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Looking for Love: The Representation
of Women in East Germany's DEFA
Films, 1972-1982



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Introduction

‘There must be more to life. More than sleep and work. And sleep and work again.’¹

This quote is spoken by the protagonist Paula in Heiner Carow’s 1973 film, *The Legend of Paul and Paula*. She is sat up in a small, single bed, drowning her sorrows with alcohol. In the background a man and woman are heard talking and laughing. Paula rests her head in her hands and says solemnly: ‘If only they wouldn’t pretend you can do without it’,² she is talking about love and companionship. Paula is a single mother with two children by two different men. She works in a poorly paid, unskilled job at a supermarket, manning the checkouts and processing bottles for recycling. Paula shows little interest in submitting her own personal happiness to the greater goal of the socialist collective. Pleasure and contentment are not to be found in the drudgery of work or motherhood and she is a champion of individual freedom. This ‘explosive’ masterpiece was ‘the most popular and controversial of all East German films’, which saw scores of women name their newborn daughters after its protagonist.³ She undermined the ideal socialist worker who would spend his or her free time indulging in party politics and further training.⁴ In fact she wants to escape into a private life far removed from the constraints of the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

This dissertation makes use of five films all produced by male directors with a central female character. They are: Egon Günther’s *Her Third* (1972), Heiner Carow’s *The Legend of Paul and Paula* (1973) and *Until Death Do Us Part* (1979), Konrad Wolf and Wolfgang Kohlhaase’s *Solo Sunny* (1980) and *Apprehension* by Lothar Warneke (1982). The lead women are all either divorced, single or in an abusive marriage. In most cases they are single mothers working in low paid, typically feminised jobs. The directors depict them as searching for self-fulfilment and individual happiness in the private sphere of love and relationships. They desire freedom from the constraints of socialist society.⁵ Paid work and involvement in the collective has brought none of them contentment. These women are all

¹ *The Legend of Paul and Paula* (*Die Legend von Paul and Paula*), [FILM], Dir. Heiner Carow, (1973).

² *The Legend of Paul and Paula*, Dir. Carow, (1973).

³ D. Berghahn, *Hollywood Behind the Wall: The Cinema of East Germany*, (Manchester, 2005), 200.

⁴ I. Dölling, “‘We all Love Paula but Paul Is More Important to Us’: Constructing a “Socialist Person” Using the “Femininity” of a Working Woman”, *New German Critique*, No. 82, (Winter, 2001), 87.

⁵ T. Bernecker, ‘Capturing Gathering Swarming: Re-Coding Post-Communist Space in East Germany’, Master of Architecture Thesis, University of Massachusetts, (May, 2009), 11.

preoccupied with an overwhelming feeling of loneliness, a characteristic of capitalism which the socialist state was supposed to eradicate. These films do not shy away from violence, failure, depression, illness and death. Character profiles are often unfavourable to men who struggle to maintain a positive influence in the domestic sphere.⁶ They were directed by some of the best known directors of the state-owned and controlled film company DEFA, and they found resonance with a public somewhat estranged from the East German cinemas.

The GDR's greatest success story, women had been a consistently favourite topic of DEFA films for a number of years. Up until now they had been presented in intellectual, professional positions of employment traditionally associated with men. They were the heart surgeon in Frank Vogel's *The Seventh Year* (1969) and the Professor of Mathematics in Ralph Kristen's *Network* (1970).⁷ These somewhat defeminised women were the heroes of the GDR, proudly helping with the construction of socialism.⁸ They were a creation of Walter Ulbricht's *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED) leadership, used as a vital tool in 'inspiring the individual to achieve...targets'.⁹ They followed Lenin's call that film was 'the most important of all arts', a 'powerful ideological weapon'¹⁰ that could be used to glorify labour and a new breed of socialist woman. Under the heading "socialist realism", films would portray an 'exemplary positive hero'¹¹ offering optimistic guidance on expected behaviour. The protagonist acted as a role model who would represent 'not reality as it is, but reality as it ought to be'.¹² The types of films to be produced were decided upon by the state's HV Film (*Hauptverwaltung Films*) department, which would compose a "master plan" for submission to the highest executive body, the Council of Ministers.¹³ The HV Film department was given the authority to approve film scripts which had to pass a series of checks by studio and even Party officials or Politburo members who would recommend changes to the story editors.¹⁴ The Party's Central Committee made use of the Film Section of the Department of Culture (*Abteilung Kultur: Sektor Film*), that supervised

⁶ A. Rinke, *Images of Women in East German Cinema, 1972-1982: Socialist Models, Private Dreamers and Rebels*, (New York, 2006), 64.

⁷ Rinke, *Images*, 7.

⁸ Berghahn, *Hollywood*, 177.

⁹ Hans Lauter at the 5th Conference of the SED's Central Committee, 1951, cited in, S. Allen, and J. Sandford, (eds.), *DEFA: East German Cinema: 1946-1992*, (Oxford, 1999), 7.

¹⁰ S. Brockmann, *A Critical History of German Film*, (Suffolk, 2010), 216.

¹¹ Berghahn, *Hollywood*, 35.

¹² Allen, 'DEFA', 7.

¹³ Berghahn, *Hollywood*, 26.

¹⁴ H.M. Bock, 'East Germany: The DEFA Story', G. Nowell-Smith, (ed.), *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, (Oxford, 1996). 628.

the DEFA studio and the HV Film.¹⁵ They had the final say on whether a film was granted permission for distribution and could easily prevent a project from continuing. Indeed at the infamous Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED in 1965, Party members launched a scathing attack on filmmakers,¹⁶ accusing them of indulging in ‘anarchism [and] pornography’.¹⁷ Many films were banned and would not be released for public viewing until the fall of the GDR in 1989.

This was the old era of what Joshua Feinstein has described as the *Gegenwartsfilme* of societal progression and forward thinking.¹⁸ It was overtaken with the arrival of *Alltagsfilme*, which used documentary realism as an excuse to move away from the presentation of ‘celluloid fantasy’.¹⁹ The ‘a-historical depiction of everyday’ life saw a very different kind of hero develop, no longer ‘advancing socialism through Herculean feats’.²⁰ The films to be studied are very much a product of the second SED leader, Erich Honecker, who took over power in 1971. Whereas Ulbricht’s reign had been blighted by the cultural conservatism of the Eleventh Plenum, filmmakers now had reason to believe that a period of greater artistic freedom had begun. Indeed in December 1971, Honecker himself famously announced that providing ‘one proceeds from a solid socialist position, there can...be no taboos in the area of art and literature’.²¹ Ulbricht had epitomised the traditional, authoritarian, pro-Soviet Communist leader,²² and so Honecker was determined to win over the hearts and minds of the population by presenting himself as a more “human” figure. A back-log of previously banned work was released, such as Stefan Heym’s critique of Stalinism, *The King David Report* and Ulrich Plenzdorf’s (also the scriptwriter for *The Legend of Paul and Paula*) *The New Sorrows of Young W*,²³ which told the story of an artist and his dreams of ‘girls, music and his beloved jeans’.²⁴ It was hoped to be the start of an improved relationship between the state and the cultural elite. Honecker trampled on the censorship traditions, ignoring the critical calls for the banning of *The Legend of Paul and Paula* by SED party members. He

¹⁵ Brockmann, *Critical History*, 219.

¹⁶ Brockman, *Critical History*, 266.

¹⁷ M. Dennis, *The Rise and Fall of the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1990*, (Essex, 2000), 116.

¹⁸ Feinstein, *Triumph*, 194.

¹⁹ Feinstein, *Triumph*, 195.

²⁰ Feinstein, *Triumph*, 197.

²¹ Feinstein, *Triumph*, 201.

²² P. Ludz, ‘Continuity and Change’, in L.H. Legters, *The German Democratic Republic: A Developed Socialist Society*, (Colorado, 1978), 256.

²³ Dennis, *Rise and fall*, 145.

²⁴ J. McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism, Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR*, (Forthcoming with Cambridge University Press, 2011), 59.

went to a private screening of the film at the Kosmos Movie Theatre in Berlin and gave his personal approval for its distribution.²⁵ With the Berlin Agreement signed in 1972, the GDR became an officially recognised state by the UN.²⁶ This stability awarded Honecker a degree of freedom and the opportunity to project a new, modern image of his country. He would encourage the material and cultural betterment of his people, acknowledging the need for a degree of individualism and consumerism, and the importance of addressing these issues in the here and now.

With all five films concentrating on female protagonists, it is also important to understand their changing social position in the GDR. The SED was determined to promote the ‘emancipation of women’ as one of the ‘greatest achievements of socialism’.²⁷ In recent years historiography by the likes of Mary Fulbrook, and Donna Harsch has assessed the impact of legislation that was designed to promote women as both workers and mothers. It was a somewhat contradictory mix of production and reproduction that furthered women’s progression on the one hand, but reaffirmed their position in the domestic sphere on the other. These works provide an invaluable explanation into societal changes that took place in the family and women’s lives in particular. They will be used alongside works by Leonore Ansorg and Renate Hürtgen and their aptly named ‘The Myth of Emancipation: Contradictions in Women’s Lives’. This serves to highlight the fact that contrary to the depiction of the “great socialist heroes” that once reigned DEFA films, in reality women struggled to achieve great positions at work due to the double burden created by childcare and household chores. Reflective of their environment, these new women characters were very much a product of their time. By analysing the representation of women in both the areas of work and motherhood, this dissertation extends current historiography which does not provide an analysis much beyond the early 1970s.

It is Andrea Rinke’s study on the *Images of Women in East German Cinema* that has undoubtedly had the greatest impact on this work. Each film represents a woman in crisis. Having set herself high expectations thanks to the promise of emancipation and equality, she is struggling to remedy this with the harsh reality of everyday life.²⁸ It was the contradictory image of woman as ‘worker and comrade’ on the one hand and ‘mother and lover’ on the

²⁵ Brockman, *Critical History*, 264.

²⁶ Feinstein, *Triumph*, 202.

²⁷ Walter Ulbricht, 1968, cited in, Rinke, *Images*, 19.

²⁸ Rinke, *Images*, 268.

other, that provided filmmakers with a ready-made dramatic, yet realistic conflict,²⁹ challenging the state's ideal of a society progressing towards perfection. Her study looks at the films in sets of two, dividing the women protagonists into the categories of 'socialist models', 'private dreamers' and 'pursu[ers] of individuality'.³⁰ I however, profess a more collective analysis that proposes greater similarities between the films, concluding that all five of the female protagonists are ultimately pursuing individuality in the private sphere. Whilst the notion of a 'private sphere' is unproblematic in the western world, as Lenin stated, 'under communism nothing is private'.³¹ It is associated with individual freedom and a degree of separation from the state. Social history and Foucault's conception of power have done much to shatter the totalitarian discourses that once reigned supreme in the historiography of communist states. This dissertation is heavily influenced by the recent work by Paul Bett's, who has shown that it is precisely the authoritarian nature of the regime that made people value a private life so highly.³² An analysis of the representation of women in the private sphere can thus provide information on 'real existing socialism' and the form this took on in the mature years of the GDR.³³ It takes into consideration the socio-cultural context of Honecker's *Muttipolitik* and his 'social contract' designed to engage in a more mutual relationship with the people and cultural elite.³⁴ Chapter one will consider women's role and representation in the public sphere, namely their duties as workers and socialist citizens. Chapter two looks at the competing identity of women in the private sphere, with a discussion of motherhood and love. The conclusion combines these social policies with an assessment of the changing cultural scene created by the confusion of the Biermann Affair. The disillusionment this incurred helps the dissertation to explain why these filmmakers, charged with the education of the people, chose to abandon the traditional heroes of socialist realism. What did they hope to achieve in their insistent portrayal of women as divorced, single mothers, often working in the lowest paid jobs? How does their insistence on the pursuit of individual self-fulfilment in the private world relate to the socialist collective? And above all what can these films reveal about the representation of women in the GDR?

This work owes much to developments in the field of cultural history and popular culture in particular. Only from the 1960s onwards has the use of film in historical scholarship been

²⁹ Rinke, *Images*, 268.

³⁰ Rinke, *Images*.

³¹ P. Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic*, (Oxford, 2010), 2.

³² Betts, *Within Walls*, 6.

³³ Betts, *Within Walls*, 10.

³⁴ Betts, *Within Walls*, 13.

given credit,³⁵ and it is only since the 1990 Berlin Film Festival that DEFA films have gained the artistic recognition they deserve from the Western world.³⁶ Valued for their role as a ‘window into East German society’,³⁷ fiction films can be seen to reflect the ‘mental and social role of its makers and audiences’.³⁸ These films have had to find favour with the scriptwriter, directors, censors, press and audiences, thus they are indications of social and cultural values.³⁹ The title of this project looks specifically at the representation of women, their love lives and pursuit of happiness – aspects of life that are hard to convey accurately in words. Body language and facial expressions, settings and scenery all help to build a picture that can tell a lot more about a culture than written sources. Information on the state-owned cinema industry and censorship also tells us much about the outlook of the ‘official’ state, how the party saw itself and its citizens. Nonetheless, problems associated with the interpretation of fiction films cannot be ignored. There is a danger of applying western cinematic theories to the analysis of socialist films. Psychoanalytical methods such as a feminist stance may force one to look for messages that are not really there. An extensive women’s movement simply did not exist in the east. John O’Conner states ‘the film is a valuable historical artefact, but its value cannot be understood without asking the proper questions about its production.’⁴⁰ Any analysis must therefore turn to cinema and film theory for the technical expertise involved in translating the meaning of different lighting techniques, camera angles, frame ordering and the use of music.⁴¹ Symbolic meaning and illusions must be understood and what is not included must be looked at just as closely.⁴²

³⁵ P. Smith, ‘Introduction’, in P. Smith (ed.), *The Historian and Film*, (Cambridge, 1976), 1.

³⁶ H. Claus, ‘Preface’, in Rinke, *Images*, ix.

³⁷ Claus, ‘Preface’, x.

³⁸ Smith, ‘Introduction’, 7.

³⁹ J.E. O’Conner, ‘History in Images/ Images in History’, *American Historical Review*, Vol. 93, No. 5, (December, 1988), 1206.

⁴⁰ O’Conner, ‘History in Images’, 1205.

⁴¹ W. Walker, ‘GDR Film in Cultural Context’, *Teaching German*, Vol. 15, No. 2, (Autumn, 1982), 204.

⁴² Herlihy, ‘Camera’, 1186.

Chapter One

The Public Sphere: Work and Socialist Commitment

The first SED leader, Walter Ulbricht had been keen to promote the integration of women into the workplace from the state's very conception. The need to rebuild in the years following the war dictated the need for a substantial workforce. With many of its men either dead or still in prisoner of war camps, it fell on women to make up the numbers. Marxism also stated that the emancipation of women and thus the social progress of a state could be achieved by allowing women to enter the productive sphere. The first constitution of the GDR in 1949 granted all women the right to work, and the right to equal pay for equal work.⁴³ Ulbricht attempted to restructure gender relations which had traditionally separated men and women under strict binary opposites. Under the Family Code of 1965 women earned the 'right to develop their abilities for their own sake and society's interests'.⁴⁴ Ulbricht encouraged women to undertake professional training and implemented annual quotas which directed industries to devote a certain number of places to women.⁴⁵ School reforms enticed women to continue with higher education and participate in subjects previously dominated by men. By 1970 women made up fifty per cent of the workforce, with eighty-seven per cent of women aged fifteen to sixty employed.⁴⁶ These impressive figures continued long after his step down from power: In 1988 twenty-nine per cent of women had a degree compared with only nineteen per cent of men whilst sixty-two per cent had qualified as a Skilled Worker or Master Craftsmen.⁴⁷ The state had declared 'equal rights to all citizens...men and women' and the 'emancipation of women [had] been achieved'.⁴⁸

Indeed, it would be wrong to suggest that the private sphere completely dominates the content of these five DEFA films, with work and socialist ideals providing a back-bone to many of the stories. Lothar Warnecke's protagonist Inge in *Apprehension* is a highly

⁴³ Fenemore, *Sex*, 19.

⁴⁴ D. Lagenhan and S. Ross, 'The Socialist glass ceiling: Limits to Female Careers', in K.H Jarausch, (ed.), *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, (Oxford, 1999), 179.

⁴⁵ D. Harsch, 'Squaring the Circle: The dilemmas and evolution of women's policy' in P.Major and J. Osmond, (eds.), *The Workers' and Peasants' State: Communism and Society in East Germany Under Ulbricht 1945-71*, (Manchester, 2002), 160.

⁴⁶ G. Bahr, 'Film and Consciousness: The Depiction of Women in East German Movies', in R. Frieden, et al. (eds.), *Gender and German Cinema, Feminist Interventions: Vol.1 Gender and Representation in New German Cinema*, (Oxford, 1993), 126.

⁴⁷ Rinke, *Images*, 23-24.

⁴⁸ Inge Lange, SED's head of *Frauenfragen*, 1972, cited in, Rinke, *Images*, 30.

intelligent, well-educated psychologist who works for the Department of Health and Welfare. *Solo Sunny*'s main character is a somewhat unconventional 'soulful, aspiring singer',⁴⁹ though her independence and determination shine through as key traits of the new socialist woman. Her lack of overall success far from reflects her enthusiasm and featuring in both the opening and closing scene, work is of great importance to Sunny. The earliest film made, *Her Third* relates most closely to the woman at work of old. The film begins with images of the protagonist Margit undertaking work as a computer mathematician. The light-hearted music in the background complete with flute, piano, xylophone and a delicate base reflect the relaxed atmosphere of the workplace. Men and women are shown working together on computer equipment, engaging in cheerful conversation. Over this montage two men are discussing the type of work that is being done and the wages earned by their female employees. Those who 'know all there is to know' can expect to earn between '810 and 890 marks' – a good salary for any GDR citizen and testament it would appear to the equality that has been achieved in the workplace.⁵⁰ Margit is 'granted an application to postpone her [work training] exam' following the birth of her first child.⁵¹ The workplace is flexible and accommodating to her needs. She chooses the 'most difficult' module but is confident and sure of her success.⁵² There were those who tried to keep her confined to an explicitly feminised role as a nun. Despite attempts by her mother superior to persuade her to stay, Margit instead throws herself wholeheartedly behind the socialist cause.⁵³ Her first relationship sees her as a member of the 'Free German Youth', 'fighting for a fascist free future.'⁵⁴ She is immersed in politics, trying to initiate conversation about the 'A-bomb [they'll] drop on North Korea' and an 'action week...to shape the future.'⁵⁵

However, this socialist optimism and commitment to the workplace soon dissolves into individualistic pursuits. A telling sign is the presentation of the workplace in *Her Third* in black and white. The film makes use of colour only once the work day has ended. The monotone colours of the work scene make it appear dull and unexciting compared to the unpredictability of the private sphere of love and relationships. She is quick to abandon her previously strong commitment to socialism, using the analogy of the 'ten year plan' to

⁴⁹ Unknown author, cited on film sleeve, *Solo Sunny*, [FILM], Dir. Konrad Wolf and Wolfgang Kohlhaase, (1980).

⁵⁰ *Her Third (Der Dritte)*, [FILM], Dir. Egon Günther, (1972).

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

describe, more importantly, what her own 'life will be like in ten years'.⁵⁶ As a single mother of two children by different fathers, she paints the picture of an isolated individual - with 'the kids...gone', she'll 'be alone, very alone.'⁵⁷ She ignores the plight of the 'starving farm workers', 'forced onto the streets by hunger as landowners force them off their land' in 'Rio de Janeiro', interrupting the story to talk about her personal life of 'failed' previous relationships.⁵⁸ Work and socialism will not be enough to save her from loneliness and they are certainly not enough for complete happiness and self-fulfilment. When Inge in *Apprehension* is diagnosed with potential breast cancer she phones work to call in sick and will be 'off for a few days'.⁵⁹ The symbolic noise of the ticking clock that can be heard at numerous points throughout the film is a countdown to her death. She cannot waste it at work which can 'sometimes be awful' and must seek comfort and happiness elsewhere.

Sunny in *Solo Sunny* is perhaps one of the most rebellious characters. She does not see herself as a helping to advance culture or art, which 'would mean serving society'.⁶⁰ Instead, her job as a singer is inextricably linked to her private desire to be loved and admired. Even this independent, career-minded woman judges success and happiness as 'know[ing] that someone wants me.'⁶¹ Her greatest moment was when 'one time, the people stopped dancing and listened'.⁶² In Sunny's first solo performance her theatrical stage makeup comes complete with long false eyelashes, smouldering smoky eyes and striking ruby red lipstick. Her hair is cut short and flattened in a 1920s cabaret style, encased in a beaded, sparkling head-dress. Her wide-opened eyes pan the audience, desperately searching for approval. The lyrics to her song: 'she's Sunny they will say, someday' reiterate her overwhelming desire to be noticed and adored.⁶³ But her confidence is shattered when she spots a man in the audience treating her heart-felt performance as if it is simply background music to accompany his dinner. The camera switches between shots of Sunny and this man, highlighting the contrast of emotions – one of passion and the other of indifference. Her heavy and dramatic make-up metaphorically relates her to the clown, characteristically lonely

⁵⁶ *Her Third*, Dir. Günther, (1972).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Apprehension (Die Beunruhigung)*, [FILM], Dir. Lothar Warneke, (1982).

⁶⁰ D.J. Goulding, *Testing the Borders: Post New Wave Cinema in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, (Bloomington, 1989), 61.

⁶¹ *Solo Sunny*, Dir. Wolf and Kohlhaase, (1980).

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

she is 'secretly crying behind a painted on smile.'⁶⁴ This career choice is far removed from the "heroic" jobs of old. She desires individualistic recognition, to satisfy her own needs and be loved and admired.

In this respect then, Sunny is hardly the dedicated socialist citizen. She is depicted as an inconsiderate neighbour who is called to a Conflict Commission (Konfliktkommissionen). She has been reported for disturbances of the peace, in this case her 'living habits [which] are a nuisance to [her] neighbours', they include 'loud music...[and] entertaining men'.⁶⁵ She is so outraged by these reports that she seeks revenge on her elderly neighbour by stepping on her hand while she is scrubbing the floor. As Feinstein correctly asserts, music and fashion are 'a means of defining individual lifestyle and political resonance'.⁶⁶ Her westernised outfits are unlike the standardised clothing of the East German stores. She is seen wearing rock 'n' roll leather jackets, skin tight jeans and patent red leather heels. As the image of Sunny on stage in the first scene fades, the film depicts its protagonist in a rundown building, her apartment facing onto the Prenzlauer Berg Neighbourhood, famed for being a 'cult hangout for non-conformists'.⁶⁷ Her walls are covered with posters of different bands and a striking pair of suggestive red lips with a speech bubble declaring her love of 'jazz rock'.⁶⁸ Her passion is music, a pursuit associated with leisure, the private sphere and individual enjoyment. Elsewhere are black and white photographs of herself mid-performance. They are reflective of her desire to be recognised and celebrated as an individual, not to merely shrink into the homogenous collective. Following her suicide attempt she dreams that 'someone came into my room and looked around and said: "Traces of Sunny, she lived here once"', it is her worst fear that she will be forgotten and fade into the past as an unknown citizen.⁶⁹

Other characters work only because of financial necessity. Heiner Carow's female protagonist in *The Legend of Paul and Paula* is a supermarket checkout assistant. She engages little with the work collective and as the beginning quote of this dissertation shows; she is looking for 'something more to life than work and sleep'.⁷⁰ She lives in an old

⁶⁴ J.D. Steakley, 'Nicholas and J.A.W.' in J. Lemke, (ed.), *Gay Voices From East Germany*, (1991), 164.

⁶⁵ *Solo Sunny*, Dir. Wolf and Kohlhaase, (1980).

⁶⁶ Feinstein, *Triumph*, 233.

⁶⁷ Rinke, *Images*, 143.

⁶⁸ *Solo Sunny*, Dir. Wolf and Kohlhaase, (1980).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *The Legend of Paul and Paula*, Dir. Carow, (1973).

apartment block and values the transient things in life far more than material positions. It is a closed-off world where she is free to dream and immerse herself in privacy, away from an interfering world. She is diametrically opposed to her lover Paul. He sees work as his greatest priority and is determined to maintain high socialist standards. He lives opposite Paula in a new modern 'P2 Wohnung', which came to characterise modern living space in the GDR.⁷¹ Paula strives for nothing but perfection when it comes to love and romance and is quick to be rid of her cheating boyfriend. Paul also catches his wife Innes with another man, but is anxious to avoid divorce because he 'can't afford that in [his] position'.⁷² He is horrified at Paula's arrival at a party for African businessmen due to her complete indifference to its financial importance. All involved have 'worked [their] butts off to land this contract' and he is not about to pursue his own happiness 'at the expense of others'. 'Obligation must be fulfilled' and 'nobody can do as they please.'⁷³ It is the influence of Paula however, that serves to undo all the hard work of the state propaganda. During their most famous love scene, she symbolically takes off Paul's *Kampfgruppen der Arbeiterklasse*⁷⁴ uniform drawing him into her world of privacy and self-fulfilment. Sprinkling him with salt and pepper she metaphorically 'prepares him for consumption',⁷⁵ steeling him away from socialism. They embark on a magical journey on Paula's bed which comes to symbolise ultimate seclusion.⁷⁶ Sex is presented as a 'free space',⁷⁷ emphasised by the liberating images of a kite and boat gliding along in the water.⁷⁸ She blindfolds the three work colleagues Paul imagines to be sitting on her sofa. She is disrupting the state's omnipresence and assures him they are 'all alone'.⁷⁹ Paula is decorated with garlands of vividly coloured flowers and the whole scene is reminiscent of a pagan festival (See Fig.1). She is the site of pleasure, the bright colours associating her with 'psychic and erotic impulses' which will destroy Paul's dull and uptight world.⁸⁰ In the background the enchanting rock music of the controversial band *The Phudys* are playing. They help entice

⁷¹ Betts, *Within Walls*, 130.

⁷² *The Legend of Paul and Paula*, Dir. Carow, (1973).

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Brockman, *Critical History*, 264.

⁷⁵ Rinke, *Images*, 152.

⁷⁶ J. McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism, Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR*, (Forthcoming with Cambridge University Press, 2011), 377.

⁷⁷ D. Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth Century Germany*, (Oxford, 2005). 188.

⁷⁸ Rinke, *Images*, 154.

⁷⁹ *The Legend of Paul and Paula*, Dir. Carow, (1973).

⁸⁰ S. Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts*, (London, 2002), 71-2.

Paul away from his world, encouraging him to ‘go to her’.⁸¹ Paula shows little interest in the socialist collective, she champions individualism and encourages others to do the same.

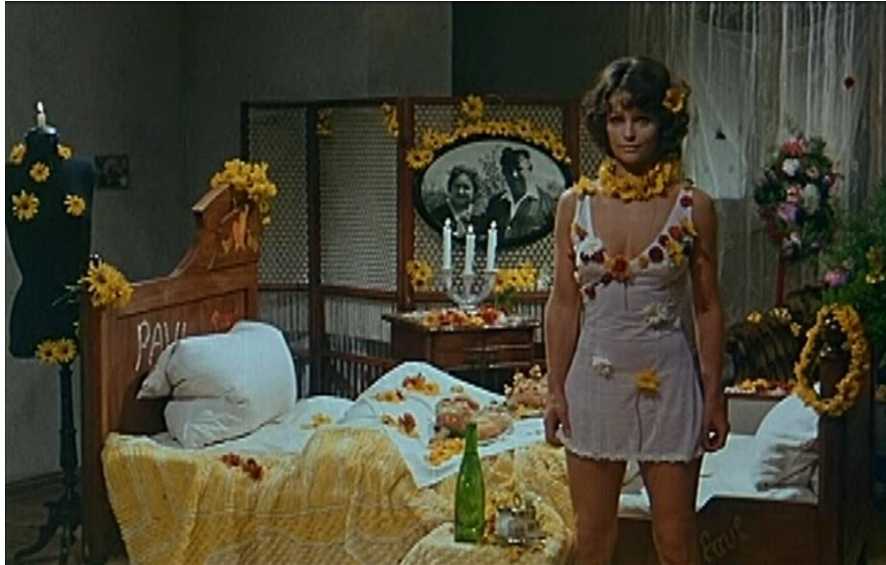


Figure 1. The Legend of Paul and Paula (*Die Legend von Paul und Paula*), [FILM], Dir. Heiner Carow, (1973).

In contrast to these women who show an increasing lack of interest in the productive sphere, Heiner Carow’s 1979 film *Until Death Do You Part*, presents a woman desperate to make the most of her state-given rights. She is determined to return to work at the local supermarket following a maternity year off. Though hardly like the professors of old, Sonja does reflect the sense of attachment and belonging employment gave many East German women. It represents more than merely a means of financial gain, she ‘feels good at work’ and it has enabled her to form close friendships.⁸² It takes her just over ‘six months’ to complete her work training ‘with distinction’, something her husband, despite his best efforts, fails to do.⁸³ However, the concept of the working woman is something that her husband Jens finds hard to understand. He believes that ‘nobody wants’ to be ‘shifting crates, sweeping, rising at six.’⁸⁴ He connects work with the destruction of typically feminised traits, destroying their motherly instincts and encouraging promiscuity. Jens refers to her job as a ‘naked checkout’, with

⁸¹ *The Legend of Paul and Paula*, Dir. Carow, (1973).

⁸² *Until Death Do You Part (Bis daß der Tod euch scheidet)*, [FILM] Dir. Heiner Carow, (1979).

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

male bosses exploiting women and their ‘thighs, midriff and pink underwear.’⁸⁵ He hates the idea of his child ‘in the crèche [or] with grandma’ and wants to maintain the traditional patriarchal family.⁸⁶ He amplifies the stereotypical traits of an overbearing husband by turning to alcohol and violent abuse as a means of enforcing domestic femininity on his wife. A construction worker in an all male brigade, he clearly feels threatened by the potential advancement of women occurring under socialism. He repeatedly calls himself ‘scum’, ‘a bastard’ and ‘a shit’,⁸⁷ highlighting his perceived devaluation through his wife’s want of independence. Though legal provisions for equality are present in the public sphere of the GDR, it seems that the attitudes of both men and women are reluctant to embrace them.

It is clear from all five films that these women are still associated with the private sphere, whether through their desire to search for love or by a controlling husband who is fearful of the negative effects employment could have on his family. This could perhaps be seen as representative of the failure of legal provisions to bring about a real change in women’s lives. The aptly named ‘Myth of Emancipation’ by Leonore Ansorg and Renate Hürtgen and ‘The Persistence of Gender Inequality’ by Annemette Sorenson and Heike Trappe, reveal the ‘continued existence of patriarchal beliefs’,⁸⁸ the persistence of ‘occupational sex segregation’ and ‘women’s continuing responsibility for children and family.’⁸⁹ They were subject to earnings of up to ‘one third less than men’ and had ‘forty per cent less leisure time’.⁹⁰ As Fenemore states many men failed to take women’s work seriously,⁹¹ and as all five films were directed by males are they representative of the patriarchal discrimination that still existed? Are they trying to encourage women back into their traditional role of the domestic sphere? Work is certainly portrayed as something which has brought none of the protagonists closer to a state of contentment or happiness. Even when Sonja is allowed to go to work by her husband Jens, it far from solves all of her problems. Heavily criticised by western feminists who saw the filmmakers as showing women who only ‘want...love and

⁸⁵ *Until Death Do You Part*, Dir. Carow, (1979).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ L. Ansorg and R. Hürtgen, ‘The Myth of Emancipation: Contradictions in Women’s Lives’ in K. Jarausch, (ed.), *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, (Oxford, 1999), 10.

⁸⁹ A. Sorensen, and H. Trappe, ‘The Persistence of Gender Inequality in Earnings in the German Democratic Republic’, *American Sociological Review*, 60, No.3, (June, 1995), 400.

⁹⁰ Fenemore, *Sex*, 20.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

babies’,⁹² they are reinforcing ‘the family code of modernity’s symbolic gender order’.⁹³ However, as Chapter two goes on to describe, it was not just work these women were rebelling against.

⁹² Sander and Schleiser, cited in, Brockmann, *Critical History*, 269.

⁹³ I. Dölling, cited in, Brockmann, *Critical History*, 269.

Chapter Two

The Private Sphere: Motherhood and Love

Whilst encouraging women to become integrated members of the workforce, the GDR was also keen to boost the declining population. Their role as mothers became an equally important part of their state defined identity. A combination of ‘support and pressure’ tactics designed to turn women into the ideal ‘working mother’, had been introduced in Ulbricht’s reign and further encouraged under Honecker.⁹⁴ Women with two or more children got longer paid holidays,⁹⁵ were granted a reduced forty hour working week and twenty to twenty-three days annual paid leave for the care of sick children.⁹⁶ To encourage large families, a cash incentive of 500 Marks was awarded for each of a woman’s first two children, 700 Marks was given to the third, 850 Marks for the fourth and 1000 Marks for the fifth.⁹⁷ Nursery school places were increased with priority given to single mothers, and a ‘household day’ off from work each month was extended under Honecker to any woman with a household and dependants.⁹⁸ Honecker was also the pioneer of the *Babyjahr*, whereby a woman with more than one child was entitled to a year’s maternity leave, complete with a guaranteed return to her old job.⁹⁹ This was part of Honecker’s new ‘social contract’ with the people.¹⁰⁰ They were put in place at a time when contraceptives had been made readily available and abortion granted on demand. It sees a move toward what Josie McLellan has termed ‘positive natalism’, using material incentives to encourage women to have more children.¹⁰¹ Indeed, these policies seem to have had considerable success. The birth rate increased with fewer than ten per cent of the female population designated ‘childless’.¹⁰² Described as the ‘most basic cell of society’ the message that children and the family were part of the ‘meaning and happiness’ of life seems to have been embraced.¹⁰³

⁹⁴ J.Z. Madarász, *Conflict and Compromise in East Germany, 1971-1989: A Precarious Stability*, (Hampshire, 2003), 42.

⁹⁵ J. Steele, *Socialism with a German Face: The state that came in from the cold*, (London, 1977), 169.

⁹⁶ Fenemore, *Sex*, 36.

⁹⁷ Harsch, ‘Squaring the Circle’, 161.

⁹⁸ Harsch, ‘Squaring the Circle’, 167.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*, 120.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*, 121.

¹⁰³ From the SED 9th Party Congress, cited in, Betts, *Within Walls*, 121.

Whilst there is no shortage of children in the five DEFA films, motherhood, like work, is not their main priority. In her conclusion, Andrea Rinke states that ‘children have a strong presence’ in these films,¹⁰⁴ but she fails to offer any real evaluation of how motherhood is presented.¹⁰⁵ Sonja in *Until Death Do You Part* is anxious to be the perfect mother. Reading to Jens from her guide to socialist marriage she states that ‘the most important year is the first, perhaps in your whole life. The best age to have a baby is my age. We’ve done everything right’.¹⁰⁶ Sonja is determined to give her child the best start in life and is making full use of her maternity leave to ensure the baby’s successful development. However, as her relationship with Jens becomes increasingly volatile, she fails to think of the psychological well-being of her child and his upbringing. Following the first instance of domestic abuse, her mother visits and tells Sonja that ‘Men who beat their wives beat their kids too’.¹⁰⁷ These words are interspersed with shots of Sonja again reading from her marriage guide. Ignoring her mother’s words she reads aloud that ‘you should sing a child a lullaby every night. Singing helps the cranial.’¹⁰⁸ She ignores the big questions that concern the child’s development and refuses to acknowledge the serious problems being created by Jens’ behaviour. Instead of attending to her child’s real maternal needs, she is turning her motherly attentions to Jens. She wants to nurture him through his problems, stating ‘what good am I, if I don’t help him? There’d be no point to my life.’¹⁰⁹ This final sentence is usually reserved for the thought of a mother’s life without a child, but for Sonja it is without the love of her husband. It is a stereotypical maternal love that is readily forgiving and unconditional.

In *The Legend of Paul and Paula* the female protagonist views motherhood as unfulfilling. Paula is seen tucking her little girl into bed and telling her to go to sleep so that she will ‘grow up pretty’ and ‘get a guy’, a reflection of Paula’s own outlook on life.¹¹⁰ Immediately subsequent to this, Paula is seen socialising with her friends at a fairground. She exchanges flirtatious smiles with a man, who will become father to her second child, before returning to his traditional wooden caravan with him. We are to presume that she spends the night there, leaving her child alone in the apartment. This occurs for a second time when Paula heads to a singles bar, this time leaving two children in the flat. She spends the night in Paul’s garage.

¹⁰⁴ Rinke, *Images*, 276.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ *Until Death Do You Part*, Dir. Carow, (1979).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ *The Legend of Paul and Paula*, Dir. Carow, (1979).

He himself questions her actions saying ‘you can’t leave the children....They’ll wake up alone, won’t they?’¹¹¹ But these words are quickly forgotten. They have sexual intercourse in an old motor car that Paul is building and it is not until the morning that Paula returns to her children. Irene Dölling’s assertion that Paula is ‘prepared to give priority to motherhood and motherliness over love’¹¹² is therefore somewhat misleading. When Paula falls pregnant with her third child, we understand that it is a ‘pregnancy that will kill her, for Paula ‘is not built for twelve children’ and ‘will not survive another delivery.’¹¹³ Despite the warnings, Paula has the baby but dies during childbirth. This is not a sacrificial act aimed at championing motherhood. The final shot of the film sees Paul and the children sleeping in bed. The audience is struck by a sense of absence; these children will grow up without a mother. As Rinke aptly explains Paula has committed a ‘radical abandon to love’.¹¹⁴ This is ‘self determination taken to the extreme, aimed at complete self-fulfilment’.¹¹⁵ This is a “love child” that shows her dedication to Paul not to motherhood.

In *Apprehension*, Inge’s relationship with her teenage son Mikey is strained due to her relationships with other men. Inge goes to wake him up for school. He is shown lying back in bed smoking and listening to loud rock music through headphones. His opening line, ‘Is he still here?’ reflects the unwelcoming attitude Mikey has towards his mother’s partner.¹¹⁶ He is not comfortable with him in the house and feels he limits his relationship with his mother. When Inge tries to reinforce her boyfriend as a more familiar father figure: ‘he’s like my husband’,¹¹⁷ Mikey replies: ‘But you’re not his wife. The difference is tomorrow he’ll have breakfast with his real wife.’¹¹⁸ This cutting statement shows the degree to which Mikey dislikes the unstable nature of their relationship; he is unable to form a bond with a man who does not really belong in their household. The fact that the film never reveals the actual name of Inge’s first partner reflects the lack of meaning he is able to impart on the family. Mikey is withdrawing from society at an early age and is shown to take little interest in his education. He ‘failed his chemistry test because he had a cheat sheet disguised as a love letter’.¹¹⁹ He is a troubled teenager, mainly due to the lack of parental influence by

¹¹¹ *The Legend of Paul and Paula*, Dir. Carow, (1979).

¹¹² Dölling, “‘We all Love Paula’”, 85.

¹¹³ *The Legend of Paul and Paula*, Dir. Carow, (1979).

¹¹⁴ Rinke, *Images*, 162.

¹¹⁵ Rinke, *Images*, 168.

¹¹⁶ *Apprehension*, Dir. Warneke, (1982).

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Apprehension*, Dir. Warneke, (1982).

either a stable father figure or an attending mother. This is underscored when Inge goes to visit her mother to ask her to watch over Mikey whilst she is undergoing an operation in hospital. Her mother's response to the fact that she is 'having problems with Mike'¹²⁰ is that 'You wanted to get a divorce. You wanted to live alone. Now see where it's got you.'¹²¹ Though the audience is not opposed to Inge's divorce, it nonetheless reflects the fact that for these women it is the attainment of love that comes first. It takes priority over work and motherhood, the two key roles that have been designated to them by the state.

Inge believes that she will not die of cancer because 'there's something I still have to do'. This is not the need to care for her son, but because of her 'dream [to]...live happily with a man...It's important not to be alone.'¹²² Motherhood is therefore associated with isolation, something that only love can resolve. She is weighed down by the words spoken to her by a previous cancer patient, for 'if you have someone who'll stand by you, who cares...everything will be alright'.¹²³ Inge had already told her doctor that no one would be able to accompany her to the hospital, this was reiterated by her mother who asks 'where is your so called friend now?'¹²⁴ When she most needed her partner he let her down. The image of a desperately lonely, vulnerable and fearful woman hunched up on the floor against a wall in her apartment, could not be further from the one with which we are presented at the end of the film. Now with fellow divorcee Dieter Schramm, she has the stability, love and compassion needed to face cancer. He tells her 'not to be afraid' and reaffirms his presence with a promise to be there for her by offering to take her out for dinner in the evening.¹²⁵ As she leaves the apartment block he goes to the window, his eyes following her as she walks off. He offers constant protection and reassurance, saving her from the loneliness of illness.

Seeking love and a "third" man is the all consuming task of Margit in *Her Third*. 'Can a person live alone?' she asks her best friend Lucie, answering her own question with 'Well I can't, [not] without a man.'¹²⁶ Despite having two children, Margit's life is characterised by loneliness. The second scene sees Margit returning home from work to an empty flat. The flute and piano music that accompanied the beginning sequence has stopped and the apartment is silent. Margit leans against a wall and sighs, the dim lighting casting her

¹²⁰ *Apprehension*, Dir. Warneke, (1982)..

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ *Her Third*, Dir. Günther, (1972).

innocent and youthful face in shadow. She has only the television for company as she cooks her meal-for-one. As a single mother with two failed relationships behind her, Margit is heavily reliant on her best friend Lucie. Telephone calls between the pair are used as a means of establishing their close relationship. Towards the end of the film there are three sequences devoted to '*Lucie am Morgan*', '*Lucie am Mittag*' and '*Lucie am Abend*'.¹²⁷ Their inclusion depicts Lucie's life over the course of a single day, showing the strong connection that these two women share. They have encountered similar problems with men who are unable to commit. Lucie too wants to 'experience love, true love', but is instead faced with a man who brings her nothing but 'insecurity, uncertainty and fear'.¹²⁸ Both are immersed in a world characterised by solitude and a longing for affection and love, they are drawn to each other for comfort and security. In a scene which the film's writer, Günther Rucker regarded as 'beautiful', the two women kiss.¹²⁹ Holding each other, their cheeks touch tenderly and Margit caresses Lucie's chest. Their eyes closed, it is a gentle and intensely loving scene (See Fig.2). They are lost and alone in a life which sees them yearning for compassion and warmth. Conversely the final scene depicts her wedding party with Mr Hrdlitschka. Her apartment is filled with brightly coloured flowers and petal garlands. The flute and piano music that had dissolved into silence when she was alone has returned. Her dinner-for-one has expanded into a feast for family and friends, who embrace, kiss and laugh. The cyclical nature of the film shows how much Margit's life has changed. She has achieved a degree of happiness in her once lonely life.

¹²⁷ *Her Third*, Dir. Günther, (1972).

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Günther Rucker, 'Zeitzeugengespräche', *Her Third*, Dir. Günther, (1972).



Figure 2. *Her Third (Der Dritte)*, [FILM], Dir. Egon Günther, (1972).

The fulfilling nature of love is reflected in the transformation of Paula's life from one of solitude to one of exultant pleasure. One sequence makes use of soviet montage, juxtaposing shots of Paula struggling with coal that has been dumped outside of her apartment, with black and white photographs of glamorous movie stars and affectionate couples.¹³⁰ It sees Paula at the bottom of a social system that has done little to help her. She is the main breadwinner, the sole carer for her children and in charge of all domestic duties. By the end of the scene Paula seems a broken woman, she has soot smeared around her face and is clutching her aching back. The realities of everyday life as a poor, single mother are characterised by hardship and isolation. Yet when she meets Paul her jubilation is infectious. She skips to work and is seen singing at the checkouts, calming the raucous crowds that have gathered to do their shopping. Love, for Paula, is so powerful that it is able to transport her to another world, a dream-like state that blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction. It transforms Paul into a 'legendary fairytale prince' who batters down her door with a silver axe.¹³¹ She is consumed so entirely by her love for Paul that she will die to cement their bond, as reflected in the *The Puhdys* last few lyrics: 'her love was as strong as her death'.¹³²

Even in a warring marriage, love is able to hold characters together. In a society that afforded women numerous rights, Sonja's warring and unhappy marriage made for uncomfortable viewing for many party functionaries. Domestic abuse was a taboo subject

¹³⁰ Hayward, *Cinema Studies*, 96.

¹³¹ Dölling, 'We all Love Paula', 88.

¹³² *The Legend of Paul and Paula*, Dir. Carow, (1973).

that only existed in the unequal societies of the ‘imperialist world.’¹³³ The opening scene provides an explanation, with a female reverend softly announcing that ‘our society has developed a new kind of familial relationship, equality between men and women.’¹³⁴ One should therefore strive for a ‘marriage based on mutual love, respect, loyalty and understanding’.¹³⁵ But these qualities, with the exception of love, are missing from Sonja’s relationship with Jens. A violent alcoholic, many GDR critics branded Jens an ‘absolute failure’, ‘a special case’ and a ‘psychopath’.¹³⁶ This is a man who tells Sonja that ‘you must never lie to me...I’d kill you...Afterwards I’d kill myself too.’¹³⁷ By lifting her dress up to reveal her knickers in a bar, he degrades her as a sex object, as his possession. When he finds out about her abortion, he is outraged and repeatedly slaps her, grabbing her hair and arms and throwing her against a wall in a crescendo of aggression. Sonja’s bloodied face, her tears and the repeated screams of ‘please don’t do it’, horrify the audience.¹³⁸ This was a society that worked hard to make divorce easier. It would be granted if one spouse found the marriage undermined by ‘unreasonable hardness and if both agreed then it only took three weeks for the annulment to be granted.’¹³⁹ Many therefore failed to see why she would stay with a violent, uncompromising and repressive husband. As one critic announced ‘Sonja has to take control of her own destiny...because all the social grounds predicting that she, a single mother, cannot exist without a provider have been comprehensively eliminated in our socialist state’.¹⁴⁰ But Sonja is determined to make her marriage work and will not leave her husband. In this way she does “take control”. She is bound by love and this above anything is the most important aspect of her life. Without it ‘she is nothing’.¹⁴¹ This is therefore an extended example of a female protagonist undermining the wishes of the state. Though initially she may appear to be doing ‘everything by the book’, by continuing to love an abusive husband, the filmmakers portray her as an unlikely rebel, actively challenging the state’s official line that marriage under socialism was somehow ideal.¹⁴²

¹³³ Betts, *Within Walls*, 99.

¹³⁴ *Until Death Do You Part*, Dir. Carow, (1979).

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Rinke, *Images*, 96.

¹³⁷ *Until Death Do You Part*, Dir. Carow, (1979).

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Betts, *Within Walls*, 126.

¹⁴⁰ Rinke, *Images*, 85.

¹⁴¹ *Until Death Do You Part*, Dir. Carow, (1979).

¹⁴² T.Bernecker, ‘Capturing Gathering Swarming: Re-Coding Post-Communist Space in East Germany’, Master of Architecture Thesis, University of Massachusetts, (May, 2009), 16.

Conclusion

The state had granted equality to women and cemented it in law. They were given new work opportunities in jobs previously closed to them, and encouraged to pursue education and extra training. However, as chapter one has demonstrated, this did not bring women closer to a state of contentment or happiness. Both Paula and Sonja work in low paid, feminised jobs as supermarket checkout assistants. Paula's motivation is financial necessity, not a desire to help build a great communist future like the protagonists of old. Though Sonja values the sense of worth employment can give, it puts severe pressure on her family life and her husband Jens is starkly opposed to it. Sunny's unconventional job as a singer is pursued due to an individualistic desire to be recognised and adored, it is not undertaken as a means of advancing socialist culture. Inge has a good education and job but finds it depressing and uninspiring. Margit is the most professionally successful character and though she has achieved equality in the public sphere, she is still lonely and longs for a relationship and love. All five films represent women most strongly in the private sphere, which is where happiness and fulfilment are to be found. For this reason, the films have been understood by the likes of Sander and Schleiser as examples of male filmmakers trying to put women firmly back where they belong, in the home.

Chapter two has served to undermine this misinformed analysis, for women do not wholeheartedly embrace their role in the private sphere. The working mother was the ideal socialist woman. She was contributing to the workforce via productive and reproductive means, helped by the implementation of *Muttipolitik* which was designed to relieve this double burden. Yet these films do not depict women upholding this social ideal. Not only are they unfulfilled by work, they are also unfulfilled by motherhood. It is presented as a restrictive role which keeps women confined to the house and a life of loneliness. Whilst the official line saw a society defined by collective responsibility and compassion, these films suggest that loneliness was the actual result of real existing socialism. Sonja in *Until Death Do You Part* is often sat inside her apartment with her small child, looking out of the window watching the busy traffic. This serves as a constant reminder of the life that could be had outside the confines of her four walls. Inge has a teenage son and Margit two teenage girls, but they nonetheless continually describe themselves as lonely and isolated. Rinke is wrong in her assertion that 'children feature prominently in these films'.¹⁴³ Though they do, like

¹⁴³ Rinke, *Images*, 276.

work, provide a back-bone to the plots, this is sidelined by their mother's search for the most important aspect of life: love.

These films were made at a time of familial crisis. They found resonance with people struggling to cope with the consequences of socialist policy and Rinke suggests that they were made to 'offer some sort of help with people's lives by encouraging and provoking independent thought'.¹⁴⁴ The presentation of singletons and lone mothers characterises the social landscape of the 1970s. The divorce rate had escalated to one of the highest in the world, with forty divorces for every one hundred marriages taking place in 1982.¹⁴⁵ A 1972 study found that it was women who filed for divorce in 64.8 per cent of cases.¹⁴⁶ The relative economic freedom which saw the average single woman earn only twenty per cent less than the average income of a two person household, combined with flexible working conditions, meant they were no longer reliant on their husbands for support.¹⁴⁷ Almost one third of all children were born out of wedlock.¹⁴⁸ Single motherhood and the raising of children with different fathers was a common occurrence, free from the social stigma that would be attributed in the West. Like Jens in *Until Death Do You Part*, Mary Fulbrook's research in the mid 1970s, saw men site financial necessity as the main reason for women to undertake employment. They still believed that it could have an 'unfavourable effect' on the 'upbringing of children' and the family in general.¹⁴⁹

But as Regine Kühn, a DEFA scriptwriter acknowledged: 'Many films narrate women's lives, not in order to narrate women's lives, but because it was easier to address problems of contemporary society which were on the borderline of what we were allowed to narrate'.¹⁵⁰ By focusing on women, filmmakers were able to explore 'potentially explosive political issues'.¹⁵¹ By presenting women who were unfulfilled by the predetermined roles enforced upon them by the state, the filmmakers question what constitutes a 'normal life' under socialism and encourage consideration of what is 'essential and appropriate to the

¹⁴⁴ Rinke, *Images*, 266.

¹⁴⁵ McLellan, *Love in the Time*, 107.

¹⁴⁶ J. Steele, *Socialism with a German Face: The state that came in from the cold*, (London, 1977), 181.

¹⁴⁷ Dennis, *Rise and Fall*, 152.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Fulbrook, *People's State*, 159.

¹⁵⁰ Berghahn, *Hollywood*, 180.

¹⁵¹ Feinstein, *Triumph*, 230.

individual'.¹⁵² Instead of determining policies based on collective concerns, the individual should become the focus. Love represents the unpoliticised individual choice, the private world away from the strict demands of socialism. They challenge the Marxist tradition that personal happiness must be subordinated to the higher interests of society on one level and the interests of the family on another.¹⁵³ They were pushing Honecker to continue with his social reforms in a departure from Ulbricht's collectivist policies of economic and industrial reform. Indeed it was in part due to Honecker's promise of greater cultural and personal freedom that he allowed the first of these *Alltagsfilme* to be made and why he personally intervened with *The Legend of Paul and Paula*. He introduced material subsidies such as an increase in the minimum wage, cheaper and improved housing facilities, a greater variety of groceries and technological devices, the expansion of day-care facilities, and the introduction of the baby year – these were all policies designed to increase the quality of people's *everyday* lives.¹⁵⁴ This was something the filmmakers were keen to explore and have developed further.

They are therefore also representative of the filmmaker's desires for personal freedom in their professional lives. Love is celebrated in these five DEFA films as the most powerful source of self-fulfilment and happiness. For the likes of Paula, Margit and Inge it has the power to utterly transform lives previously characterised by loneliness. For Sonja, love is the only thing that makes her life worth living and for Sunny it symbolises individual recognition. Just as these women are expressing their need for something more than work and motherhood, the filmmakers are asserting their professional need for change and cultural liberation. Women's pursuit of love is symbolic of the filmmaker's desires to produce films with increased emotional complexity, meaning, and passion that can be both irrational and unpredictable. By picking love as an overarching topic, the filmmakers were departing drastically from the traditions of old. Thomas Heimann reflects on the pre-Honecker era films where DEFA mockingly stood for 'Dismal Expectations For Amour'.¹⁵⁵ Socialist realism had promoted 'sterility' and 'paranoid suspicion' of any cultural product that even suggested links to Western 'kitsch' or 'pornography'.¹⁵⁶ The women were defeminised and

¹⁵² Goulding, *Testing the Borders*, 63

¹⁵³ D.A. Field, 'Irreconcilable Difference: Divorce and conceptions of private life in the Kruschchev Era', *Russian Review*, Vol.57, No.4, (December,2002), 5.

¹⁵⁴ Brockmann, *Critical History*, 260.

¹⁵⁵ J.G. Urang, 'Realism and Romance in the East German Cinema, 1952-1962', *Film History: An International Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 1, (2006), 93.

¹⁵⁶ Urang, 'Realism and Romance', 92.

turned into masculinised labourers. Their relationships were desexualised and based more on camaraderie and friendship. But with Honecker's promises of a more culturally liberal era, the time seemed right to project socialism with a "human face", exploring real issues and human emotions.

This concern became even more pressing with Honecker's cultural u-turn beginning in 1973. The promises of his 'no taboos' speech were dissolved when Honecker declared that 'the loneliness and isolation of the individual from society as depicted in various...films...shows us clearly that the fundamental attitude of such work is antagonistic towards socialist expectations of art and literature.'¹⁵⁷ It was a situation only worsened by the shock expatriation of the singer Wolf Biermann in 1976,¹⁵⁸ following a concert tour in West Germany where he spoke of his divergent philosophy on the party line.¹⁵⁹ Though all five films show women plagued by loneliness, it is *Solo Sunny* and *Apprehension* that suffer the most from societal isolation. These are the two films which were made after the Wolf Biermann Affair¹⁶⁰ and represent the alienation that many filmmakers felt following the mass exodus of artists that followed. As Rinke correctly points out, this explains why films depicting the private sphere and women continued to be made throughout the 1980s.¹⁶¹ These films started as a means of negotiating further change and continued as a form of protest against cultural stagnation which bordered on regression. These filmmakers were not merely pawns in the hands of the SED leadership. Honecker and his party functionaries could not simply implement top down decisions and expect filmmakers to follow suit. These films can be viewed as an '*Ersatzfunktion*', a medium through which the filmmakers addressed their own concerns and those of the people.¹⁶² That these filmmakers remained in the East when many others left is testament to the commitment these men had to helping construct a better, more modern form of socialism. They were not fighting against the state, they were critiquing it through the coded representation of women and their quest for love.

¹⁵⁷ Honecker, 1973, cited in, Rinke, *Images*, 41.

¹⁵⁸ Rinke, *Images*, 37.

¹⁵⁹ A.S. Miller, *The Cultural Politics of the German Democratic Republic*, (New York, 2004), 156.

¹⁶⁰ Though *Until Death Do You Part* was released in 1979 production had begun on the film much earlier.

¹⁶¹ Rinke, *Images*, 266.

¹⁶² Feinstein, *Triumph*, 8.

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