

# BERLIN CHAPTER IV



By Henning Wrage

East German (GDR) film history is anything but homogenous: Periods with surprising freedom were succeeded by those in which film concepts and productions were strongly disciplined. Two phases of these complicated ups and downs are of prominent significance: the early 1960s (the years between the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bitterfeld Conference in 1964, and the 11<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the Central Committee of the ruling party SED in December 1965); and the early 1970s (the years between Erich Honecker's accession to power in 1971 and singer/songwriter Wolf Biermann's expatriation in 1976). The course was set during these periods: Whatever was possible—and impossible—in the culture of the GDR was negotiated there. Like no other movie, *Berlin um die Ecke* (*Berlin around the Corner*) stands paradigmatically for the first phase of liberalization.

*DEFA cinema and GDR culture at the beginning of the 1960s*

At first, it is surprising that the early 1960s in particular are considered to be a time of exceptional cultural freedom. It followed, after all, an event that is often seen as the decisive turning point in the freedom of GDR citizens: During the night from August 12 to 13, 1961, members of the NVA (national army), the barracked border police and combat groups began to close off streets and train tracks to West Berlin. The last exit to the west for GDR citizens was closed precisely six weeks after Walter Ulbricht's infamous quote: "No one intends to build a wall!"<sup>1</sup> Paradoxically, it is precisely this event that was welcomed and interpreted as a clear signal for a new beginning by many of the country's artists. Renowned artists, like the film directors Konrad Wolf and Heinz Thiel, and authors such as Franz Fühmann, Stephan Hermlin and Erwin Strittmatter, publicly expressed their approval of the border closing. Christa Wolf, one of the most prominent authors in the GDR, wrote in 1962, "The 13th of August permitted us to expand the borders in our own country, the borders within ourselves, and to broaden the conversations with our own people."<sup>2</sup>

Hidden behind the artists' affirmative response to the border closing was a motif of isolationist hope: the idea to now be able to contribute to the development of socialism and its culture irrespective of an open border or the young country's vulnerability. Only a minority may have actually believed that "three imperialistic armies in West Berlin had been walled in,"<sup>3</sup> and that the construction of the Wall was an exclusion and not a confinement. In fact, it seemed that the demarcation of the border had deprived censorship of an essential argument: reference to the imminent ideological exploitation of confrontational art by the class enemy in the West.

This seemed to prove true initially. Indeed, politicians' claim on cultural control had not quite been suppressed but softened for a while. Nevertheless, the atmosphere of cultural freedom during this period cannot be explained merely through culture or cultural policy. From today's perspective, it seems to be due to concessions in power politics. The early 1960s are, if you will, the temporary release of culture during the phase of political consolidation after the building of the Wall. And still, the early 1960s are probably the most interesting phase of the cultural history of the GDR, a period full of hope for a synthesis of artistic and social functioning. These are relative liberal years for the arts that lastingly orient themselves in comparison to the texts and movies of the 1950s.

Several factors play a role that will be discussed at length: 1) the building of the Wall meant the end for many directors who lived in the West and shaped the cinematic landscape of the 1950s; 2) however, at the same time it was a beginning for a number of younger filmmakers, and the DEFA Studio for Feature Films was fundamentally reorganized during these years under the leadership of Jochen Mückenberger.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the studio had to face a new competitor: Television

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *Dokumente zur Berlin-Frage, 1944-1966. Schriften des Forschungsinstituts der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik e.V. Bonn*. Vol. 1, Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag: Munich, 1987. 418.

<sup>2</sup> "Der Gegenwart verpflichtet. Bericht über die Diskussion auf der Parteitagung des DEFA-Studios für Spielfilme." *Filmwissenschaftliche Mitteilungen*. Nr. 1 (1963). 1-24.

<sup>3</sup> Sindermann, Horst. "Es geht um Grundfragen, nicht um privaten Seelenkummer." *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED*. Ed. Elimar Schubbe. Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag, 1972. 1092-1095, 1094.

<sup>4</sup> Jochen Mückenberger was made studio director on October 21, 1961, and he held this position until February 1966. In the wake of the 11<sup>th</sup> Plenum, personnel changes in the DEFA Studio for Feature Films were carried out and Jochen Mückenberger was dismissed from the studio.



crossed the line to being a mass medium at the beginning of the 1960s. 3) Due to the media competition in search of a new capacity and new audience, GDR filmmakers discovered a new target audience: the generation born in '45 or *Jahrgang 45* (also the programmatic title of a banned movie by Jürgen Böttcher); a generation of young adults that did not share WWII as a formative event, was now old enough to vote, and became therefore politically important.

## *Building the Berlin Wall*

Besides the generally palpable liberalization, the closing of the border on August 13, 1961, also had consequences for personnel. DEFA employees who lived in West Berlin but worked at the DEFA Studio in Babelsberg (GDR) were given the choice to either move to the GDR or to lose their positions. This also affected many older directors who had worked both for DEFA and West German production companies and who were responsible for the aesthetics of many earlier DEFA movies resembling UFA movies. Especially the early DEFA years bore the hallmarks of movie directors from the Federal Republic or West Berlin since they made movies in both Germanys (Georg C. Klaren, Johannes Hempel, Wolfgang Schleif, Hans Deppe, Gerhard Lamprecht, Franz Barrenstein, Harald Mannl, Hans Heinrich, and Karl Paryla, just to name a few). In 1950, six of the ten movies produced by DEFA originated with “West” directors, a dual track that subsides during the second half of the decade. Closing the border is the most important date for the end of the continuity of personnel; in December 1961, the newly appointed director of the DEFA Studio for Feature Films, Jochen Mückenberger, announces the *Störfreimachung* (action to eliminate interference) in a letter to the Deputy Minister for Culture, Hans Rodenberg, concerning the elimination of all Western staff from DEFA with the exception of a very few.<sup>5</sup> The building of the Wall therefore meant a career opportunity for the next generation and indirectly also for the content and composition of the movies.

## *Institutional changes*

If one wants to understand how the so-called *Kaninchenfilme* (Rabbit Films) of the 11<sup>th</sup> Plenum in 1965-66<sup>6</sup> (especially *Berlin around the Corner*) came about, one has to take into account some crucial institutional changes. As an initiative by the film director Kurt Maetzig, the so-called *Künstlerische Arbeitsgruppen* (KAG, artistic production groups) had already been formed in 1959; their autonomy was continuously broadened in the early 1960s up to the interference by the 11<sup>th</sup> Plenum that took place in December 1965. The creation of the KAG involved partial decentralization of movie production that was even strengthened by the elimination of the position of the head dramaturg in 1964. Günter Witt was appointed deputy minister responsible for the film sector on December 30, 1960. Witt also oversaw the Central Administration for Film (HV Film), the institution in the Ministry of Culture that organized the approval of film for national distribution and export. Hans Bentzien took over as minister of culture from Alexander Abusch<sup>7</sup> on February 27, 1961, and appointed Jochen Mückenberger to the position of director of the DEFA Studio for Feature Films. It is due to this group of high-level administrators—Jochen Mückenberger, Hans Bentzien, and Günter Witt, as well as the Party Secretary of the DEFA Studios, Werner Kühn—that DEFA's dependence on the central administration was considerably reduced. The KAG were increasingly able to develop their own film ideas starting in 1962/1963 and to freely distribute their finances and resources based on an agreed upon production plan. This created an institutional freedom that had never existed before for the filmmakers of the DEFA Studios.

<sup>5</sup> The term *Störfreimachung* was included in a note from Jochen Mückenberger (DEFA) to Hans Rodenberg (Ministry of Culture) dated December 19, 1961. Printed in: Schenk, Ralf. *Eine kleine Geschichte der DEFA. Daten, Dokumente, Erinnerungen*. Berlin: DEFA-Stiftung, 2006. 132-134, here 133.

<sup>6</sup> The 11<sup>th</sup> Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED, a conference originally planned as an economic conference, took place in December 1965. It was quickly changed into a cultural conference, and with great fanfare not only works of GDR literature like Werner Bräuning's *Rummelplatz (Fairground)* but also 12 DEFA feature films were banned in the aftermath of the plenum. These movies are today called *Kaninchenfilme*, referring to Kurt Maetzig's banned movie *Das Kaninchen bin ich (The Rabbit Is Me)*. This film was one of the productions that was under harsh attack during the plenum's discussions. Therefore, the 11<sup>th</sup> Plenum ended the liberalization of the early 1960s and is seen today as one of the most drastic interferences by GDR politics in the culture of the country. For more details, see: Sylvester, Regine. “Hier wird unsere Partei beleidigt.” *Die Zeit*, Issue 50/2015, December 15, 2015. And: Kaiser, Monika. *Machtwechsel von Ulbricht zu Honecker. Funktionsmechanismen der SED-Diktatur in Konfliktsituationen 1962 bis 1972*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander Abusch was minister of culture from 1958 to 1961. He was appointed vice-chairman of the council of ministers of culture and education in 1961.



## *Movies with contemporary topics, movies for young people*

Now that DEFA was institutionally re-organized, it began to reclaim its audience. Indeed, movies with an antifascist topic remained a constant. Movies with contemporary topics, however, became the signature feature of DEFA, which addressed a generation that had not experienced the war. Young adults and over one million GDR youth between the ages of 14 and 18 belonged to this generation. Politically, the thematic treatment of contemporary life was also up in the air. The Youth Communiqué drafted under the direction of Kurt Tuba<sup>8</sup> stated: “The girls and boys of today will be the heads of socialist Germany in a few decades. The moment for young people, young skilled workers, female collective farmers, technicians, woman teachers (...), and scientists has henceforth arrived.” Walter Ulbricht personally declared during the mass rally of Berlin youth on September 23, 1963, “The German Democratic Republic is a state of the youth.”<sup>9</sup>

Confronted by television’s growing competition for an audience, cinema also targeted young audiences. If one wanted to reach the next generation, one had to formulate the central problem: not the decision *for* but rather the integration *into* an already existing society. Maybe more obvious to the observer today, the project *youth* implied its flipside as well. If one really wanted to approach the younger generation, one needed subjects that also looked critically at the older generation. This older generation, however, was in control of political power and therefore had the means to use it if necessary against unpopular criticism in the media.

## Berlin around the Corner

*Berlin around the Corner* (working title of the movie: *Berlin – Kapitel IV; Berlin – Chapter IV*) was supposed to be the fourth Berlin movie in the successful cooperation between director Gerhard Klein and screenwriter Wolfgang Kohlhaase. Previously, they had made *Alarm im Zirkus* (1954, *Alarm at the Circus*), a movie about two West Berlin boys who are involved in a theft in East Berlin. This was followed in 1956 by *Eine Berliner Romanze* (*A Berlin Romance*), a love story in divided Berlin. The most famous production in the series, *Berlin – Ecke Schönhauser* (1957, *Berlin – Schönhauser Corner*), about young East Berliners in search of their own position in life, was released in 1957. Although the latter movie had originally not received permission for production, it was shot after all, but it was initially not accepted by HV Film. The movie made it to the big screen only after emphatic praise by the youth organization FDJ. *Berlin around the Corner* suffered an even sadder fate after the 11<sup>th</sup> Plenum. The shooting was completed after seven months at the end of December 1965, and the movie reached its completion stage. A little later, the KAG raised doubts about the movie’s compliance with the resolutions of the 11<sup>th</sup> Plenum. The movie allegedly displayed tendencies that made an approval of the film possible only after some changes.<sup>10</sup> The movie was accused of complaining about a generational conflict, that the depicted problems were not typical for socialism, and that it pictured conditions critically without offering a solution. There was a second rough cut showing for the KAG and the studio directors on May 10, 1966. The movie was rejected again and new cuts were suggested. The KAG announced on May 20, 1966 that the movie would be edited once again after recent discussions.

Wilfried Maaß (HV Film) notified Franz Bruk (newly appointed director of the DEFA Studio) in a letter dated July 26, 1966, that the results of the required cuts would be examined; however, it was done with the aim of ceasing all further activity. On September 29, 1966, HV Film agreed with the DEFA Studio, that *Berlin around the Corner* would not be submitted for state approval: “This movie needs to be classified as one of those works that had to face criticism and needed to be abandoned due to its anti-socialist, pernicious stance.”<sup>11</sup> HV Film furthermore criticized “anarchism in the workplace” and especially “a generational conflict that cannot be solved.”<sup>12</sup> The movie was therefore never completed. Part of the original soundtrack was still missing and the music by Georg Katzer had not yet been recorded.<sup>13</sup> Only the rough cut remained.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Kurt Tuba was appointed chair of the youth commission of the Politburo of the SED’s Central Committee and was in charge of drafting the Youth Communiqué.

<sup>9</sup> *Jugend von heute – Hausherrn von morgen. Kommuniqué des ZK der SED zu Problemen der Jugend der DDR*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1963. 5 and 37.

<sup>10</sup> BArch DR 117 BA A/269b, BI 480-494

<sup>11</sup> The movie was finally abandoned on December 29, 1966, as “attempts at getting the movie ready for authorization did not lead to an outcome.” BArch DR 117/28110.

<sup>12</sup> Jahrow, Franz. *Stellungnahme*, zu Berlin um die Ecke. *Abt., Filmproduktion*. 29. 9. 1966. BArch DR 117/A/0047, also printed in Jahrow, Franz. “*Stellungnahme*, zu Berlin um die Ecke.” *Film und Fernsehen*, Nr. 1 / 2 (1996). 30-31.

<sup>13</sup> For more detail, see: Berghahn, Daniela. “The Censorship in a ‘Clean State’; The Case of Klein and Kohlhaase’s *Berlin um die Ecke*.” *Censorship and Cultural Regulation in the Modern Age*. Ed. Beate Müller. New York, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004. 111-140, especially 129.

<sup>14</sup> The rough cut from 1987 had a length of 118:35 min. Information from the DEFA Foundation in Berlin in December 2015.



This rough cut version was shown more than twenty years later at the Berlin State Cinema Archive “Camera” (hosted by the Babylon cinema) on November 10, 1987. During the following years, the movie was shown occasionally in film clubs or on special occasions.<sup>15</sup> Screenwriter Wolfgang Kohlhaase and film editor Evelyn Carow edited the movie after the Wall came down. This version<sup>16</sup> premiered in the GDR Academy of the Arts on February 7, 1990<sup>17</sup> and was presented one week later to an international audience at the Berlin International Film Festival.<sup>18</sup>

While in the 1987 rough cut the action oscillates between a developing love story and a conflict in the workplace, a generational conflict takes center stage in the 1990 version. With this change, the question of how positions of socialism can be encoded on the next age group arises. The choice of cuts for the post-Wall version of *Berlin around the Corner* seems to be due especially to divergent target audiences. For the movie to be successful with a young audience in 1966, one could not avoid a viable love story, but the audience in 1990 was more interested in the aspects that emphasized the social conflicts in the GDR.

*Berlin around the Corner* was supposed to have been the first big parts for the main leads Dieter Mann (Olaf) and Kaspar Eichel (Horst). Both of them had remarkable careers in movies, television, and theater in the GDR, despite this banned cinematic debut. Monika Gabriel (Karin), the female protagonist, had already had important parts in DEFA’s satirical short film series *Stacheltier* (*Porcupine*); she moved to the Federal Republic in 1971 and continued her career as actress, scriptwriter, and voiceover artist (e.g. for Liv Ullman and Charlotte Rampling). The movie contrasted the male actors with two established stars of the older generation, namely Erwin Geschonneck and Hans Hardt-Hardtloff, who were almost omnipresent in the movies of that period.

The title immediately ranks the movie among the *Berlin* productions. On the one hand, it advertises a movie about everyday life in the GDR—as Kohlhaase already wrote referring to the previous movie, a production about and for the “people around the corner.”<sup>19</sup> The film’s aesthetics are clearly reminiscent of Italian Neorealism, due to the use of dialects, intradiegetic lighting, and a preference for shooting at original locations. Kohlhaase wrote later about director Gerhard Klein’s style: “He was looking for poetry, inherent in the objects; he did not want to add anything.”<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, the movie is geared towards the big picture, as one of the first takes illustrates. A high-angle shot shows the area around Karl Marx Allee,<sup>21</sup> a highly symbolic location of socialist beginnings, but it was also the starting point for the uprising on June 17, 1953.<sup>22</sup> The basic suspense of this movie arises from the constant back and forth between the protagonists’ everyday life (the search for personal happiness—and, above all, love), and big social conflicts that do find a solution at the end (unlike what the censors maintained). The plot is developed in large, initially only associatively connected blocks that connect two subplots with each other. The film humorously develops a love story, and connects it to a profound, socially significant conflict between the generations. On the one hand, it was planned this way from the beginning (Gerhard Klein remarked in an interview that “there was no plot in a traditional way. No stolen stamp whose thief is apprehended by a clever detective”).<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, one can speculate that a version completed in the 1960s would have synthesized the two storylines.

<sup>15</sup> On September 8, 1987, the HV Film answered to an inquiry by the State Film Archive of the GDR: “The film *Berlin around the Corner* is approved for State Film Archive screenings” BAArch Berlin DR140/447/1 v. 2. For more information, see: Habel, Frank-Burkhard. “Von Disney-Filmen und Perestroika.” *Bilder des Jahrhunderts. Staatliches Filmarchiv der DDR 1955-1990. Erinnerungen*. Eds. Eva Hahm, Hans Karnstädt, Wolfgang Klaue, Günter Schulz. Berlin: Bertz+Fischer, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> The length of the movie and of the version released on DVD by the DEFA Film Library is 83 minutes. This is the 1990 version (in NTSC format), which was restored by the DEFA Foundation in 2015.

<sup>17</sup> See advertisement in the *Berliner Zeitung* of January 31, 1990: The movie was shown in the series *6 verbotene DEFA-Filme der 60er Jahre* (*6 Banned DEFA Movies of the 1960s*).

<sup>18</sup> The movie was released for national cinema distribution on May 10, 1990.

<sup>19</sup> Kohlhaase, Wolfgang. “Für die von der Ecke. Über den Film *Berlin - Ecke Schönhäuser*.” *Junge Welt*, 08/13/1957.

<sup>20</sup> Schmidt, Hannes. “Er suchte die Poesie, die in den Dingen steckt. Gespräch mit dem Autor Wolfgang Kohlhaase. Werkstattfahrten mit Gerhard Klein.” *Aus Theorie und Praxis des Films*. Potsdam: Betriebsschule des DEFA Studios für Spielfilme, 1984. Vol. 2, 6-44, especially 10.

<sup>21</sup> The street was named Stalinallee in 1949 and renamed Karl-Marx-Allee in 1961. Stalinist architecture was added during the 1950s.

<sup>22</sup> A wave of strikes, demonstrations, and protests against the GDR government as a reaction to massive quota increases occurred around the time of June 17, 1953. The uprising started with work stoppages already on June 16 at the large construction site on Stalinallee and spread quickly throughout the GDR. It was ended only when the Soviet Red Army intervened.

<sup>23</sup> Hähnel, Hilde. “Nachts in der Ecke... notiert bei Dreharbeiten zu einem neuen DEFA-Film in Berliner Straßen.” *BZ am Abend*, August 31, 1965.



In the center of the movie are Olaf and Horst, two young workers in a metal company, who always get into smaller confrontations with the system. There are arguments with the ticket seller at a dance hall, a traffic cop, the community police, or the neighbors—situations with which a young audience during the 1960s surely was able to identify. The love story with Karin also contributes to audience identification with Olaf, through whose perspective the movie is by and large structured. The development of the two becoming a pair takes up significantly more space in the rough cut than in the 1990 version. Olaf stubbornly shows his affection for Karin, who is reluctant for quite a while, starting with a scene in the aforementioned dance hall, to a scene where Olaf tries to win over his love object at her home, right up to a swimming trip at a lake during which the marvelously laconic humor in Kohlhaase's dialogs climaxes both casually and emotionally:

Tell me something. / Like what? / Something about yourself. / There's nothing to tell. / Then, tell me, what you see. / A man is scratching his belly. [...] Someone dove into the water. Three sailboats have moderate wind. An old lady is eating cake. Two people are kissing.<sup>24</sup>

Olaf refuses in this scene to tell Karin a seaside idyll by demonstrating emphatic triteness and laconic attitude, just as the movie itself takes up the laconic attitude of the young and refuses to idyllize the circumstances. The more complex aspects of this love story have been omitted to a large extent in the 1990 version. The 1987 version gives the story between Olaf and Karin more space (as well as the contrast with Horst's rather more libidinal affairs). It shows at length how Karin has to break with a previous partner and gives a deeper psychological motivation to the female lead.

The substantially shorter 1990 version<sup>25</sup> severely cuts down this story. The protagonists' problems in the workplace are given priority: They criticize unavailable materials, the outdated machines, the slack, and, above all, the fact that the young workers are being paid substantially less by comparison. Consequently, the young people tamper with their pay slips, the misconduct that is the starting point for the central conflict between the younger and older generation.

What is remarkable about *Berlin around the Corner* is the fact that in its depiction of the workplace conflicts it also clarifies the stance of the older generation as they are juxtaposed to the viewpoints of the younger generation. In particular, the repair fitter Krautmann (Erwin Geschonneck) is presented as an almost ideal character. Although he is a representative of the war generation, he points out the problems in the factory. Even though his relationship to his own son is anything but ideal, in the end he becomes a symbolic father figure for Olaf, the most important representative of the upcoming generation.

Conversely, an open conflict erupts between Olaf and the editor of the factory newspaper, Hütte (Hans Hardt-Hardtloff). Hütte's motivation is also made understandable. If we initially view him almost as a stereotype of bureaucratic grip on power, it quickly becomes clear in a conversation between Hütte and the party secretary of the factory that the protagonist's obstinacy can be attributed to the feeling of the impotence a communist experienced during Nazi times. In this scene Hütte utters the sentence: "Don't you ever believe that all this [the GDR-society] could get lost again?" This scene in the movie brings out the mistrust of the older generation towards the younger one, and the almost paranoid political control of culture. It uncovers the tragedy that the SED state was about "a dictatorship of the victims, [...] led by politicians who had for a greater part returned home in 1945 from POW camps and prisons or from exile and who came from two labor parties that had experienced the Nazi terror first."<sup>26</sup> They were survivors (either of the Third Reich or the Stalinist purges), which explains the paranoid tendency toward safeguarding power and authority as the ramification of traumatic compensation. At the same time, the discussion reveals the exasperation of the older generation at no longer being able to understand the younger generation: "Sometimes I lie awake at night. And then the ones who are always content, and the brown-nosers, [...] and boys like those two [Olaf, Horst] come to my mind. What goes through their heads? Do you know?"<sup>27</sup>

Before it comes to a reconciliation between the generations, the conflict between Olaf, his sidekick Horst (who tagged the factory locker room with the inscription "We are all slaves!"), and Hütte escalates. The conflict reaches its climax when Olaf lies in wait for Hütte in a dark hallway. A fight is followed by a verbal altercation that encapsulates the *Zeitgeist* of the

<sup>24</sup> Translation of the dialog according to the English subtitles of the movie released by the DEFA Film Library.

<sup>25</sup> The 1990 released 35mm version was 33 minutes shorter.

<sup>26</sup> Dieckmann, Friedrich. "Die falsche Versöhnung." *Die Zeit*, November 13, 2003.

<sup>27</sup> Hütte addressing Olaf in the film.



early 1960s. Hütte reproaches Olaf that his generation was lacking an essential aspect of appreciation for and the identity of socialist society because they never experienced the terror of the Third Reich. (“Power, my boy. Don’t you realize that you have the power? That soon you’ll have it all to yourselves?”) On the other hand, Olaf vicariously delineates on behalf of the younger generation the discrepancy of the reality depicted in the media and personal experience (“At times I see I’m not as happy as it says in the papers.”); he criticizes hypocrisy, a lack of transparency, lack of worker participation, and the denial of personal claims for happiness and individual fulfillment, and he refers to a time that is no longer accessible to the *Jahrgang 45* (generation born in 1945). At that point, the antagonism between the generations seems, indeed, to be so insoluble as Franz Jahrow, the censor of the HV Film, had written in his rejection. “The movie alleges from beginning to end that there is a generational conflict in our republic that cannot be resolved. [...] In this lies the dishonest and antisocialist message of this movie.”<sup>27</sup>

With that said, the movie has, however, not come to its end. Contrary to the description by the censors, Olaf’s integration into the world of the grown-ups succeeds, if only as a symbolic tradeoff and as a result of an equally symbolic sacrifice. The final important encounter between young and old takes place between Olaf and Krautmann. The importance of this scene is also highlighted aesthetically: If the very first shots show everyday life—Berlin around the corner—and go from there to a long shot, the procedure is turned around at the end. A long shot that pivots over the entire factory is followed by a medium shot that shows Krautmann and Olaf in an intimate, almost casual, conversation during a breakfast break. Krautmann leaves the scene shortly thereafter. What is not shown is that he dies immediately afterwards. Olaf and the audience find out about it in another medium shot, in which a worker runs towards Olaf and tells him something that can only be gathered from Olaf’s upset face since the sound has been muted in this scene. Krautmann, the ideal character of the older generation, has died. The scene that is constitutive for the entire movie gains in symbolism only in retrospect. After the dead Krautmann has been quickly carried out through the main gate of the factory, it is now Olaf who turns off the machines, just like Krautmann used to do.

The next scene elevates the event even further. Hütte asks Olaf after the funeral to write an obituary for the factory newspaper. The text is read in the next scene from off-screen, “Paul, I think you’ll always be here. When we re-equip the factory. And when we’re calmer, because we know how to do things better. When we don’t waste electricity and 16mm nuts are a dime a dozen, then you’ll still be here, Paul.”

The scene depicts the entrance of the factory, through which old and young with all individual characteristics walk, all of them in the same direction, and then it frames the beginning of the movie by repeating the long shot. The reconciliation of old and young becomes possible in this movie only through the older protagonist’s death—the symbolic offering. Krautmann stood outside the evolving conflict and represented the altruism of the functioning factory.

The key sentence of Olaf’s obituary, the assertion that Krautmann will “always be here,” needs to be taken seriously because it points to the mechanism of sacrifice and legacy. Psychoanalytically one could speak here of the formation of a collective *Über-Ich* (*Über-ego*): The protagonist’s legacy as a generalized altruistic principle becomes applicable to the exponents of all generations. Only the sacrifice, the physical disappearance of the protagonist who embodied, more than anyone else the principle of selfless support for progress in the factory, validated his legacy as a generalized altruistic principle applicable to exponents of all generations. This has an importance that exceeds the actual plot, which can be deduced from the aspirations of the filmmakers. (Kohlhaase: “Art is always the socialization of emotions beyond the merely private.”<sup>28</sup>) As the final long shot of this scene makes clear, work and society correlate directly. The factory is the world as microcosm. It is a model whose possible conditions are founded in the common effort for the greater good.

This is where the movie actually ends. Olaf has completed the process of becoming an adult. In the final shot one sees him moving out of his parents’ apartment and driving off with Karin, but not until he has passed on his leather jacket (a well-established metonymy of juvenile delinquency in East Germany) to his little brother—another symbolic transfer. Looking at

<sup>27</sup> Jahrow, *Stellungnahme*.

<sup>28</sup> Wolfgang Kohlhaase in an interview with the author on June 29, 2006. The author owns the material.



it from the end, the movie depicts its central conflict as cyclical. The adverse attitudes in the life of the generations seem insoluble at the same time that a consensus basically seems possible, which, however, cannot be decreed centrally but instead is a result of the individual struggle for society's progress by those 'from the corner.'

Despite the emphatic affirmation of socialist society and its potential at the end of the movie, *Berlin around the Corner* was obviously too much a mirror of the apparent and also unwitting GDR reality in order not to be banned. The movie succeeded in not denying or suppressing various lines of social conflicts and instead having them dealt with without inflating youthful infractions against the rules as criticism of the political system. Not least it is also a plea for other freedoms of the cinema. For example, Horst tells from his time in the West, "I went to the movies every day. Sometimes twice. Not the flicks we get here: Love stories with self-critiques." Accordingly, the movie pays discreet, yet still explicit tribute to the Hollywood youth movies at that time, i.e. *Rebel without a Cause* or *The Wild Bunch* by iconically quoting poses by James Dean and Marlon Brando. *Berlin around the Corner* demonstrates that it's not about the transfer of slogans but rather about conveying an attitude and its legacy. The party and the censorship still preferred to adhere to an ideological consensus in regard to the movie and to society.

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### Additional Readings:

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