DEFA FILM LIBRARY
UMASS AMHERST

TEACHING GUIDE

Developed by
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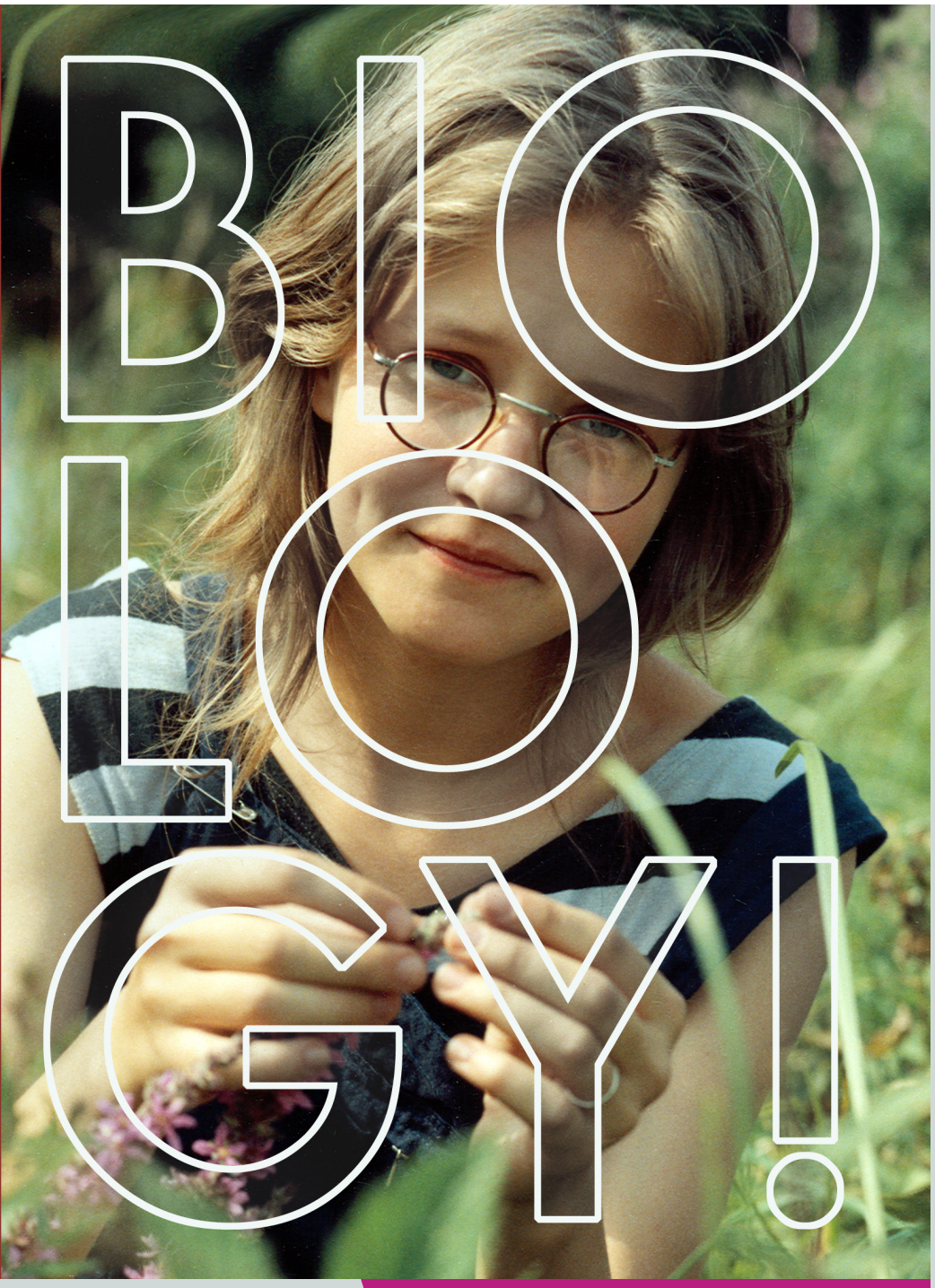

BIOLOGY!

ORIGINAL TITLE ***Biologie!***
GDR, 1990, 89 min., color, aspect ratio 16:9, EN ST, German CC SDH

DIRECTOR AND SCRIPT: **Jörg Foth**
SCENARIO **Gabriele Kotte, Wolfgang Müller**
DRAMATURG **Erika Richter**
CAMERA **Michael Göthe**
MUSIC **Christoph Theusner**
CAST: **Stefanie Stappenbeck, Cornelius Schulz, Robert Arnold, Carl Heinz Choynski, Heide Kipp, Katrin Klein, Peter Prager, Uta Reckzeh, Horst Rehberg**

NUMBER 3

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Please note: DEFA Film Library teaching guides are meant to give teachers information and ideas for how they can use a film in an English-language classroom. (They are not meant to be detailed lesson plans.) Those who would like to adapt some of these ideas for a German-language classroom may be interested in our Guide to Teaching DEFA Films in German.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Biology! is a youth film about relationships of all kinds—an intimate first love, friendship, mentorship, family and community. It is also a film about self-discovery. The young protagonists learn about what motivates them as they develop their knowledge of and opinions about the world through their interactions with each other, their communities and nature. Youthful idealism and a growing awareness of the ties between people and the natural world, and between individuals and the community drive their sense of urgency to build connections and implement change in order to disrupt social power structures in the fight to protect the environment. *Biology!* is appealing to young adult audiences today for its timely focus on the effort to raise awareness of the impact humans are having on the environment, as well as for its treatment of timeless topics such as generational conflict, youthful cynicism towards authority, sexual awakening, family and friendship.

Keywords: love, sexuality, gender, youth, activism, environmentalism, high school, generational conflict, generation gap, class, everyday life in East Germany, GDR environmentalism

Ideal audiences and courses: *Biology!* is well suited for older teenagers and ideal for a range of college and graduate courses, including in: German Studies; Film & Media Studies; Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies; Communications. Topic areas: German cinema; social movements; environmentalism; life under socialism; 1980s; activism; German society and culture.

Content Warning: Nudity (05;20;13 - 06;23;00). Sex (52;20;01 - 54;19;00 | 01;03;10;15 - 01;03;23;01 | 01;08;47;22 - 01;09;12;24) Birth Control (44;42;12 - 45;03;11).

CHAPTER BREAKS

1 . . . . . 00;00;00;00 . . . . . Biology Class
2 . . . . . 00;03;36;12 . . . . . Winnie Meets Ulla
3 . . . . . 00;09;57;15 . . . . . The Parents
4 . . . . . 00;12;07;11 . . . . . At the Doctor's Office
5 . . . . . 00;14;38;09 . . . . . Field Trip
6 . . . . . 00;19;20;15 . . . . . Nature Reserve in Danger
7 . . . . . 00;24;31;24 . . . . . Building without Permit
8 . . . . . 00;26;15;22 . . . . . The Confrontation
9 . . . . . 00;30;16;04 . . . . . Ticks & Socialism
10 . . . . . 00;33;41;09 . . . . . At Winnie's House
11 . . . . . 00;38;08;10 . . . . . Call for Action!
12 . . . . . 00;40;43;01 . . . . . Getting Acquainted
13 . . . . . 00;45;38;07 . . . . . Visiting Winnie's Dad
14 . . . . . 00; 47;14;11 . . . . . At the Mayor's Office
15 . . . . . 00;49;39;23 . . . . . A Place for Everyone
16 . . . . . 00;51;02;12 . . . . . Photo Montage
17 . . . . . 00;54;20;08 . . . . . Sleepover & Newsreel
18 . . . . . 00;57;00;00 . . . . . Proof of the Dipper
19 . . . . . 01;03;11;09 . . . . . Aerial View
20 . . . . . 01;04;51;27 . . . . . Preparing an Exhibit
21 . . . . . 01;07;01;21 . . . . . Looking for Winnie
22 . . . . . 01;10;27;09 . . . . . Exhibit with Surprises
23 . . . . . 01;21;31;22 . . . . . Ulla's Judgement
24 . . . . . 01;27;28;01 . . . . . Human Chain

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SUMMARY

Original 1990 poster, Designer unknow

Winfried and Ulla are teenagers from different class backgrounds and social circles. They also have vastly different interests: Winfried is fascinated by technology and computers, while Ulla prefers nature and the outdoors. When the two fall in love, Winfried takes on her passion for protecting the environment. During a class trip, Ulla and her classmates discover a house and illegal trout farm being built in the middle of conservation land, threatening to disrupt a delicate ecosystem that is supposed to be protected by environmental laws. Ulla goes to extraordinary lengths to try to stop the construction, including lying in wait to capture a picture of a rare bird thought to live in the area: the European Dipper. Though she does not see one, she solicits Winfried to help her create a touched-up photograph of the bird as "evidence" that the nature preserve houses an endangered species. Then things unravel. Winfried finds himself caught between Ulla and his own parents, who are responsible for the construction project. Ulla's deception is discovered, and the fallout from her dishonesty forces her and her classmates to confront difficult lessons about personal relationships, community ties, authority and the fight for a just cause.

CONTEXT

Biology! was shot in August and October 1989, during which time East Germany's peaceful revolution was building to a climax that would ultimately trigger the end of the global Cold War and subsequent German unification. Hungary's border also opened to Austria in June 1989 and over the summer, thousands of mostly young East Germans sought ways to leave the country for the West. Driving both border openings and political activism, grassroots mobilization moved from autonomous indoor spaces—including churches that had sheltered the peace and gay rights movements—to the streets.[1] The new East German civil rights movement was seeking visibility and legitimization, and large street protests—such as the Leipzig Monday demonstrations beginning September 4 and the large November 4 demonstration for political reform in Berlin—were taking place in cities across East Germany, demanding freedom of speech and the right to peaceably assemble. The political leadership of the GDR changed hands from Erich Honecker to Egon Krenz on October 18; Krenz's new administration, faced with a crippling national deficit and a mounting push for social change, ultimately witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989.

Biology! was conceived of as a youth film—featuring young adult protagonists and designed for a young adult audience—under the East German umbrella category of *Gegenwartsfilm*, a genre that, in Thomas Lindenberger's apt translation, was "contemporary social drama."[2] The film captures the social energy of the

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[1] For more information about the chronology of events in fall 1989, see: "Chronicle of Leipzig Monday Demonstrations," DEFA Film Library, *<https://ecommerce.umass.edu/defa/sites/default/files/Chronicle%20of%20the%20Leipzig%20Monday%20Demonstrations.pdf>*. Accessed 8 March 2022.

[2] Lindenberger, Thomas Lindenberger. "Home sweet home: Desperately seeking Heimat in early DEFA films." *Film History* , Vol. 18, No.1. 2006. 46.

CONTEXT

political moment, but it is difficult to evaluate what the film's real impact on GDR youth might have been, as its reception was overshadowed by the major historical events surrounding it. About the fall of 1989, dramaturg Dieter Wolf recalls, "the present, in which the love story was built, suddenly became the past" (See Dieter Wolf's essay "*Biology!* The 93rd Film of the Babelsberg Production Group" in Resource Materials, below). By the time *Biology!* premiered in Schwerin on September 20, 1990, the world had changed. The Berlin Wall had fallen, the global Cold War was ending, the first free and fair elections had been held in the GDR, the West German Mark had replaced the East Mark, and German unification was fast approaching. Thirteen days after the premiere, East and West Germany were unified, and West Germany's constitution became the law of the country.

Foth's career as an East German filmmaker was also swept up in the forces of German history. Part of the disenfranchised Nachwuchsgeneration (the fourth generation) of East German filmmakers, Foth received promotion to full director in 1990, long six years after his 1983 directorial debut with the children's film *Das Eismeer ruft* (*The Arctic Sea Calls*). Disenchanted with the lack of directing opportunities, Foth had left the DEFA Studio for Feature Films at the end of 1988 to work in theater, choosing to pursue other avenues for his artistic ambitions. In spring 1989, however, DEFA dramaturg Erika Richter contacted him with an offer that would allow him to return to the studios if he agreed to make the film adaptation of Wolf Spillner's 1984 popular youth novel *Wasseramsel* [*European Dipper*], about nature conservation and young love. For more information about the history of the film and Jörg Foth's filmmaking, see Foth's interview and Reinhild Steingröver's essay in Resource Materials, below.

By the end of the 1960s, air, water and soil pollution, largely caused by the GDR's brown coal industry and agricultural practices, resulted in a growing health crisis among the East German population, with medical conditions ranging from asthma to infant mortality.[3] This, along with the devastating effects on communities that were displaced or disrupted by land exploitation, soon became untenable for many East German citizens.[4] Wolf Spillner, an East German nature photographer and prolific author of young adult literature, wrote his highly successful second novel, *Wasseramsel*, to raise "concern for the natural environment in the face of reckless economic development, the incompatibility of privilege with the principle of equality and the indispensable social value of tolerance."[5] The novel was also a loose criticism of former Prime Minister Willi Stoph, who had built a hunting cottage on the GDR's largest land preserve. Spillner, like Foth, wanted to use the advantages afforded to fiction (vs. the highly censored press, for example) to remind young audiences about the importance of socialist ideals in the face of such contradictions.

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[3] Velten, Sarah. "Environmental Politics and Policies in the GDR." *The Role of the Environment in the GDR*. Munich: GRIN Verlag, 2005. 5-8.

[4] This topic was poignantly explored by DEFA director Kurt Tetzlaff in his 1983 documentary *Erinnerung an eine Landschaft – für Manuela* (*Memory of a Landscape – For Manuela*), available on Kanopy.

[5] Tabbert, Reinbert. "The Surprising Career of Wolf Spillner's Wild Geese: A Case Study of East German Literature." *Poetics Today,* Vol. 13., No 1. Spring, 1992. 254-256.

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CONTEXT

In the GDR, nature was constitutionally protected but, by the 1980s, the environment had become an existential issue for many citizens. Environmental protections had been mandated in the GDR's 1968 revision of the constitution, but the state had fallen short when it came to putting them into practice. When East and West Germany were founded in 1949, the East German constitution had simply guaranteed the redistribution of natural resources to public ownership, which sought to ensure that land would be exploited equitably. Article 15 of the 1968 revision, however, stated that the "natural wealth" found in the land "must [also] be protected and used efficiently." The constitution made clear that nature conservation was "in the interests of the well-being of the citizens" and was the responsibility of both the state and the people. This included the protection of not only land, water and air, but of flora and fauna as well.[6] In 1972, in response to growing concerns, the GDR created the Ministry for Environmental Protection and Water Management—fifteen years ahead of a parallel move by West Germany.[7] Two of the interests involved in this policy development were, on one hand, conservationists who viewed the GDR's environmental issues as part of an urgent international crisis and therefore larger than the GDR itself and, on the other hand, economists and party officials whose primary concern was competitive economic growth and planning. As historian Scott Moran has explained, "[r]ather than protect small preserves, the law called for holistic planning to preserve the integrity of whole landscapes while balancing the needs of industry, agriculture, recreation, and science."[8] Because the GDR's environmental policy was so closely tied to economic growth, however, the gap between policy and practice caused significant failures in the country's environmental efforts.[9] For more information, see the *Timeline of GDR Environmentalism* in the Resource Materials, below.

Biology! was one of few films made at the East German DEFA Studios to address people's growing concern about the impact humans have on the environment. Other cinematic engagements with the GDR's environmental issues included: Kurt Tetzlaff's 1983 documentary about open-cast brown coal mining south of Leipzig, *Erinnerung an eine Landschaft – für Manuela* (*Memory of a Landscape – For Manuela*); Klaus Georgi's short animation films about pollution, *Konsequenz* (*Consequence*, 1986-87) and *Der Kreis* (*The Full Circle*, 1988-89); and Peter Rocha's *Lusatia Trilogy* (1987-90), a documentary series about GDR energy policies destructive to both the environment and the Sorbian minority community. Parallel to Foth's *Biology!*, Rolf Losansky's *Abschiedsdisko* (1989, *Farewell Disco*) was a youth film with the didactic purpose of educating younger generations about the negative effects of the GDR's reckless implementation of energy policies, as well

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6 *Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (1968), Verfassungen.de < *http://www.verfassungen.de/ddr/verf68-i.htm*> Accessed 8 March 2022.

7 Velten, 5-6.

8 Moran, Scott. "A New Environmental Law: Landscape Care, Global Ecology, and Domestic Social Policy." *The Peoples Own Landscape: Nature, Tourism, and Dictatorship in East Germany.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014. 107.

9 Velten, 4. By 1989, roughly 40% of the GDR's land and water were contaminated by industrial and agricultural practices.

CONTEXT

as about the potential for change.[10] Foth's Biology! showed the sense of urgency around environmental policy experienced by a new generation concerned about the kind of world and society in which they wanted to live.

ABOUT THE FILM

Foth's own vision of the project would address the concerns of young, everyday East Germans, including environmental destruction and a corrupt political machine that rendered people powerless in the face of state hypocrisy and elitism.

Foth had never wanted to make a film about issues in contemporary East Germany, finding films in the DEFA *Gegenwartsfilm* genre to be "cute," but unable to address the experiences of so many East Germans, especially of his generation. The film adaptation project had already been tried and subsequently dropped by two other directors;[11] but Foth accepted the assignment and returned to the DEFA Studio in 1989, because it provided him with an opportunity to create something for young East Germans. In a recent interview about the film, he recalls feeling: "now someone must make something for young people so they don't stay as compliant as my generation did" (See Foth's interview in Resource Materials, below).[12] Foth's film oeuvre shows how he became increasingly impatient with the stagnation imposed upon his generation at the DEFA Studios, which reflected sentiments widely felt in society. Especially with his more experimental films, Reinhild Steingröver argues, Foth's art was an appeal for "free expression in" and "access to media" (For a more extensive analysis of Foth's experimental films, see Steingröver's essay in Resource Materials, below). With *Biology!* Foth promoted and validated young people's passions: the film reminds viewers of the interconnectedness of the world in which we all live, of both our social and biological ties. The film also demonstrates the public role Foth stepped into at this point as an artist. The call to activism through his art was an imperative for Foth, not only on behalf of young people, but also for the future of the country.

Biology! offers a fictional blueprint for how people can shape their communities and environment. Sometimes Foth does this with humor—like the sign Ulla posts at the construction site: "Children are responsible for their parents!"[13] There are also demonstrations of real courage, such as when the young people present their case to the mayor or join hands to form a human barrier against construction. The film also teaches tough lessons about what not to do—i.e., challenging dirty politics with your own dirty tricks. After Ulla and her classmates discover

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[10] Klaus Georgi, director, *Konsequenz* (1986-87; *Consequence*, GDR/DEFA animation) and *Der Kreis* (1988-89; *The Full Circle*, GDR/DEFA animation); Rolf Losansky, director, *Abschiedsdisko* (1989; *Farewell Disco*, GDR/DEFA); Peter Rocha, director, *Hochwaldmärchen* (1987; *Fairytale of High Forest*, GDR/DEFA documentary), *Leben am Fliess* (1989; *Life Along the Rivulet*, GDR/DEFA documentary), *Die Schmerzen der Lausitz* (1989-1990; *The Pain of Lusatia*, GDR/DEFA documentary).

[11] Geiß, Axel. "Künstler ohne Jagdrevier. Demnächst im Kino: Biologie!" *Filmspiegel* (1990): 22.

[12] Translation mine. "Jetzt muss man etwas für die Jugend machen, damit sie nicht so lange so verständnisvoll bleiben wie wir, wie meine Generation."

[13] Translation mine. "Kinder haften für ihre Eltern!" (00;23;15;17).

that someone has illegally gotten permission to build on the protected land, she begins to request her own favors to help challenge it, asking her mother to access town information through her job at the mayor's office and Winfried to doctor the photograph. Gaining momentum for her cause, Ulla inspires her classmates and biology teacher to join her in confronting the town's mayor, functionaries and residents. Her missteps jeopardize both Ulla's standing in the community and her relationships, however, and she finds herself trying to balance her loyalties with her ideals. Relationships are nevertheless severed and ultimately, though she is not defeated, she is outmaneuvered. After the dust settles, however, Ulla and her classmates organize again and continue to advocate for their cause. Ulla's story shows viewers the power of standing in solidarity with each other and of striving to live up to the ideals of equity and justice in a society where the power should be in the hands of the people.

To see how this plays out in the film, consider the final sequence encompassing Ulla's judgement and partial reconciliation. At the end of the film, Ulla is dressed in the blue uniform of the national GDR youth group, the Free German Youth (FDJ); this was the official co-ed organization intended to socialize East German youth, ages 14-25, to become exemplary socialist citizens. As she stands alone in front of her teachers and schoolmates (also in uniform), the school director and the chair of the parents' council (who is Ulla's stepfather) are the authority figures who publicly mete out the punishment for Ulla's "violation of all the principles of school and social coexistence."[14] They revoke her acceptance into the *Erweiterte Oberschule* (EOS, Extended Secondary School), a preparatory school for college-bound students, and determine that she will spend five weekends doing community service. The scene, however, invites viewers to sympathize with, rather than condemn Ulla. The FDJ uniforms would no doubt have reminded GDR viewers of the uniformity of thought and action encouraged as of a young age—and that the "voluntary" nature of the FDJ was itself a deception, as were the ideals that defined it. While FDJ members might be given preferential treatment and access to education, such privileges could easily be taken away if one failed to comply with the uniformity of the system, as Ulla had.

After showing Ulla standing alone in front of her peers, the camera settles on the two adults denouncing her and declaring her punishment. Their speeches about "principles," "honesty" and "community" glaringly reveal the conflict between idealism and reality that Ulla has encountered in her campaign against a corrupt political machine that allows those with privilege to circumvent environmental regulations. For Ulla, this particular violation marks the community's failure to uphold its own "principles of coexistence"—both with other members of society and with nature—and a cause for which it is worth breaking with the status quo. The camera does not return to Ulla until she is left alone, as her "community"

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[10] *Biology!* DVD (01;22;25;00).

ABOUT THE FILM

walks away from her.

For Foth, however, this was not how Ulla's story should end. While he insisted in letters to the DEFA Studio that Ulla's forgery should receive "the worst possible consequences," he presented the moral of the story as follows: "A society cannot be built on discipline alone."[15] At the very end, the camera cuts to Ulla and the other students all together at the land preserve, forming a human chain to block the construction trucks from entering. A camera pan of their interlocked hands, in combination with the unity of their message—"a human chain! We're preventing development here"—makes the lesson clear: there is power in solidarity and in striving to live up to the ideals of a society that promises equality, justice and real power in the hands of the people. As Foth wrote, there is "love in the fight, a whirlwind around Ulla, [and] emerging love."[16] The bold actions of Ulla and her classmates thus capture the mood of late-1980s East German grassroots activism on behalf of environmentalism, peace, gay rights and politics, which ultimately transformed a society and its history.

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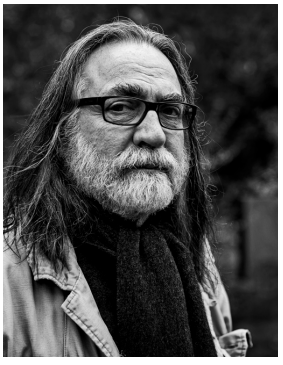
[15] Translation mine. "Ihre Fotofälschung muß ganz einfach die schlimmst möglichen Folgen für sie haben." Borrowing an opinion expressed by [Heiner] Müller, Foth applies it to his own film: "Eine Gesellschaft kann man eben nicht nur aus Disziplin errichten, wie Müller im TV sagte." Jörg Foth papers, Correspondence from December 29, 1988. SCUA at UMass Amherst.

[16] Ibid. Translation mine. "Liebe im Kampf, Wirbel um Ulla, entstehende Liebe."

BIOGRAPHIES



Jörg Foth, DIRECTOR (b. 1949)

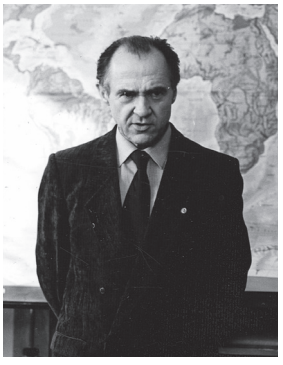
Jörg Foth's debut was the children's film *Das Eismeer ruft* (1983, *The Arctic Sea Calls*). He was then contracted to make three films as a director-in-training and to collaborate on two co-productions: as assistant director to Bernhard Wicki on *Die Grünstein-Variante* (1984, *The Grünstein Variant*, FRG/GDR) and as co-director of *Dschungelzeit* (1987, *Time in the Jungle*, Vietnam/GDR). In the 1980s, he was integral to the formation of the Young Filmmakers Group at DEFA and the DaDaeR Artistic Production Group, which oversaw the production of his 1990 musical cabaret revue, *Letztes aus der DaDaeR* (*Latest from the Da-Da-R*). In spring 1990, when Germany unified, the DEFA Studio for Feature Films closed a few months after Foth's promotion to full director. After German unification, Foth worked in film, television and theater. The Jörg Foth papers are housed in Special Collections and University Archives at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. For more, see Foth's page on the DEFA Film Library website.

BIOGRAPHIES

Erika Richter, Dramaturg (1938-2020)
Erika Richter was an editor for filmwissenschaftliche mitteilungen, a journal of the Film and Television Academy in Potsdam-Babelsberg (Today: Konrad Wolf Film University of Babelsberg. She was also the dramaturg for 14 productions at the DEFA Studio for Feature Films, including noteworthy women's films such as *Die Beunruhigung* (1981, *Apprehension*) and *Das Fahrrad* (1982, *The Bicycle*), as well as Rainer Simon's banned 1981 film *Jadup und Boel* (*Jadup and Boel*) and Heiner Carow's *Coming Out* (1989). In 1992, after the death of her husband, film historian and painter Rolf Richter, she took over publication of the important film and television periodical Film und Fernsehen. For more information, see Richter's page on the DEFA Film Library website.

Stefanie Stappenbeck, Actor (Ulla) (b. 1974)
Stefanie Stappenbeck was a child actor in the 1986 GDR TV film *Der Elterntauch-laden* (*Parent Swap*). Her first leading role in a feature film was as Ulla in Jörg Foth's *Biology!* After graduating from high school in 1992, she worked with Thomas Langhoff at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin and, despite never receiving any formal training as an actress, has had a prolific career. She has received several awards and nominations, including: Theater heute's best up-and-coming actress (1995, 1999); Promotional German Television Award (1999); Golden Camera (1999); Boy-Gobert-Award for Up-and-Coming Theater Actress (2000); Bavarian Television Award (2013); and Best German TV Actress Jupiter Award (2015). For more, see Stappenbeck's page on the DEFA Film Library website.

Cornelius Schulz (Winfried) and **Uta Reckzeh (Birgit)** were lay actors who only played in this film. There is no biographical information on them.



Carl Heinz Choynski, Actor (Mr. Hansen) (b. 1936)
Carl Heinz Choynski is a prolific (East) German film and television actor, who also appeared on stage with the Berliner Ensemble from 1965 to 1993. After his film debut as a supporting actor in Egon Günther's *Abschied* (1968, *Farewell*), he worked with numerous well-known East German diretors, including several times with Jörg Foth, on *Das Eismeer ruft* (1983, *The Arctic Sea Calls*), *Dschun-gelzeit* (1987, *Time in the Jungle*) and *Biologie!* (1990, *Biology!*). Since German unification, Choynski has continued to act in movies and several popular televi-sion series, including *Liebling Kreuzberg* (*Darling Kreuzberg*) and *Tatort* (*Crime Scene*). For more, see Choynski's page on the DEFA Film Library website.

Please note: The following activities are divided into those that can be used before, during and/or after viewing the film. They are suggestions and not necessarily meant to be scaffolded to build on each other. They are designed to accompany the screening/viewing of *Biology!*

Pre-screening activities

1) *For Discussion:* Show students the following screenshot (or select one of your own). What does it portray? Narrative development and conflict? Character? Setting? Genre? How does the image establish these things and what expectations are set for viewers?

Screenshot of the final scene (TC 01;28;56;13).

2) In small groups, have students look at the chapter lines (above) and discuss their ideas about what these convey about themes, characters, etc. After the students have had time to discuss this, give them the film summary and have them compare or elaborate on their ideas in writing. Students could revisit this as a post-screening activity to compare their expectations with their impressions after watching the movie.

3) *Context building* (*for an upper-level culture or history class*): In preparation, have students read Timeline of GDR Environmentalism and/or the essay "Activism to Protect Species and Speech in Jörg Foth's *Biology!*" (see Resource Materials). Assign a topic for them consider; examples might include: environmental issues and political activism in the GDR; the political climate of the late 1980s and the Wende period; the *Nachwuchs-generation* of DEFA filmmakers; or the genre of youth films. The entire class might focus on one topic, or different groups of students might focus on different areas. Following this, have them post their findings about an assigned topic (examples below) to a discussion forum; alternately, they can organize their findings in small groups at the beginning of class and select a speaker to summarize and present the pertinent information to the class. (You may want to provide whiteboard space, poster board, easel pads, etc., or have students use free collaborative software, like Jamboard). *This student-centered activity provides an opportunity for students to become the experts on one aspect of the larger topic and share their knowledge with the class.*

The following may be used as discussion topics—before, but also after watching the film—or as prompts for short written assignments outside of class. (Please refer to materials listed under Resource Materials and/or Selected Scholarship and Reviews, below.)

a) What do you know about the history of the environmental movement as a global concern? What do you know about environmentalism in Germany? *The purpose of this activity is to activate student knowledge and introduce the topic in a general sense by pooling on collective knowledge in the classroom. This can also be used as a small group activity in which each group creates a collaborative Google Jamboard that can be shared with the class.*

b) What is a youth film and what expectations does this genre set for an audience?

Activities for during the screening

Pre-activity preparation for #1 and #2—Give students a Film Analysis Worksheet and review the terms and vocabulary in the Guide to Film Analysis (see the Teaching Guides page of the DEFA Film Library website).

1) Invite students to jot down their initial reactions to all or some of the following while watching the movie: plot, social and historical context, specific scenes, character development and the "moral" of the story (if they think there is one). After the viewing, divide them into small groups to discuss specific topics.

2) If you prefer, students can use the worksheet to take notes on: camera shots, sound, editing, costume, mis-en-scene, etc. You may either ask students to decide ahead of viewing the film which categories they will focus on, or let them respond spontaneously. After the viewing, divide them into small groups to discuss specific topics.

3) Have the students fill in a chart about the different characters by providing adjectives or qualities that describe their: personality, character development, relationships to each other, and their role(s) in the film (e.g., parent, teacher, mentor, activist, student, daughter, friend, etc.). After the viewing, divide them into small groups or have the whole class discuss the various characters.

Post-screening activities

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

1) Relationships are an important part of the film and its message. Possible questions to discuss include: If you could build a relationship or friendship with any character in the film, who would it be, and why? Who is the antagonist in this film, and why? Why it is easy/hard to go against family, friends or authority figures if you believe what they are doing is wrong?

2) Individual actions can have a big impact, as the storyline of this film shows. Possible prompts for discussion could include: Describe three acts of courage undertaken by the protagonists in this film and explain why they are courageous. Is Ulla's decision to present a faked image understandable and/or justifiable? Was Winfried's decision to help her the right thing to do? Do you consider Winfried's decision to expose Ulla a deception or betrayal? Why or why not?

3) *Biology!* is the adaptation of the novel *Wasseramsel* [*European Dipper*], by Wolf Spillner. In making the film, director Jörg Foth put a lot of thought and effort into changing the title. What is the role of biology in this story? What expectations did the title conjure for you before watching the movie? Discuss and compare how these expectations might have been different if the film were titled European Dipper. (*NB: This exercise may also be done as part of a pre-screening activity and revisited in post-screening.*)

What were the social and political issues that brought people together behind a cause and/or to demand change in East Germany in the mid-to-late 1980s? (*See, for example, the Chronicle of the Leipzig Demonstrations or the Timeline of GDR Environmentalism listed in the Resource Materials*)

What were the challenges for filmmakers and artists in East Germany in the 1980s and during the Wende period (i.e., leading up to the fall of the Wall and then through German unification in October 1990)? (*See, for example, the interview with Jörg Foth or the essay by Dieter Wolf in the Resource Materials*)

Group Film Analysis:

1) Have your students break into groups and compare the Film Analysis Worksheets they filled out to focus on one of the following activities, then have the groups share their results with the class:
   - character development: write profiles for the main and supporting characters
   - plot development: diagram the plot development and identify key scenes that move the plot forward. Why are these scenes important?

2) Show the scene of Ulla's judgment (01;21;35;15 – 01;25;32;10). Drawing on the Guide to Film Analysis, help students analyze the scene, focusing on camera, sound, costume and narrative.

3) Using the students' Film Analysis Worksheets, identify who focused on filmic aspects versus plot/context aspects of the movie. Then have them practice analyzing a scene of their choice from the same angle and present their scene analysis to the class. (*This activity can follow up on the guided film analysis above. Be prepared to pull up and show the sequence or a screenshot to help illustrate their presentations.*)

Possible Related Research and Essay Topics:

Research the history of environmental protection laws in Germany (including in divided Germany, 1949-90) and the U.S. Then create a graph or a timeline that compares and contrasts them.

Have students write a letter to ask and encourage a lawmaker to take action on an environmental issue that impacts their own community. *The purpose of this activity is to give students practice in organizating ideas and making informed arguments. The teacher may decide if ietters are to be sent or just a writing exercise.*

Have students write a review about the film. Building on information in this Teaching Guide, it could include: a very brief summary of film, character or genre; pertinent information about the film's history and context; and 2-3 themes, accompanied by examples and analysis (e.g., aesthetics, plot development, character development, moral of the story). The review should clearly state why they do or do not endorse the film.

Have students consider the history and role of civil disobedience and protest in the GDR and write about the film through the lens of civil disobedience. They should consider both the film's context and content. Alternatively, you may wish to have students write a persuasive essay about youth activism more recently—for example, Greta Thunberg and #fridaysforfuture—or compare youth activism in East Germany to today's activism.

RESOURCE MATERIALS

Texts on the DVD and the DEFA Film Library website:

- "Life's Little Ironies. Interview with Jörg Foth," by Hiltrud Schulz (DEFA Film Library)
- "Activism to Protect Species and Speech in Jörg Foth's *Biology!*" by Reinhild Steingröver (Univ. of Rochester)
- "*Biology!* The 93rd Film of the Babelsberg Production Group's," by former DEFA Chief Dramaturg Dieter Wolf
- Timeline of GDR Environmentalism

Related Texts on the DEFA Film Library website:

- "Guide to Film Analysis" and "Film Analysis Worksheet" (PDF, see Teaching Guides webpage)
- "Chronicle of the Leipzig Monday Demonstrations" (PDF, see film: *Leipzig in the Fall*)
- "Interview with Jörg Foth" (PDF, see film: *Latest from the Da-Da-R*)

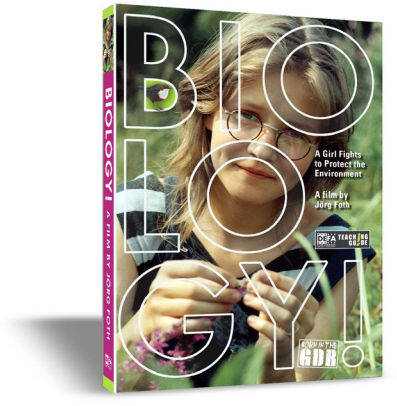
Selected Environment-Related Films on the DEFA Film Library:

- *The Mistake.* Directed by Heiner Carow, DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme, 1991. DVD. (Also on Kanopy)

- Three short animated films on: *Animation Before Unification*: *16 Shorts from East Germany*. Amherst: DEFA Film Library, 2007. DVD. (Also on Kanopy)
  - *Consequence*. Directed by Klaus Georgi, DEFA-Studio für Animationsfilme, 1986-87.
  - *Full Circle*. Directed by Klaus Georgi, DEFA-Studio für Animationsfilme, 1988-89.
  - *Sunday*. Directed by Klaus Georgi, Lutz Stützner, DEFA-Studio für Animationsfilme, 1989-90.

- *Memory of a Landscape - For Manuela*. Directed by Kurt Tetzlaff, DEFA-Studio für Dokumentarfilme, 1983. Kanopy.

- *Sun Seekers.* Directed by Konrad Wolf, DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme, 1958/1971. DVD. (Also on Kanopy)



A DEFA Film Library DVD Release (2022).

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