of standardized narrative cinema. As Gunning argues, early cinema shares with later avant-garde filmmaking a particular relation to the spectator—'that of exhibitionist confrontation rather than diegetic absorption'—and its common practices, such as the recurrent look of the actor at the camera, rupture the cinematic

56 Creech, *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts in East German Women's Films*, 175-176.



3. Alternative cinematic imaginaries: Iris Gusner's *Alle meine Mädchen* (*All My Girls*, 1980) departs from conventions of narrative and realism as Anita (Barbara Schnitzler) performs a serpentine dance.

illusion of reality.<sup>57</sup> For Gunning, the cinema of attraction represents an alternative cinematic trajectory that does not disappear with the hegemony of narrative cinema, but rather 'goes underground', resurfacing in certain genres (e.g. the musical) as well as in oppositional filmmaking practices that foreground cinematic spectacle and disrupt storytelling conventions.

Harkening back to this cinema of attraction, Anita's serpentine dance disrupts the linear narrative of *Alle meine Mädchen*, and the affinity between this scene and silent cinema is further underscored by the absence of any diegetic sound. In the final shot of the sequence, which departs from realism entirely, a floral painting hanging above the bed in the hotel room expands to fill the entire screen, as Anita's dancing figure floats in the air, superimposed onto the floral backdrop (see Illustration 3). Recalling Heide Schlüppmann's description of the 'secret complicity' between cinematography and women's emancipation in the era before World War I, this noteworthy shot – like the sequence as a whole – imagines a history of film form and spectatorship that might have opened onto a different future.<sup>58</sup>

A hard cut accompanied by the sound of a rooster crowing brings us back to reality, and we see Ralf and Kerstin lying in bed the next morning, leaving us to wonder whether the orgy was a dream after all. Suspended outside the hetero- and chrononormativity that otherwise characterizes *Alle*

<sup>57</sup> Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attraction', 66.

<sup>58</sup> Schlüppmann, *The Uncanny Gaze*, 1.

*meine Mädchen*, the orgy scene demonstrates women's collective resistance to the conflicts animating both Gusner's narrative and the late GDR more broadly, including failing productivity, rising inequality, vanishing solidarity, and the rule of managerial technocracy. In the liminal space of the hotel, the women find solidarity through mutual pleasure, but this is a private and provisional form of unity that notably does not take place within the managed collectivity of the factory or the East German public sphere, and it is also short-lived.

For soon after their return to the factory, a longstanding conflict between Kerstin and the other women resurfaces, forcing a confrontation with money that supersedes their tentative camaraderie. Already at the outset of the film, Anita has informed Ralf that he shouldn't bother talking to Kerstin, because she is not an official member of the women's brigade. Anita's comment constructs Kerstin as an outsider; as we soon learn, Kerstin has graduated from secondary school and should be studying at university but has instead been delegated to work on the assembly line as a form of punishment (she is on probation, but we are not informed of her infraction). Kerstin's presence in the narrative attests to the paradoxical (de-)valuation of productive manual labour in the GDR as a site of ostensible emancipation that is also inflicted as a punishment.

Kerstin also facilitates Gusner's focus on the complexity of GDR class distinctions, and she later becomes the catalyst for the film's metadiscursive attention to money and debt (for a further discussion of labour, money, and debt in the German cinema of neoliberalism, see Chapter 6). Kerstin's background as a member of the educated bourgeoisie is the source of repeated conflicts in *Alle meine Mädchen*, ranging from arguments over punctuation and grammar to an accusation of robbery, when Anita suspects Kerstin of theft from the brigade's till. Discovering a large sum of money missing from her locker, Anita immediately assumes that Kerstin is the culprit, because of her outsider status, her lower pay grade, and her apparent criminal past. Anita soon finds the missing money in an apron pocket and realizes that her accusation was a mistake, but Kerstin has already left the brigade and the factory. When Ralf also fails to believe Kerstin's account of events, she leaves with a suitcase, disappearing from the narrative for good.

The brigade's inability to integrate Kerstin (except for in the orgy scene) signals the failure of collective labour and social solidarity as political projects in the GDR, just as Ralf's film reflects the failure of state socialism as a representational project. Toward the end of *Alle meine Mädchen*, Ralf's advisor castigates him for not taking advantage of the opportunity to screen his film on television, since he didn't finish it on time. Ralf explains that the

brigade's problems made it impossible to stick to his timeline and emphasizes his empathy for the women: 'They are more important to me now than any deadlines!' Subsequently, his advisor defends Ralf to another professor for demonstrating empathy for his subjects rather than careerism. In a pointed critique of the general withdrawal from public life in the late GDR, Ralf's advisor contrasts his commitment to the brigade with the pervasive loneliness and drinking in private that characterized the *Nischengesellschaft* (niche society).<sup>59</sup> The professor's comment emphasizes the privatization of collective social life that characterized East German society in the 1970s and 1980s, pointing once more to the failure of state socialism's dominant narratives.

In the penultimate scene of *Alle meine Mädchen*, the women from the brigade sit in a screening room and view Ralf's film. Formally and generically heterogeneous, the film combines slapstick scenes shot in the factory with documentary-style close-ups of Anita speaking earnestly about gender and labour, punctuated by repeated jump cuts. Obviously straying from dominant expectations of a documentary about socialist labour, Ralf's film develops a changed formal language influenced both by the cinematic icons Chaplin, Romm, and Fellini and by the women themselves, not least the absent Kerstin, who have forced Ralf to reckon with his ideas about filmic representation. As Creech points out, the self-reflexive film within the film unmasks film's transparency, instead portraying 'film as a medium in which narrative is constructed and power is negotiated'.<sup>60</sup> Notably, women are centred as the agents, subjects, and viewers of this metacinematic representation. While reaction shots show the women in the diegetic audience laughing and smiling at their own representation, however, the ambiguous responses of the film school faculty leave open the question of whether Ralf's film will ever find another audience.

*Der Stand der Dinge* and *Alle meine Mädchen* dramatize the transition away from auteur cinema, the end of filmmaking as a project of national-cultural legitimation, and the increasing centrality of commercial considerations in both West and East Germany. At the same time, these films archive the changing modes of ordinary life and the speeding up of time in narratives that take place on the cusp of neoliberalization.

Despite their markedly different production contexts, both films make visible cinema's increasing turn away from the project of representing the

59 The term *Nischengesellschaft* was coined by journalist Günter Gaus. See Gaus, *Wo Deutschland liegt*.

60 Creech, *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts in East German Women's Films*, 189.

people in favour of attention to the exchange relation as the principle of both cinema and capitalism itself, in Deleuze's sense: 'The only rejoinder to the harsh law of cinema—a minute of which costs a day of collective work—is Fellini's: "When there is no more money left, the film will be finished."<sup>61</sup> The projects of postwar art cinema and especially of socialist cinema still represented by *Der Stand der Dinge* and *Alle meine Mädchen* were ultimately made impossible by the ascension of market forces.

The *Filmkrise* at the outset of the 1980s arose from and responded to pronounced economic and political changes, initiating a transitional phase for filmmaking on both sides of the Wall. Ultimately, the neoliberal turn in German cinema resolved not only the *Filmkrise* itself, but also the underlying contradiction between the commercial and cultural functions of film that had driven cinema debates throughout the 20th century. It did so by appropriating the cultural *for* the commercial, by aestheticizing market-driven consumer society, and by co-opting artistic and political resistance and difference. The resultant German cinema of neoliberalism, memorably labelled by Rentschler as a 'cinema of consensus', has proved remarkably resilient on both the domestic and world markets, as we will see in Chapter 2.

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61 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 77.



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