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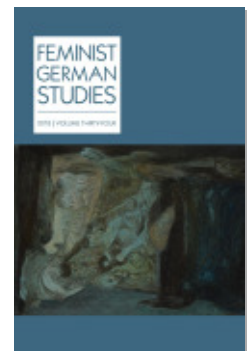
Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts in East German Women's Films
by Jennifer L. Creech (review)

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Book Reviews

Jennifer L. Creech. *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts in East German Women's Films*. Indiana UP, 2016. 280 pp. Cloth, \$85.00; Paper, \$38.00; Ebook, \$9.99.

More than a quarter century after the dissolution of the GDR, scholarly fascination with the cinematic culture of former East Germany is well documented in countless publications centering on the Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft (DEFA) film studio. This focus marks a shift away from the post-Cold War domination of Western intellectual discourses, and yet within this growing body of work, very little scholarship concentrates specifically on women in East German film. With her book *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts in East German Women's Films*, Jennifer L. Creech joins the conversation that reconsiders the cinematic tradition of the GDR, and her innovative approach emphasizes gender and gender politics in socialist film. Through an interdisciplinary and intertextual framework informed by feminist film theory, she provides a gender-conscious reading of five features produced after the infamous “culture freeze” of 1965 and identifies femininity as the crux of social and political critique. Creech explores the cinematic medium in the GDR as a space for potential subversion, especially as couched within seemingly mild “women’s” themes such as marriage and motherhood. In analyzing the position of femininity at a critical juncture between the active role of emancipated socialist citizen and the quieter, domestic role of working wife and mother, Creech argues that the female protagonist in Eastern Bloc films presents a coded endorsement of self-determination.

Throughout the book, the author engages and troubles the dichotomies of East and West, public and personal, and utopian dreamscapes and social critique to reframe DEFA's women's films and highlight their subtle resistance to binary modes of thinking.

Following an introduction that lays out a nuanced historical and political context of DEFA productions after 1965 and interrogates the problematic status of gender equality under socialism, this book features four chapters that examine women's films in the GDR and reinforce the foundational role of femininity in East German social critique. The first chapter, "Happily Ever After," offers an analysis of Egon Günther's *Lots Weib* (1965; Lot's wife) and reveals the film's challenge to the public/private binary within the institution of marriage and the practice of divorce. Focusing on the feminine subject of gaze and voice, Creech uncovers the empathetic relationship the film establishes between viewer and protagonist. Chapter 2, "The Lonely Woman," explores contradictory depictions of motherhood in *Das Fahrrad* (1982; The bicycle) and *Bürgschaft für ein Jahr* (1981; On probation), illustrating the cultural links between the social role of motherhood and the perceived female biological essence. Creech argues that these texts articulate motherhood as a site of both resistance and potential fulfillment, thereby problematizing the role of production in socialist subjectivity. Self-fulfillment as a mode in opposition to production also features in chapter 3, which investigates the female collective as a site of viewer identification in *Alle meine Mädchen* (1979; All my girls). Here, Creech asserts that the film positions interpersonal relationships, rather than labor, as the nexus of the well-rounded socialist personality. The final chapter, "Real Women," contends with the documentary film *Winter Adé* (1988; Goodbye to winter) and its constructions of reality and authenticity as ideological critique. Together, via thorough, theoretically rigorous analyses of five primary films, these clearly written chapters develop a contextualized survey of the East German cinematic realm and contribute to the author's central arguments.

In line with other recent scholarly engagements with DEFA, *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts* examines these films' subtle acts of political and social critique, veiled through seemingly innocuous depictions of *Alltag*. Creech looks beneath the surface to identify patterns of critique that point to persistent gender inequality within a system that has declared blanket emancipation for all citizens. Significantly, this text draws attention to the often-overlooked contributions of women's socialist cinema, doubly mar-

ginalized due to Western and patriarchal perspectives that dismiss East German productions as propaganda and overlook female political agency and ability. This volume is recommended to film enthusiasts and scholars as well as anyone interested in the history of DEFA and the complex relationship between cultural politics, feminism, and cinema. In her innovative and internationally oriented approach to DEFA, Creech demonstrates the enduring relevance of these films and their critical engagement with the feminine as mother, comrade, and outcast.

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Jennifer L. Creech and Thomas O. Haakenson, editors. *Spectacle*. Peter Lang, 2015. German Visual Culture 2. 313 pp. Cloth, \$105.95.

Creech and Haakenson have edited a provocative interdisciplinary volume on the topic of spectacle, including contributions by scholars of history, art history, architecture, film and media, and theater and performance studies. Most of the book focuses on twentieth- and twenty-first-century visual culture, but its first chapter examines early modern German visual culture. Wisely, the volume does not define German spectacle. Rather, it examines the concept of spectacle in the context of German history and politics.

Thomas O. Haakenson's insightful introduction provides a useful discussion of Guy Debord's influential 1967 book *La société du spectacle* (*The Society of the Spectacle*, 1970), to which almost every author in the volume makes reference. He compares it with Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno's *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1947; *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1972). Their concept of the "culture industry" has similarities with Debord's "society of spectacle" in modern consumer capitalism. Debord's manifesto is a more monolithic model, collapsing spectacle and society, whereas Horkheimer and Adorno's more nuanced, dialectical model offers some hope for resistance.

For Debord, spectacle is inseparable from capitalism. Jacob M. Baum's chapter on baroque spectacle in early modern Germany reminds us that Protestantism opposed medieval Catholic spectacle; thus, early capital-