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Acronyms

ARD Arbeitgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten
der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (consortium of public broadcasters
c. West Germany)
BA FA Bundesarchiv, Abteilung Filmarchiv (Federal Film Archive)
BArch Bundesarchiv (Federal Archive)
COMECON Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (economic organization in
the Eastern Bloc)
DEFA Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft (German Film Corporation, Ltd)
DFD Demokratische Frauenbund Deutschlands (GDR mass organization
for women)
DFF Deutscher Fernsehfilm (state television broadcaster in the GDR,
renamed in 1972 to ‘Fernsehen der DDR’ (GDR Television))
FDJ Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth, socialist youth organi-
zation in the GDR)
FRG Federal Republic of Germany
GDR German Democratic Republic
MDR Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk (regional public broadcaster in Germany, part
of the ARD)
IM Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter (unofficial collaborator of the secret police in
the GDR)
KOR Komitet Obroty Robotników (Polish Committee for the Defense of
Workers)
KPD Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (German Communist Party)
NATO North American Treaty Alliance
NSB Neues Soziales System (New Economic System, GDR)
NSDAP Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist
German Workers Party)
ORWO Original Wollen (film stock brand in the GDR)
PDS Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus (Party of Democratic
Socialism)
RBB Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg
(regional public broadcaster in Germany, part of the ARD)
SED Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands
(German Socialist Unity Party, GDR)
SPD Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
(German Social Democratic Party)
Stasi informal name of the MfS: Ministerium für Staatssicherheit
(GDR secret police)
Fig 8.4: The closing images of Der Scout (1983) offer White Feather as a single and singular rider, at the head of not a people but of a great many horses.

genre's usual partisan fighter. He does lead the herd over the landscape, but the film never bothers to cut back to his tribe, never relocates him amidst the collective for which he (legally) fought. In fact, these closing images offer him as a single and singular rider, at the head of not a people but of a great many horses.

The Indianer collective at whose heart White Feather/Mütić served in Der Scout is never retraced - he is a lonely rider on the open, barren landscape, fulfilling the individualistic rather than collective fantasy of the GDR's late genre films. If genre films, especially by the early 1980s, were seen generally by DEFA as compensation to weary viewers after the 1976 Biermann affair, these late genre films manifest a growing lack of conviction about the collective. In proposing Die Lehren des jungen Werthers, Kenworthy Helga Schütz had argued that Goethe's Storm and Stress classic would appeal to mid- and late-1970s viewers frustrated with the long wait for revolution - a frustration evident, I think, in the growing individualism of these films' protagonists. If the early DEFA genre films sought to uncover and intensify points of (collectivist) contact with their global genres - be it the utopian hope of sci-fi, the social critique of the Erbefilme or the collectivist spirit of the Wild West in the Indianerfilme - these late genre films downgraded these collectivist agendas in preference for the individualist protagonist. But as the films' final baren, even brutal landscapes around their protagonists indicate, the individualism was marked by melancholy at the fading of the collective dreams in the war and waning years of the socialist republic.

Sabine Hake
Chapter 9
Public Figures, Political Symbols, Famous Stars: Actors in DEFA Cinema and Beyond

'In the GDR, we had no stars', Erwin Geschonneck declared shortly before his death, looking back at more than fifty years of DEFA cinema.1 Confirming his observation, Manfred Krug concluded in one of his first interviews in the West: 'In the GDR, we didn't have a single star. Moreover, I don't know anyone in the GDR, no matter how popular based on their work as an artist or whatever, who would say about themselves or allow others to say that they were a star? Because of the country's growing political isolation after the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, popular actors and their audiences enjoyed what he called a unique sense of Vertrauenskäften (intimacy or familiarity) that has been lost after 1992 - that is, after the closing of the DEFA studio and the disappearance of what, for lack of a better term, might be called the socialist star system.

The careers of Erwin Geschonneck (1906-2008), Manfred Krug (1932-) and Armin Mueller-Stahl (1930-), the most famous actors associated with the East German film studio today, allow us in this larger project of rewriting DEFA history to consider the particularities of the socialist star system before and after the demise of the GDR and DEFA. All three actors were central to DEFA's self-understanding as a socialist cinema and continue to play a key role in the critical examination of the studio's legacy. A few films from the 1960s, including several ensemble pieces, defined the terms against which their later careers have been evaluated and their status as embodiments of generational experience established. Even after the emigration of the two younger men to West Germany in the wake of the 1976 Biermann affair and the 1990 accession of the GDR to the EU, Geschonneck, Krug and Mueller-Stahl continue to be closely associated with this vanished country - reason enough to pay closer attention to popular

1 Erwin Geschonneck, Bei uns gibt es keine Stars, Audio CD (Münster: Polar Film, 2006). I inter- 
slide 'bei uns' as 'in the GDR', well aware that it could also mean 'at DEFA'. All translations are my own unless noted otherwise. I want to thank the editors of this volume for their helpful com-

actors and their multimedia presence within German film history and cultural memory.3

Unfortunately German film studies provides few critical tools for conceptualizing actors as public figures and for considering their contribution to cinema as a site of consensus building and memory-making. This is all the more puzzling in light of the proliferation of star discourse in popular culture. Since unification, the star label has been evoked repeatedly in promoting DEFA as an integral part of the German film heritage, including in the terms of (post)memory associated with Ostalgie (nostalgia for the East). In the preface of Vor der Kamera: Fünfzig Schauspieler in Babelsberg (1993), editor Ralf Schenk asserts that, despite official opposition to Hollywood-like stars far removed from the masses, the Babelsberg studio after 1945 did indeed create Sterne (stars) and Sternechen (stardettes).4 At a 2008 public event honouring Geschmeck, former DEFA director Roland Gräf hailed the actor as one of the few 'real film stars' of the GDR and in fact all of Germany.5

The desire to integrate the East into an all-German narrative and to validate DEFA as a popular cinema is also apparent in Stefan Soidlovitz's description — one of the few scholarly articles on a DEFA star, Manfred Krug — of the studio's ambitions since the 1960s of developing the star system — in moderation.6

In the context of fan culture the engagement with DEFA stars remains largely a retrospective affair, as evidenced by the nostalgic tone of the fan website DEFA-Sternstunden (http://www.defa-sternstunden.de/) and of West German Television's own DEFA Hall of Fame (https://www.defa-ballhof.de).7 Book titles such as Leckern der DEFA Stars and DEFA-Stars: Legenden aus Babelsberg show a heavy

investment in the proper transition from communicative memory to cultural memory, a process facilitated by DVD box sets such as Die großen Stars der DEFA, featuring Geschmeck, Krug and Mueller-Stahl.8 To what degree such retrospection involves (post)socialist attachments can be seen on the WESTFORM website and its offering of Grafikheftchen (fan messages) to stars that include stock phrases (e.g. You have enriched the DEFA film scene in a special way') reminiscent of official party rhetoric. How the post-unification construction of a socialist star system also allows for expressions of mourning and melancholia can be seen in Geschichten der DEFA (2009), a book of actors' portraits (including of Geschmeck and Mueller-Stahl) by photographer Sandra Bergemann that measures the growing distance to the socialist past through their familiar lined faces and aging bodies.9

All these forms of identification and projection are based on the perceived identity of actor and character associated with the star phenomenon, which has been studied primarily in relation to the Hollywood studio system. But the relationship between screen persona and public persona, to use a more precise terminology, can also be found in the elusive dynamics linking the personal to the public, and the individual to the collective, in the socialist star system. Measured against a narrow definition of stars based on their commodity status, the above-mentioned statements by Geschmeck and Krug are undoubtedly true. Glamour, sex appeal and celebrity were not central to any of the socialist cinemas emerging after the Second World War. However, the conditions of production in state-controlled film industries did not preclude strong emotional attachments beyond the requirements of character engagement and narrative point of view. Well-known actors served as political role models, personifications of social types and, occasionally, symbols of nonconformity; they also became mnemonic devices for several generations of (East) Germans.

In the socialist public sphere cultural practices served two very different functions: to facilitate the alignment of private with public fantasies and desires — in short, to achieve ideological interpellation — and to provide an outlet for marginalized or alternative voices in the absence of open political debate and actual social change. Like writers and artists (and, in a very different context, athletes), actors were Kulturkraftfunde (cultural workers), expected to support the building of socialism through their artistic performances and public appearances, rewarded

3 The 1991 Nuremberg affair refers to the extortion of popular post-stopper Wolf Heimann and the ensuing crisis of legitimation that began with a protest resolution by a group of prominent cultural workers.
for their loyalty with great honours and privileges, but also closely managed by the SED and its proxies in the studio bureaucracy. This strange mixture of nurture and surveillance could also be found in other socialist cinemas but rarely in the heightened terms unique to Germany as a Kultur Nation (cultural nation) and, specifically, a culture in which theatre had traditionally provided a surrogate public sphere for a disempowered bourgeoisie. With the theatre defined "as a moral institution" (Schiller), stage actors, and later screen actors, came to embody the resultant contradictions in ways specific to their profession — that is, in performative terms. For that reason, David Bathrick's definition of the socialist public sphere applies equally to the socialist star system where "to speak a language of "authenticity" at a moment of crisis was ironically linked to the increasing failures of official ideology in the GDR to provide a sense of value and cohesion." And in ways similar to writers, artists and athletes, popular actors continue to play a crucial role in the afterlife of the GDR, whether in relation to the memory of socialism or the meaning of national identity.

For all these reasons it might ultimately be more productive to describe famous DEFA actors through a different terminology: as Personen des öffentlichen Lebens (figures of public life) and öffentliche Persönlichkeiten (figures of public interest) whose (auto)biographies are presented and evaluated against the backdrop of contemporary history and politics. After all, the role of "the stars as national signifiers" (Hayward) can only be conceptualised through recognition of the remarkable range of traditions, conventions and practices that exist to integrate into a Hollywood-dominated star discourse and confirm the endurance of national variants even under conditions of globalisation. One manifestation of this national difference is greater reliance on non-fiction practices (theatre, music, literature, art) to the transformation of the famous actor into a figure of public life, another is the predominance of male actors in fulfilling a function reminiscent of the public intellect in the bourgeois public sphere. It would require a longer discussion to account for this gendered nature of the legacy of socialist cinema. In the limited space available here two points must suffice: the importance of male-dominated genres such as the antifascist film to the making of GDR history and identity and the specific function of male actors and directors throughout German film history, including its controversies and scandals. The similarities on the level of physiognomy and typology between,

11 The significance of actors as public figures in the GDR should not be confused with the contemporary culture of celebrity as described in Griswold Turan, Understanding Celebrity (London: Sage, 2004); and Ellis Cashmore, Celebrity Culture (London: Routledge, 2006).

say, Geschonneck and Heinrich George and the frequent comparisons in fun discourse between Krug and Hans Albers reveal problematic continuities in the performative re-enactment of national and political identities in masculinist terms. Likewise, Geschonneck's, Krug's and Mueller-Stahl's multimedia presence (i.e. through their literary, musical and artistic work) points to a continued investment in high-culture traditions that distinguishes German cinema from other European cinemas and has no equivalent in the careers of female DEFA stars.

My discussion of the otherness of the socialist star system and its relevance for a more historically and nationally specific understanding of fandom and celebrity departs from three observations. First, DEFA promoted collective modes of production that had a profound effect on the self-understanding of actors as performers of the social imaginary; at least in theory ensemble acting was privileged. Second, the identification of the studio with the state favoured patterns of reception in which characters were seen as representative of identifiable social types and specific actors celebrated as extensions of the socialist collective; in such a system individualism was often associated with marginal or subversive positions. Third, the appeal of famous actors and their public biographies was (and still is) inseparable from the generational experiences of audiences on both sides of the East-West divide; this is most apparent in the actors' post-unification status as witnesses to the German division and its aftereffects. Their multiple roles as social types, public figures, generational icons and 'national signifiers' — performing what Susan Hayward calls the gestalt and morphology of the body — can be traced with particular clarity through the historical transitions: from East to West German cinema, from divided to unified German cinema and, in rare cases, from national to transnational cinema. A number of additional factors influenced the making of the socialist star system: the strong connections between theatre, film and television, the many overlaps with literary and musical culture, and the complicated relationship between film and politics. Even today the cult of the 'great actor' as the incarnation of specific ideas about (German) character, mentalit and habits is essential to the ways generation functions as a central category of group identification in the making of the star phenomenon.
Integral to the politics of culture in the DDR, Geschonneck, Krug and Mueller-Stahl began their careers on the theatrical stage during the 1950s, appeared in political prestige productions as well as popular genre films throughout the 1960s, worked with equal success in film and television in the 1970s and continued to increase their media presence as Zeitegen (historical witnesses) during the 1980s and beyond by experimenting with other literary, musical and artistic forms. Their professional and personal biographies speak to the experiences of those who built or came of age in the GDR and for that reason are often treated as part of the ongoing process of Vergangenheitsbewältigung - that is, of coming to terms with German division and unification. Conferring the performative nature of such forms of embodiment, their respective contribution has been assessed through typologies taken from stage and screen. Thus Geschonneck is described as a Charakterchauspieler (character actor), Krug as a Volkschauspieler (popular actor) and Mueller-Stahl as that rare phenomenon, a German Weltsstar (International star). Adding a decidedly political dimension to these typologies, Geschonneck has remained closely aligned with the utopian project of socialism and its foundation on traditional masculinity and class-consciousness. By contrast, Krug and Mueller-Stahl have come to stand for the triumph of individualism over collectivism, with their complementary performance styles, expressive physicality and psychological inwardsness, reenacting the disintegration of the unified model of socialist man personified by Geschonneck. Significantly the two younger actors left the GDR in the wake of the Biermann affair for careers in the West, Krug as a West German television actor since the 1980s and Mueller-Stahl in international productions since the 1990s.

From a contemporary perspective the three of them can be associated with three approaches to the DEFA heritage and, by extension, memory of the GDR: In the form of an East German socialist narrative (Geschonneck), a German-German national narrative (Krug) and a Hollywood-based transnational narrative (Mueller-Stahl). But in order to fully understand their larger significance, we need first to establish the conceptual terrain on which to map the socialist star system in theoretical and historical terms. Accordingly the three case studies presented in the essay's second part - based primarily on reviews, interviews and autobiographical writings - are also intended as a reflection on the problems of applying categories such as 'star image' and 'star system' to the (East) German context without considering the practices and debates through which DEFA and other socialcinemas set out to develop alternative conceptions of identity, character and personality.

How does the socialist star system shed light on a still under-researched part of German cinema, namely that of actors as public figures? The answer lies in the term's ability to achieve greater differentiation, not least through its resistant qualities. In the standard work on the topic, Richard Dyer examines the ways in which the star phenomenon develops out of specific conditions of production and consumption, how the relationship between screen persona and public persona makes possible various forms of identification and how the resultant interpersonal and multimodal effects constitute cinema as a public sphere. A product of these overlapping structures and practices, the star image can subsequently be analyzed as a social construction, a form of ideological interpellation and a site of subversive readings and alternative meanings.14 The ideological work done through what Andrew Tudor calls emotional affinity and self-identification tends to aim at the production of consensus, but its goals and effects differ considerably in the capitalist and the socialist dream factory.15 The Hollywood star system, to generalize, translates social problems into individual terms, thereby bracketing the category of the political, whereas socialistcinemas emphasize collective subjectivities and subsume private desires under public needs. However, the decline of the classical studio system since the 1950s resulted in a dramatic transformation of the star system, including the transfer of some of its glamour to the film director as true star, which forces us to evaluate the historical changes in the star function during the 1960s and 1970s against both the normative standards set by Hollywood and the alternative approaches associated with art cinema and socialistcinema. Last but not least, the above-cited studies on stardom and fandom, which presume a strict division between politics and entertainment, cannot fully account for the precarious balancing act between art and power required of actors in the state-controlled film industries of the Eastern Bloc and especially pronounced within the film-theatre interface in East Germany.

14 The standard work on stars see Richard Dyer, Stars, rev. ed. (London, BP, 1990) and Stardom: Industry of Desire, ed. by Christine Gledhill (London/Bristol, 1991), especially the introduction. Gledhill offers a good definition of the term and of star studies: 'The star challenges analysis in the way it crosses disciplinary boundaries; a product of mass culture, but retaining theoretical concerns with acting, performance and art; an industrial marketing device, but a significaing element in films; a social sign, carrying cultural meanings and ideological values, which expresses the interaction of individual personality, inviting desire and identification; an emblem of national celebrity, founded on the body, talent and personal style; a product of capitalism and the ideology of individualism, yet a site of contest by marginalized groups; a figure consumed by the media as the personal life who compensates for alienation with statements and politicians' (p. xii). For German studies on the star phenomenon, see Der Star. Geschichten, Rezeption, Bedeu- tung, ed. by Werner Paulus and Helmut Korte (Munich: Fink, 1997); and Stephan Lowey and Helmut Korte, Der Filmster Status und Identität, Meiner, 2003.
lication with film genres in the UFA tradition, they maintained the implicit hierarchies – also on the level of social relevance – between character and popular actors and dramatic and comical parts. Coming from the stage, character actors – usually older men – acquired a reputation based on their ability to disappear entirely behind a role and to translate existential human questions into dramatic registers. Working in that tradition, Geschonneck played capitalists and proletarians and Nazis and communists, with the underlying (Marxist) assumption of identity as socially constructed making him the perfect conduit to the grand narratives of history as class struggle. By contrast the typical popular actor, his equivalent in the lower register of folk theatre (and its post-war equivalent, television), excelled in comic registers and regional sensibilities. His appeal originated in the production of similarities that facilitated self-identification within the parameters of everyday life. As such a German Everyman, Krug covered a narrower range of roles than Geschonneck and for that reason required a greater correspondence between screen persona and public persona. Mueller-Stahl occupied a position between the two, resembling the older Geschonneck in the versatility that distinguished him as a character actor, but sharing with Krug the contemporary look and feel that made him recognizable and hence relatable.

Beyond these individual differences the men's acting styles attest to their training in the socialist theatre and film culture built after the Second World War as a laboratory for the new socialist man. Two approaches vied for dominance: On the one hand Oskar Brecht at the Berliner Ensemble continued to explore aspects of epic theatre, including its antipsychological method, with Geschonneck, who joined the Ensemble in 1949, clearly benefiting from the playwright's close attention to social tabus as an alternative to psychological motivation. On the other hand Konstantin Stanislavsky, available in German translation since 1952, promoted a "method of physical action" compatible with a socialist (i.e. deterministic) conception of character; the tension between expressiveness and restraint in Mueller-Stahl may be traced back to this tradition.21 Influened equally by the objective approach to acting identified with Brecht and the subjective one identified with Stanislavsky, many directors showed a strong preference for the kind of ensemble acting showcased in almost programmatic fashion in Fünf Patroninhöfen [Five Cartridges, Frank Beyer, 1960], with Geschonneck as a communist commissar in charge of an international group of young partisans that includes

21 On film acting, see Hugo Fetting, Theater and Film (Berlin: Henschel, 1945) and Sozialistischer Menschenbild und Filmkarikatur. Beiträge zu Film und Fernsehen, ed. by Hartmut Altevich (Berlin: Henschel, 1970). For an example of the extensive exception of Stanislavsky already in the early years, see Konstantin Stanislavski and others. Der schauspielerische Weg zur Rolle (Berlin: Henschel, 1952).
cussion board called NVA-Forum that appeals to East German army veterans. Geschonneck still provides a voice to those disillusioned with the realities of unification and opposed to the neoliberal world order. He awarded in 1997 of the Goldene Henne prize by SUPERillu, the most influential weekly in the eastern states, confirms his role as a projection screen for old attachments to the dream of socialism and, more problematically, new forms of German nationalism (e.g. on the same NVA-Forum). 28

Meanwhile, the obituaries written in 2008 after a series of celebratory events at the Berlin Academy of Arts on the occasion of Geschonneck’s hundredth birthday recontextualize this status as an East German legend by either depoliticizing his ar-

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28 See www.nva-forum.de/nva-board/index.php?y=09/08/78k&idk=5000b212ca2168 showtopic=9399. NVA refers to Nationale Völksarmee (National People’s Army).
nistic contribution through phrases such as Guter Menschen darsteller (great performer of human beings) or belittling his political commitments through the derogatory label Vorzeige proletariat (model proletariat). Yet for a large number of his admirers, Geschonneck’s class origins and communist biography were, and still are, an essential part of his enduring appeal. From his involvement with the Weimar communist party after 1929 and exile years in Moscow to his SEZ membership after 1949 and work as an unofficial Stasi informer under the name Miron in his active support of the socialistic successor party DDR (Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus) until his death, Geschonneck’s biography reads like an idealized history of German communism. Observatory references to his close ties to the Berlin working class—he grew up on Ackerstrasse and lived much of his life near Alexanderplatz—have been used to assert the historical force and continued relevance of class as a category of self-identification. Meanwhile, his expulsion from the Soviet Union, imprisonment in concentration camps and almost miraculous survival of the bombing of the Cap Arcona have added to the mythifications of Geschonneck as a larger-than-life figure, endowed with the kind of superhuman vitality associated before the war with film stars such as Heinrich George or Hase Albers.

Geschonneck started his acting career in earnest around the age of forty after being discovered by Brecht for the Berliner Ensemble. Early roles included politically ambivalent characters in Das Bell von Wunscheb [The Axe of Wunscheb, Falls Larmack, 1951] and Der Hauptmann von Köhn [The Captain of Cologne, Slatan Dudow, 1956]. The turning point came with Leute mit Flügeln [People with Wings, Konrad Wolf, 1959], the controversial film that would forever link him to the search for positive socialists in leftist film and sum up even his own life to readings that produced “biography with more exemplarity, less individual validity.” He worked repeatedly with Frank Beyer on antifascist classics such as the above-mentioned Fliegende Tapferen [Naked Among Wolves, 1963] and der Becker adaptation Jakob der Ältere [Jacob the liar, 1974] and showed off his comic talents in Karibik-Kalle in Karibik und Sauерburger [Caribbean and Soeur, 1964].

Geschonneck’s status as a role model and public figure became an integral part of his film roles in the 1970s. Cast as a worker activist facing retirement in Bennett für Achilles [Banquet for Achilles, Roland Gröf, 1975], he brought into sharp view the changing nature of the project of socialism. In Asta mein Engelchen [Asta, My Little Angel, Roland Ormson, 1981] he played a security guard at the DEFA studios with an uncanny resemblance to a well-known actor and a great love of Asta Nielsen. And his survival of the last weeks of the Second World War inspired

the television production Der Mann von der Cap Arcona [The Man from the Cap Arcona, Lothar Bellag, 1982]. Even his recordings of popular songs from the 1920s and 1930s can be interpreted as post-socialist versions of cross-marketing and brand-building that rely on autobiography for creating alternately biographic, nostalgic and revisionist effects.

The three editions of Geschonneck’s autobiography Meine unvollkommenen Jahre [My Tumultuous Years, 1980, 1997, 2009] show the continuities in his public persona before and after and unification and, together with earlier tributes, reveal the full identification of the actor with the state editor. Geschonneck used the preface to the 1997 edition to present his artistic and political choices as ‘defensible’ and then went back to the original text from 1984. Thus, about the changed ending of Das Bell von Wunscheb he writes: ‘Such anonymous interference with the work of an artistic collective is not acceptable and not enjoyable. I didn’t think the cut was a good idea’ (p. 194). The delayed release of Leute mit Flügeln prompts the following confession: ‘At the time I very much regretted that the film was not released immediately; I liked it and my work in it, too’ (p. 197). Identifying all of his roles (and off the screen) with an attitude of ‘straightforwardness, a steadfastness of attitude’, Geschonneck remains apologetic about his politics: ‘For me the separation of art and life never existed. Whenever I found it necessary and appropriate to speak up in public, I did it’ (p. 203). Then shifting into the present tense, he continues, ‘I know that my popularity, beyond the roles, requires me to do this, that it helps our struggle in the form of public statements and declarations’ (p. 213). Concerned about the growing signs of disillusionment amongst the educated elites, he concludes by demanding that actors, like screenwriters and directors, take an active role in the process of filmmaking: Let’s think about how to solve these problems organizationally, not only organizationally but also ideologically’ (p. 207).

Such statements might have prompted Manfred Krug to conclude ‘that for a long time he [Geschonneck] closed his eyes to what was really going on in the GDR, pulling off some appallingly stereotypical figures.’ Representing a very

10 Geschonneck’s Meine unvollkommenen Jahre, Lebenserinnerungen was first published in 1985 by Dette, only to be reprinted in a revised version by Aistau in 1997 and another one by Iris Neue Berlin in 2009 (i.e. after his death).
11 Erwin Geschonneck, Meine unvollkommenen Jahre (Berlin: Aistau, 1997), p. 11. The following quotes are all taken from this later edition.
12 Manfred Krug (Interview) in Bernad Schulz, Manfred Krug, Portrait des Sängers und Schauspielers, (Magdeburg: Schubach, 1994), p. 26. In his Geschonneck biography Frank Honigk explains the actor’s willingness to compromise with reference to his strong political convictions and his biographically motivated desire for belonging: ‘For a long time he did not step out of his role but to his own way internalized rather than critically ques-
different generation, the much younger Krug has a classic Cold War biography. The divorce of his parents in 1949 brought him to East Germany where he trained to become a steel worker and acquired his distinctive forehead scar. His public persona was from the beginning defined through an intuitive physical acting style that reconciled seemingly incompatible qualities - macho posturing, tenderness, irreverence and irresistible charm - while remaining the same across different genres, whether anti-fascist drama, costume film or romantic comedy. Krug made the transition from ensemble player to leading man with Auf der Sonnenseite (On the Sunny Side, Ralf Kirsten, 1962), a story based on his own experiences as a worker turned actor. In his signature role as the carpenter Balla in the banned Spur der Steine (Trace of Stones, Frank Beyer, 1966), Krug developed further his persona of the rebel caught between the needs of the working collective and the demands of party discipline. His second career as a jazz singer, which started with several legendary concerts and recordings for the East German label Amiga, including Jazz und Lyrlik (1966) and Jazz-Lyrlik-Proc with the band Jazz Optimisten (1968), and which continued in collaboration with Gisela Fischer, provided the context or intertext through which the individualism of his screen roles could be interpreted as an artistic rather than political stance.33

Reviewers have tried to capture Krug’s popular appeal through terms such as Eulenauge (meny prankster), Luftball (happy-go-lucky fellow) and Hoppel-Hoppel (happy-clappy hero) — terms that celebrate him as ‘a lovable big boy of our times’.34 Already in Auf der Sonnenseite the identity of role and actor was central to his success, as was the expression of his rebellious side through music. In the words of one reviewer: ‘Manfred really gets Martin [the character]. Not because Manfred Krug is an actor who knows how to embody the figure of Martin (Hoff). There exists a certain elective affinity between the young artist and the fictional young steelworker with artistic talent.’35 Beschreibung eines Sommers [Description of a Summer, Ralf Kirsten, 1963], with its provocative perspective on socialist morality, already took full advantage of the actor’s reputation as a free spirit. As one reviewer noted, ‘it is difficult to determine where Manfred Krug ends

Similar questions were addressed in a radio feature produced by Thomas Heter dealing with Geschwender’s view in Dachau, Widerstand und Anpassung - Nichtbeantwortet, which aired on 12 April 1989 on Der Bunte Rundfunk.
34 For a survey of Krug’s DEFA films, see Manfred Krug, die großen Filme, ed. by Ralf Schenk (Berlin: Parthia, 1997).
the least political film ever made in the GDR, and no one noticed ... there are just two [al-
lected people] who want to try it with each other one more time, and it doesn’t work [...].
This film, and these friends, that is the GDR that I find hard to leave.\footnote{39}
Notwithstanding the political implications of such irremovable differences, Krug’s symbolic currency in the West from then on lay in representing German-
ness outside the antagonistic terms of history and politics.\footnote{40}
In Abgehauen Krug recounts the ten-months between signing the protest res-
olution in November 1976 and leaving the GDR with his family in June 1977.\footnote{40}
On 20 November 1976 his house became the site of a memorable meeting, secretly
recorded by the actor, between Werner Lambers (member of the Polizistko of the
Central Committee) and a group of writers that included Stefan Heym, Jurek
Becker and Christa Wolf. His description of the meeting shows their continued at-
tachment to the project of socialism and their naive hope to change the dynamics
of art and power. At the same time it sheds an important light on the function of
the peculiar actor/public figure in performing the personal/political dyad in the
rewriting of German history and identity. In the eponymous 1998 television adap-
tation of the book directed by Beyr, the sequence starts with the remark by the
actor playing Krug in 1976 “that the actor Krug and the person Krug are seen as
identical” and then cuts to the much older, real Krug of 1998:
The people said: look at that... such types exist... a human being that can be treated... What
will become of the unique relationship, only possible in the GDR, between the audience and
myself? This audience, they see not my heart. They see my face.\footnote{39}
The final scene, in turn, introduces yet another version of Krug from his first in-
terview in 1977 with a West German television reporter. Responding to the ques-
tion about what he left behind, he speaks warmly of ‘the people, the audience — a
few personal friends, relatives, nice people’, thereby blurring the boundaries be-
tween autobiography, newswire and fictionalisation and guaranteeing the con-
flation of populism and popularity at the heart of his remarkable success.
Benefitting from his Volksmeisheit (folkiness), Krug quickly found work in
several West German television series produced by the public broadcaster ARD:
in Auf Achse (On the Road, 1977–1993) as a trucker, in Detektivbüro Roth [Private
Produced in 1976, the film was released in the GDR in 1978 and in the FRG in 1979.
40 Other autobiographical writings include a group of poems recited with his usual cheeky voice
on the accompanying CD, Die Geschichte. Was soll das? (Münch: Eicon, 1999); a memoir of his early
life before his admission to a drama school, Meine ersten Jahre (Münch: Eicon, 2003); and a col-
Investigator Roth, 1986–1987] as a PI, and in Liebling Kreuzberg [Darling Kreuz-
berg, 1984–1986] as a Berlin-based lawyer; he also became one of the most popu-
lar detectives in the acclaimed crime drama Tutur [1984–2004]. Evidence of his
name recognition, Advocacy insurance in the late 1980s ran a television ad cam-
paign under the slogan ‘Advocat ist Anwalts Liebling’ (Advocate is the lawyer’s
darling) that referenced the Liebling Kreuzberg series. For his promotion of Tele-
komm stocks during its initial public offering Krug in 2007 apologized to fans after
the stock had lost much of its value, calling this endorsement the greatest mistake
of his career. Nonetheless, he continued with such lucrative sidelines when he
appeared in a 2010 Mercedes Benz Bank print ad that used his trucking adven-
tures in Auf Achse to promote the luxury car brand: a true spokesperson for the
triumph of individualism and, it could be argued, of self-interest over political
ideology.
Krug’s mode of accommodation prompted Armin Mueller-Stahl to observe:
‘I was fascinated with one of Krug’s, the enjoyable, amusing part, the other seven
eighths for me were not positive but negative examples of how I did not want to be
under any circumstances.\footnote{41} Like Krug, Mueller-Stahl belonged to the generation
of GDR citizens who were children during the Third Reich, reached adulthood
during the 1950s and became politically disillusioned during the 1960s. Within the
Oedipal scenarios outlined earlier, the two actors occupied different places
within this generational narrative. Krug as a man of the people with strong opinions
and simple tastes, and Mueller-Stahl as the quintessential loner, an outsider with
intellectual tendencies and emotional ambivalences. Born in Tübingen in East Prussia,
Mueller-Stahl grew up in Berlin during the war, trained on the stage at the East
Berlin Volksbühne and gained critical acclaim in the antifascist films directed
by Beyr, most famously Königskinder (Royal Children, 1962). Like Krug, Mueller-
Stahl purused interests outside acting: A humorous poem from 1964 describes a man
kissed by several muses:
In meiner Picasso Konkurrenz hat musikalisch viel Potenz
und dichtet mit Routine.
Am Morgen aber — das ist klar —
ist er als Film- und Fernsehdarsteller
und attends auf die Bühne.\footnote{42}
From the beginning, Mueller-Stahl was perceived as indefinable and ambiguous, qualities he shared with other actors associated with the European New Waves. One reviewer of Nacht unter Wolken spoke of a unique tension between the impersonality of his physical face and the depth of his psychological aspect. Mueller-Stahl himself explained in an interview from 1963 that "I try to be a "positive hero" but no paragon of virtue ("Tugendheld") and elsewhere called for "absolute honesty in showing the contradictions in reality." Nonetheless, his nuanced interpretation of anti-heroic heroes can also be seen as affirmation of their continued political relevance, with one reviewer praising his character in Königskinder as "a simple working-class boy who, despite all the dangers, knows where he belongs." Another described him as "a figure that the audience can take with them into their daily lives." Corroborating such points, the actor at the time expressed satisfaction about appearing in films that highlighted the historical claims of the working class in our republic to the leadership in Germany." He never joined the SED, cultivating the persona of an apolitical artist (instead, and later spoke disingenuously) difficulties in getting roles: "Not proletarian enough. I was a "Western, descendant type." Both aspects, his association with highly self-reflexive New Wave sensibilities and his identification with the socialist imaginary at its most didactic, are clearly in evidence in his last DEFA film, tellingly titled Die Flucht (The Flight, Roland Grötz, 1977), about an apolitical East Berlin physician planning his defection to the West. Once again, one reviewer criticized his character's "tortured indecision and stubborn intransigence," whereas another praised the film's complex treatment of a difficult subject matter as "custom-made for Armin Mueller-Stahl and his role." Having been blacklisted after the 1976 Biermann affair forced Mueller-Stahl to turn to writing as his preferred form of resistance and to cultivate the artistic talents that had been part of his public persona from the start. After receiving his exit permit in 1979, he found steady employment on West German television and worked as a Sympathisierer (dubbing actor) before starting a second career in New German cinema, appearing twice in films by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. His performance as Thomas Mann in the critically acclaimed television series Die Manns (The Mann Family, Heinrich Tollerer, 2001) must be considered the high point of his post-DEFA career and the clearest expression of his self-understanding as a cultured bourgeois. With greater international presence came an even closer association with the recent German past, including the legacies of Nazism and communism. Not surprisingly, his clearest statement as actor, screenwriter and director, Gespräch mit der Lesete [Conversation with the Beatle, 1996], draws on his breakthrough role as a former SS officer in Music Box (Costa-Gavras, 1989) and still resonates in his appearance as a former Stasi agent in The International (Tom Tykwer, 2009). In these English-language productions Mueller-Stahl usually plays a German or (vaguely) East European character with a strong affinity for authoritarian structures and traditional values, a creature of Old Europe. His distinctive style - the pursed full lips, pinning blue eyes and raspy dark voice (as well as the accent in the English-language films) - continues to bring out the underlying contradictions, suggesting coldness and compassion, hesitation and determination, ruthless and generosity. At the same time the description of his performance as a Vatikan insider in Angels and Demons (Ron Howard, 2009) as "historie[n] professionalism" suggests that the legacies of the socialist art system can also take on different meanings in the casting of ethnic and political difference within global Hollywood.

Offering a retrospective perspective, Mueller-Stahl's literary writings from the last decade include personal memoirs such as Unterwegs nach Hause [On the Road Homeward, 2005], collections of short stories and essays and, in the only film-related book, anecdotes and drawings from the set of Die Manns. His story of three actors in Veranderter Sonntag [Described Sunday, 1981] represents a rare attempt to capture the strange atmosphere of anger, fear and despair in the wake of the Biermann affair and anticipates some of the points made later by Krug in...
Allehausen. In fact the excerpts from a diary left to the main character by his friend could have been written by Mueller-Stahl — including his recollection of a party member’s warming to ‘Arno’.

[In the Federal Republic] no one would be waiting for a 60-year-old actor, my age would be the greatest handicap. Moreover he was certain that my reasons were political only in a point. I supposedly had achieved everything in the GDR, a star, living like a star on the cake and would want the same in the FRG, but the colleagues there would most likely block my professional career.84

While continuing to write short prose, Mueller-Stahl today works primarily as a visual artist honoured with a 2007 exhibition in the Hamburg Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe; returning to his first love, the violin, he also gave a concert at the Leipzig Opera house in 2011. His various creative endeavours have found a small but receptive (older) audience; by contrast, critics have not responded well to his movie successes abroad. For instance, a reviewer in the Süddeutsche Zeitung blamed the virus of Großenmeinung (great actor syndrome)85 for his all too familiar mannerisms in films such as The International. Such typical German resentment concerning native-born actors (or directors) with commercial success in Hollywood did not stop Aufbau, the successor of the famous GDR publishing house, from promoting Mueller-Stahl’s collected works under the heading ‘The Webstar in an Artistic Overview’. Moreover, as the only former DEFA actor with an international career, he continues to be showered with honours and accolades. On the occasion of his eightieth birthday, two German biographies appeared in 2010, one by Volker Skiera and the other by Gabriele Michel. Mueller-Stahl received an award for lifetime achievement from Progress-Film in 2009 and the Berlinale’s Honorary Golden Bear in 2011.86 The same year he was named honorary citizen in his birth town of Thal/Soeretik and, as a long-term resident, of Schleswig-Holstein. And on the occasion of the 22nd anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, he was honoured in 2011 by the non-partisan, pro-Europe Deutsche Gesellschaft for his ‘remarkable engagement for a life of freedom and dignity’, another indication of how actors as public figures continue to facilitate the equally important processes of remembering and

forgetting in the rewriting of post-war German history in national and transnational terms.87

To return to the larger points outlined at the beginning: the development of a socialist star system and its resonances in postdramatization cinema and television can be reconstructed through the biographies and filmographies of DEFA’s best-known actors. But Geschmeick, Mueller-Stahl and Krug are not the only ones who have come to personify the continuities and ruptures of post-war history and utopian function as vessels of generational memory. Prominent theatre families and famous actor couples played a key role in the most serious confrontations with the SED regime in the wake of the Berliner Affair, as evidenced by the emigration of Katharina Thalbach and Thomas Wlasch (with their daughter Anna), Franz Maria Hagen (and her daughter Nina), as well as Angelica Domröse and Hilmar Thiele. The overdetermined function of actors became even more pronounced.

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86 In addition to Michel, Amel Mueller-Stahl, von Volker Skiera, Amel Mueller-Stahl, Die Magie der Filme: Langern und Müller, 2010; Gebhardt Hidde’s and Thomas Lassnigczyk’s Amel Mueller-Stahl. Seine Filme - sechs Leben (Munich: Heyne, 1993) is little more than a filmography/biography.
in the postunification period, most tragically in the legal battles (over Stasi IM accusations) between Ulrich Mühe and his ex-wife Jenny Größmann, with their subsequent early deaths suggesting narratives of national guilt, shame and atonement played out at the intersection of art and life. But the postunification success stories of former DEFA actors such as Corinna Harfouch, Henry Hübchen and Katrin Sass also bear witness to the influence of a heavily subsidized theatre culture committed to acting as a dramatic art and sustained through the fluid exchanges amongst theatre, film and television.

In this larger context the two most famous personifications of German division and unification continue to add their voices as former socialist stars to ongoing debates on the legacies of the GDR. Recently Manfred Krug, in response to the global financial crisis, talked about ‘what was good and reassuring’ in the GDR, such as the social welfare network and the belief in economic equality. And Ariane Mueller-Stahl recalled the desire for a more just world that made him a communist believer after 1945; *Fünf Pfotenetzhäuser*, he observed, could have become a cult film, had it been made in the United States with Hollywood stars. Instead, the actors associated with this anti-fascist classic continue to bear witness to the significant differences between the socialist star system and the Hollywood star system and to show how the productive encounters between both informed their own screen personas and public personas inside and outside the GDR. For that reason alone closer attention to the unique public function of famous actors in German cinema and the overlapping textual, intertextual and contextual practices that facilitate identifications and create meanings is bound to produce a more comprehensive account of DEFA cinema. In ways that hopefully have become clear through the three case studies this methodological challenge might also enable us to gain a deeper understanding of cinema as a public sphere and of actors as figures of public life – perhaps even stars in the broader sense.

58 Manfred Krug und “Das Schicksal an der UdR”, *Spiegel* Online, 24 October 2008 (www.spiegel. de/panorama/letten/1,1518,360328,00.html).