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## Legal Tender

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Published by Cornell University Press

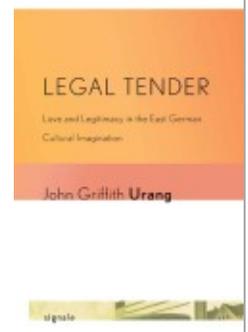
Urang, John Griffith.

Legal Tender: Love and Legitimacy in the East German Cultural Imagination.

1 ed. Cornell University Press, 2010.

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## WARES OF LOVE

### *Socialist Romance and the Commodity*

Wann lernen Sie, daß Liebe . . . auch ihre Grenzen hat?

When will you learn that love also has its borders?

— WILLI, factory-militia captain, stopping East German call girls from crossing the newly closed border to the West, in Gerhard Klein's 1966 film, *Geschichten jener Nacht* (Stories from That Night)

The problem is summed up by a pair of juxtaposed photographs in the May 1954 issue of the East German entertainment magazine *Das Magazin*. The first looks outward from a bookshop at a young couple window-shopping arm in arm (fig. 1). Both are gazing intently at a book entitled *Verliebte Welt*, (World in Love). The caption reads: “wahre Liebe” (True Love). On the facing page is a photograph of another couple, from the waist down (fig. 2). He is wearing a wrinkled sportscoat and pointed shoes; she a tight sweater, a short floral-print skirt, and stockings. On a billboard behind them we can see most of the words “St. Pauli,” a reference to the red-light district of Hamburg. The caption reads: “Liebesware” (Wares of Love).

At first, the intended moral of the story seems fairly clear. Against the Cold War backdrop of the early 1950s, “Wares of Love” seems to point to the decadent West, where love is for sale, literally and figuratively. The couple’s clothes suggest that they are *Halbstarken* (literally, “half-strong”), the German version of the rebels-without-a-cause who appeared all over Europe and the United States in the 1950s.<sup>1</sup> In consuming the latest fashion trends, in buying the products that are supposed to make them more desirable, these young West Germans are in fact selling themselves.

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1. For a contemporary account of the *Halbstarken* epidemic, see Curt Bondy et al., *Jugendliche stören die Ordnung: Bericht und Stellungnahme zu den Halbstarkenkräwallen*.



**Figure 1.** “True Love.” A young couple window-shops at a bookstore. Source: *Das Magazin*, May 1954, 38.



**Figure 2.** “Wares of Love.” Behind this pair we can see the words “St. Pauli,” a reference to the red-light district of Hamburg. Source: *Das Magazin*, May 1954, 39.

The East, we may infer, is the land of “True Love,” where young lovers are brought together by culture and ideas, rather than fashion. The pair in the bookstore, however, are not *not* consuming: their romantic moment is created and defined by commodities—in this case, books. In fact, the books are not even products of the socialist bloc: one title, faintly visible, identifies a translation of British author David Severn’s 1946 children’s novel *Forest Holiday*, while *Verliebte Welt* is a picture book by the popular French cartoonist Raymond Peynet. Both “true love” and “love-for-sale,” it seems, may involve the act of consumption—even of Western products. The determining difference seems to lie in the intention behind the consumption. Perhaps this need for qualitative discernment explains the third figure in the “wahre Liebe” photograph, a man wearing a trenchcoat, hat, and glasses, standing behind the couple and watching them. Implicit or explicit supervision appears frequently in East German love stories from this period. With such a thin line between “true love” and “love-for-sale,” only constant vigilance could prevent the former from giving way to the latter.

This chapter will examine the ideological friction generated at the intersection of romance and consumer culture. In particular, my analysis will focus on the ways in which commodities become imbricated in the ideals and practices of romantic love, the subtle or conspicuous ways in which commodities come to mediate even—indeed, especially—this, the most intimate of interpersonal relationships. In the case of the GDR, this scandal (for, as we will see, the threat of scandal is never far from the commodified relationship) is doubled: within the East German context, a love affair with the commodity implies a deeper betrayal, a refutation of the system’s most basic commitments and principles. Yet, by the end of the 1950s, the East’s flirtation with consumer culture had given way to a deeper and more permanent attachment—and the party, for its part, seemed content to help its rival move in. The following analysis will unpack the grounds and terms of these developments and explore their broader implications for the history of romantic narratives in East German culture. The guiding question of this chapter might be phrased as follows: How did socialist East Germany end up with a capitalist libidinal economy?

As the “Liebesware” photograph reminds us, the limit-case of commodity-mediated romance would be prostitution, the direct exchange of money for sex. If, as I have argued in the introduction, one of the primary elements of modern romance is a suspension of the prevailing economies (political, financial) in favor of a temporary and unique *libidinal* economy, then prostitution would represent the opposite: the incursion of market conditions into the purview of romance, the sphere of sexual intimacy.<sup>2</sup> A number of social critics from Marx on have argued that capitalist conditions render prostitution not the exception, but the norm: Engels’s famous cri-

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2. If this reversal implies a challenge to romantic love, then the riposte would be found in the plotline, from *La Traviata* to *Pretty Woman* (and, as we will see, *Der Kinnhaken* [see p. 59]), wherein the unromantic exchange of prostitution becomes resupplanted by romantic love.

tique of marriage, for instance, claims that bourgeois marriage “turns often enough into the crassest prostitution—sometimes of both partners, but far more commonly of the woman, who only differs from the ordinary courtesan in that she does not let out her body on piecework as a wage worker, but sells it once and for all into slavery” (134). Engels uses prostitution both literally and rhetorically here: he has in mind not only the exchange of sex for money, but also the mediation of any relationship through material calculation or necessity. Engels’s polemical strategy calls attention to the inconsistency of a system that encourages commodity-mediated relationships in some contexts (from fashion to marriage) while condemning—in fact criminalizing—them in others.

As I have argued in the introduction, such ideological contradictions are the stuff of romance, and this case is no exception. Particularly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a great number of love plots go out of their way to assure the protagonists—and the reader—that there are no covert material interests informing their romantic destiny. Thus in Lessing’s *Minna von Barnhelm* Tellheim marries Minna only when it seems that she has lost her considerable fortune, Elizabeth refuses Darcy’s first proposal in Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, and Ferdinand and Luise follow their star-crossed love to its tragic end in Schiller’s *Kabale und Liebe* (Cabal and Love). In such narratives, the possibility that interpersonal relationships might be subject to economic conditions is held at a distance from the central romantic pair, instead projected wholesale or piecemeal onto the society surrounding them. Often the specter of material interest is foisted onto a few straw men (or women), whose only affinities are those from which they are likely to profit. The romantic code prohibits an attraction to wealth as such, reserving such undignified, unromantic behavior for gold diggers and social climbers. At the same time, however, the habitus of wealth—the manners, style, education, and taste of the upper classes—are the very objects of romantic desire: thus, in the end, the love-object, chosen for every trait besides wealth, usually happens to be rich as well.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, romantic plots can have it both ways: they insist on the possibility of a “pure,” materially disinterested relationship without denying the desirability of wealth and status. The forced choice of economic dependency—and thus by no means coincidentally a “choice” usually given to a female protagonist—is recast as a real choice from a position of romantic independence.<sup>4</sup> These love stories, we might say, mediate the social fact of commodity mediation.

In the twentieth century, the role of commodities in romantic ideals and practices became both more diffuse and more pronounced: more diffuse as buying

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3. As the old saying has it, “Love not for money, love where money is.” Or, in Pierre Bourdieu’s somewhat more cryptic phrasing, “Taste is the form par excellence of *amor fati*” (244).

4. For more on love and choice, see Luhmann, 50–57. Luhmann outlines the importance of what he calls “double contingency” in the romantic code: “the freedom each partner has to decide whether or not to become involved in a love relationship” (50).

power dispersed somewhat more evenly across lines of gender and class (a “good match” being no longer a matter of survival for middle-class women, nor “romantic” practices reserved only for the upper classes), yet more pronounced with the ever-greater imbrication of consumer goods into daily life.<sup>5</sup> In *Consuming the Romantic Utopia: Love and the Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, Eva Illouz argues that twentieth-century romantic tropes are inseparable from consumption—that romance, despite its antimaterialist precepts, has become the commodity-mediated relationship par excellence. Illouz analyzes the development of modern “romantic” imagery, especially in advertising, and traces the gradual replacement of such courtship practices as “calling” with modern forms such as “dating.” The culture of dating, according to Illouz, is the quintessential form of “commodified” romance:

In modern dating...the consumption of commodities becomes an end in itself...[The] dating period is often one of intense consumerist activity whereby two people interact with the surrounding public culture and come to know each other within this framework. In the modern romantic ideal it is the very act of consumption that constitutes and creates the romantic moment. (76)

The notion that capitalist romance is fueled by commodity consumption is unlikely to shock anyone: similar arguments have been made in a number of forums.<sup>6</sup> It would be more surprising, however, to see the same dynamics playing out in socialist East Germany. And more astonishing still to find the SED (East Germany’s ruling Socialist Unity Party) actively encouraging policies and rhetoric that legitimated, even promoted, both the commodification of romance and the romanticization of commodities.<sup>7</sup> As we will see, in the course of the GDR’s first decade both situations came to pass. In the East German cultural imagination from the late 1950s on, “wahre Liebe” (true love) and “Liebesware” (wares of love) were not as far apart as one might expect.

### ***Aufbau* or *Wirtschaftswunder*: Reconstruction and Legitimation**

The state of East Germany’s cultural landscape at the beginning of the 1950s makes such a correlation between romance and commodities appear highly improbable. For one thing, there was not yet a consumer culture to romanticize. One of

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5. The relative economic independence of working women in the nineteenth century inspires Engels’s remark that disinterested love—what he calls sex love—“becomes and can only become the real rule among the oppressed classes, which means today among the proletariat” (135).

6. Erich Fromm’s quasi-self-help bestseller *The Art of Loving*, for instance, identifies capitalist consumer culture as one of the main impediments to modern love: “Our whole culture is based on the appetite for buying, on the idea of a mutually favorable exchange. Modern man’s happiness consists in the thrill of looking at the shop windows, and in buying all that he can afford to buy, either for cash or on installments. He (or she) looks at people in a similar way” (2).

7. This is Illouz’s chiasmus (26).

the most significant differences between the postwar Germanys was the fact that a *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle) never happened in the East. While Western Europe was rebuilding industry and infrastructure with capital from the Marshall Plan, large-scale démontage in the Soviet Occupied Zone was slowing down the already devastated economy. Though the citizens of the GDR were working just as hard as their neighbors to the west, less material enjoyment was to be had in the fruits of their labor. Where the *Wirtschaftswunder* made itself felt in high wages and a market flush with consumer goods, the GDR's *Aufbau* (reconstruction) was primarily concerned with building up the infrastructure of heavy industry. And as impressive as the construction sites in Stalinstadt or Hoyerswerda may have been, they could not promise gratification like that offered by the resplendent shop windows of West Berlin's Kurfürstendamm.

The symbolic order of the fledgling GDR, however, did offer compensation for its sluggish economic growth. While the literal and libidinal economies of the Federal Republic coalesced around the new Deutschmark, East Germans were given a new object of cathexis and ego-identification in the personality cult around the figure of Stalin.<sup>8</sup> Despite his importance as a political focal point, there is a

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8. Wolf Biermann's poem "Deutschland: Ein Wintermärchen" (Germany: A Winter's Tale) (Berlin: K. Wagenbach, 1972) explores the parallel structure of the postwar libidinal economies of East and West Germany. In Biermann's poem, history becomes the "excrement" of Germany, the "ass of the world." Each half of the divided Germany has its own way of dealing with the "German shit":

So that it won't embarrass us  
The German excrement,  
With good West German diligence  
Is given shine and scent

What alchemists could never do  
—they've managed there (I'm told)  
They've taken all the German shit  
And made it into gold

The GDR, my fatherland  
Is clean in any case  
A relapse of the Nazi-time  
Could never now take place

With Stalin's broom so thoroughly  
We scrubbed everything down  
That red and scarred the backside is  
Which earlier was brown

Die deutschen Exkremeute sind  
Daß es uns nicht geniert  
In Westdeutschland mit deutschem  
Fleiß Poliert und parfümiert

Was nie ein Alchemist erreicht  
—sie haben es geschafft  
Aus deutscher Scheiße haben sie  
Sich hartes Gold gemacht

Die DDR, mein Vaterland  
Ist sauber immerhin  
Die Wiederkehr der Nazizeit  
Ist absolut nicht drin

So gründlich haben wir geschrubbt  
Mit Stalins hartem Besen  
Daß rot verschrammt der Hintern  
ist Der vorher braun gewesen

Biermann's poem, which revisits Heine's raucously sarcastic cycle from 1844, identifies two divergent mechanisms for processing the sediment—the excreta—of German history. By Biermann's account, both the manic industriousness of the FRG's *Wirtschaftswunder* and the rigor and violence of East German Stalinism are attempts to deal with the trace of National Socialism: while the West perfumes and polishes the "German shit" until it turns to gold, the East scrubs Nazi brown into Stalinist red. To conceal this historical remnant, the two Germanys in Biermann's poem reach for tangible objects, the materiality of which is emphasized by the reduplication of the word *hard*: the "hard gold" (*hartes Gold*) in the West and the "hard broom" (*harte[r] Besen*) in the East. In Biermann's somewhat formulaic

danger in overstating the importance of Stalin himself in the symbolic machinery known as “Stalinism.” To judge from official cultural artifacts of the time—state-sanctioned literature, films, posters, and so on—the Soviet premier occupied a central place in the GDR’s collective imagination. Yet it is hard to say how thoroughly the personality cult penetrated GDR society as a whole. Peter Skyba, for instance, suggests that among GDR youth in the early 1950s “the Stalin cult had a far smaller effect outside of functionary circles than party and youth organizations expected” (163). Since it is beyond the scope of this inquiry to speculate on the actual depth and breadth of the Stalin cult, I will assert only that the figure of Stalin provided a “good-enough” legitimating object. Good enough, that is, to anchor a symbolic mechanism whereby the legitimacy of socialism—or more precisely, of socialism’s claim to represent best the interests of the working class—was grounded not in the horizontal conditions of production, but in the vertical relations of authority.

A glance at the GDR workplace during the *Aufbau* period will make it clear that the East German worker did not experience an improvement in working conditions corresponding to his or her promotion to the ruling class. The hours were as long as ever, the labor as menial and dangerous, the pay as low as or lower than it had been before the founding of the GDR. In short, the assurance that they now owned the means of production did not change the lived experience of workers in the GDR. The proof of socialism’s superiority over capitalism, and in turn the proof of the party’s mandate to represent the working class, had to be sought elsewhere. When it was functioning effectively, the Stalinist symbolic machinery provided this “proof”: Stalin’s all-seeing gaze, his all-encompassing concern, was visible assurance that the party was literally looking out for all of its citizens. And where these specular bonds failed to take hold, their negative guarantee remained: Stalin’s loving gaze gave way to the suspicious eyes of the secret police, the vengeful stare of the show trial.

In this sense, we may describe many *Aufbau*-era cultural products as “Stalinist,” not because they necessarily exhibit the brutal rigor of the Stalinist party line, but because they anchor ideological legitimacy in the hierarchies of state power and Soviet hegemony. If, in these works, the party is always right, it is because it has a privileged relationship to the coming social order: tautologically, the SED’s monopoly on power is legitimated in relation to a future that it alone has the power to determine. The aesthetic category correlative to this legitimacy strategy is that of socialist realism, which, by definition, “evaluates the individual, particular phenomena of reality from the standpoint of the coming society” (“Sozialistischer Realismus,” 791).

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account, postwar Germany divides itself under the signs of competing objects, what psychoanalysis might call fetish objects: the “hard gold” of the commodity or the “hard broom” of Stalinism.

## “Dismal Expectations for Amour”: Socialist-Realist Love Stories and the 1953 Film Debate

The cultural imperative of socialist realism would have a chilling effect on the growth of the love story in the GDR, for where West German film largely adopted the tried-and-true Hollywood template of commodified romance, filmmakers in the East had a harder time finding a viable romantic model.<sup>9</sup> As we will see, one of the goals of *Aufbau*-era cultural policy was the transformation, if not the elimination, of traditional romance. Which is not to say that there were no love plots in this period. As a March 1953 editorial in *Neues Deutschland* pointed out, “There is hardly a film produced by [the state film production company] DEFA in which people’s love relationships do not play a thematic role” (Reinecke).<sup>10</sup> Yet these early DEFA love stories do not *feel* particularly romantic. The grounds for this intuition, I would argue, have to do with the structure and mechanism of the traditional romantic code, the demanding logic of love-as-topos. If prostitution represents the limit-case of capitalist romance, the point where consumption necessarily becomes unromantic, then the socialist equivalent would be found in the politicization of any and all intimate interpersonal ties, the cutting of passion to the measure of politics. This tendency might best be summed up by one character’s dismissal of DEFA love stories in Gerhard Klein and Wolfgang Kohlhaase’s 1965 film, *Berlin um die Ecke* (Berlin around the Corner). Asked about DEFA films, Horst (Kaspar Eichel) simply sneers: “Liebespaar macht Selbstkritik” (Lovers do self-critique). This three-word sentence captures a sense felt by many audiences of East German public culture that there is something de facto unromantic about its tendency to instrumentalize love for propaganda. I would hasten to point out, however, that this unromantic quality lies not in the content of the propaganda—for there are many undeniably romantic, profoundly propagandistic love stories to be found all over the political spectrum—but rather in its denial of romance’s right to self-determination. In the idiom of this book, we can characterize the problem here as that of an imposition of the socialist symbolic economy—that is, of socialist ideology’s self-understanding and ordering of the world—onto the love story’s erotic economy. As Piotr Fast claims in a short but evocative chapter on romantic conventions in Soviet socialist realism in his book *Ideology, Aesthetics, Literary History*,

In spite of the “uselessness” of the theme [of love], socialist realism tries to adopt it by depriving it of its characteristic autotelicity and subjecting it to its ideological

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9. For more on West German consumerist romance, see Erica Carter’s compelling book *How German Is She? Postwar West German Reconstruction and the Consuming Woman*, esp. chap. 5, “Film, Melodrama, and the Consuming Woman as Cultural Deviant.”

10. A 1953 article in the West German newspaper *Die Zeit* claims otherwise: “A statistician calculated that love had appeared in only 3 percent of DEFA films hitherto” (“Glück—groß und klein”). This discrepancy may be explained by conflicting definitions of the love story.

objectives in two different ways. First, it uses “romance” as a testing ground of morality, smuggling into novels postulates of the so-called socialist morality; second, it embeds the theme in the story of the ideological formation of the protagonists, making of love a teleological motivation of their behavior or a reward for their good deeds or attitudes. (64)

This dynamic is exemplified in the film *Roman einer jungen Ehe* (Story of a Young Couple), directed by Kurt Maetzig and written by Maetzig with Bodo Uhse. The “young couple” in the title are Jochen (Hans-Peter Thielen) and Agnes (Yvonne Merin), struggling actors in postwar Berlin. Where Jochen drifts into the not-so-successfully-denazified West German theater scene, Agnes inclines toward the East, working on a highly political—and, in Jochen’s eyes, shamelessly propagandistic—film project. Eventually, the political divisions between Agnes and Jochen become too great, and they file for divorce. A last-minute courtroom reconciliation, however, saves their marriage—just in time for the celebration of the opening of Berlin’s new Stalinallee, “Stalin Boulevard.”

In comparing *Roman einer jungen Ehe* with an earlier film by Maetzig, *Ehe im Schatten* (Marriage in the Shadows), Heinz Kersten alerts us—perhaps inadvertently—to the fundamental difference between these two love stories. In Kersten’s view, *Roman einer jungen Ehe* reveals

the transformation of an otherwise talented director under the party’s increasingly dictatorial film policy. Where in the 1947 film *Ehe im Schatten* [Marriage in the Shadows] Kurt Maetzig depicted the fate of a marriage between an “Aryan” and a Jew under National Socialism—a story in which both husband and wife would rather seek death than let themselves be separated by the inhuman laws of a criminal political order—he would assert five years later in *Roman einer jungen Ehe* the impossibility of marital harmony between partners whose “political progress” was unequal. (69)

In one sense, the point that Kersten seems to want to make here is highly problematic. Presented as a logical apposition, the two halves of this sentence would appear to argue that the challenge facing the couple in *Roman einer jungen Ehe* is equivalent to that faced by the couple in *Ehe im Schatten*. Maetzig, it seems, is somehow aesthetically and morally negligent in his failure to allow Agnes and Jochen to resist the oppressive demands of political polarization, a resistance that would be akin to Hans and Elisabeth’s fatal stand in *Ehe im Schatten*. If, however, we put aside the politico-moral aspect, the question of relative dictatorships and modes of resistance, and ask instead about the status of these two love stories *as* love stories, then we find a telling structural difference.

*Ehe im Schatten* relies on the love story to resolve its tragic plot, reaching back into the Romantic tradition to portray a love that is greater than, but ends in, death. *Roman einer jungen Ehe*, on the other hand, refuses to use romance to bring the

characters into an ideologically suitable formation (a lovelorn Jochen, for instance, might suddenly see the error of his ways), and instead makes the protagonists' love contingent upon their politics: Jochen returns to Agnes only after he has been convinced—through unemployment and a thrashing by West German rowdies, among other arguments—of the superiority of socialism. When he reaches this political position, he finds Agnes waiting for him. In *Roman einer jungen Ehe*, the force that reunites this young couple is not love, but it has a name. With her husband proudly looking on, Agnes reads a poem by Kuba (Kurt Barthel) at the Stalinallee ceremony: “Stalin himself took us by the hand / and told us to hold our heads high.” Where Andrew Marvell had once imagined true love as a pair of parallel lines that, “though infinite, can never meet,” Kuba names the point where Jochen and Agnes will come together: “Straight to Stalin leads the path / On which the friends have come.”<sup>11</sup>

It is this narrative subordination, more than the film's clumsy propaganda, that makes *Roman einer jungen Ehe* a fundamentally unromantic movie. In this sense, we can speak of a “transformation . . . under the party's increasingly dictatorial film policy”—less of Maetzig himself (for any shift in ideological content between these films probably owes more to the difference in their settings than to a change in Maetzig's own thinking) than of the love story as a genre. As the following outline of East German cultural policy—more specifically, film policy—will reveal, this was precisely the transformation that GDR cultural functionaries were trying to bring about. The trade-off for such political rigor, however, is that romance is thereby prevented from doing what it does best, namely ameliorating the tension caused by ideological self-contradiction. Rather than obeying its own self-contained logic, romantic passion becomes subject to political doctrine: its internal structure and overall trajectory must correspond to the ambitions of socialist social engineering. This would not present a problem, except that the ideological fabric of East Germany in the 1950s was riddled with holes. As we will see, the Workers' and Peasants' State was unable to decide whether it was a producer's or a consumer's paradise. In fact, it was emphatically neither. Films and literature from this period needed desperately the narrative patch that the love story could provide, and audiences clamored for its uncomplicated satisfactions.

In his history of early East German cinema, Thomas Heimann sums up the state of romance in DEFA films of the early 1950s: “Given the sterility of the subject [of love], the *bonmot* made the rounds that ‘DEFA’ stood for ‘Dismal Expectations

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11. Marvell, “The Definition of Love,” ed. Donno, 49–50. The seventh stanza of the poem (published posthumously in 1681) reads:

As lines, so loves oblique may well  
Themselves in every angle greet;  
But ours so truly parallel,  
Though infinite, can never meet.

for Amour' [Dürre Ernte für Amor]" (130). Such "sterility" was the product of a cultural line that was characterized on the one hand by the demand for relentless agitation and propaganda from cultural producers, and on the other by an almost paranoiac suspicion of any cultural product with an air of Western "kitsch" or "pornography."<sup>12</sup> *Kabale und Liebe* was acceptable, but without the stamp of *Kulturerbe* (cultural heritage), a love story had to prove its merits by its political content. Walter Ulbricht's address to the Second Party Conference of the SED in July 1952 draws attention to the propagandistic importance of film for the *Aufbau* effort:

Artists should be aware that what the people want, above all, is more films. The struggle for the new Germany presents so many dramatic conflicts that one cannot speak of a lack of material. DEFA should switch over to making films about the struggle to build the groundwork of socialism; it should pay more attention to the questions of village life; and it should make more films that depict the works of great figures in the history of our people. Our authors should also learn to use the weapon of comedy in the fight against backwardness, mocking and ridiculing backwardness in order to help overcome it. (Schubbe, 240)

By this account, even comedies must be brought to bear in the "fight against backwardness": films exist to enlighten, not to entertain. A conference of East German filmmakers in September 1952 solidified this rule into doctrine.<sup>13</sup> Hermann Axen's keynote address lamented the lack of feature-length films addressing the important issues of the day. Predictably, he discovered the root of this problem in "ideological ambiguity," specifically "insufficient application of the methods of socialist realism" (Zentralkomitee, "Für den Aufschwung," 28). Other speeches continued along these lines: "In the name of the people," Gustav Müller, head of the Machine-Lending Station (MAS) in Possek said, "I want to ask you for cultural support. We have no need for fluff like *Das Flutenkonzert* [*The Flute Concerto*, a

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12. See, for instance, the resolution of the Central Committee of the SED at the Fifth Party Congress, March 15–17, 1951: "To poison the consciousness and corrupt the taste of the masses, the imperialist culture-destroyers deploy the weapon of kitsch. Kitsch is pseudo-art. Kitsch is also artistic form with false content. This can be seen in the mass distribution of pornographic magazines, detective stories, and pulp fiction of the most wretched kind and in the production of kitsch- and crime-films. Cosmopolitanism in popular music is also an important means to corrupt the human being and likewise to destroy the national cultural heritage of the people" (Schubbe, 181–82).

13. Most of the presentations at the 1952 film conference essentially elaborated and restated the tenets of the Politburo directive "For the Improvement of Progressive German Filmmaking," adopted a few months earlier. In the Politburo resolution, as in Ulbricht's speech, the emphasis is on film's didactic potential: "The progressive German cinema fulfills a key national duty in that it imparts the ideas necessary to defend freedom, democracy, national independence, and humanism as well as cultivating and developing the national cultural heritage of our people" (Zentralkomitee, "Für den Aufschwung," 5). For more on the Politburo resolution, see Heimann, 134–37.

popular costume-drama made in 1930]... We want to see films that address our ways, our work, and our mission" ("Für den Aufschwung," 60).

One of the few exceptions to this socialist-realist consensus was Horst Ilgen, a guest from the Wismut uranium mine near Chemnitz. As reported in *Neues Deutschland's* account of the conference (but not recorded in the conference protocol), Ilgen brought greetings and a request: the Wismut miners wanted more film comedies ("Die DEFA zu einem schöpferischen Kollektiv entwickeln!" 6). Ilgen's cameo at the film conference accords with a pattern visible throughout the early 1950s. Where cultural functionaries decried the not-yet-didactic-enough efforts of DEFA, the target audience had a very different set of complaints: the East German workers were tired of being edified and agitated; they wanted to be entertained.

Thus, while the feuilleton pages of newspapers and magazines thrashed out the political viability of the previous year's film production, readers' letters spoke to the films' entertainment value, or lack thereof.<sup>14</sup> In a letter to the *Neue Filmwelt* (New World of Film) from June 1952, Werner Pfeifer of Chemnitz criticizes the tendency of cultural functionaries to focus on films' "values and content" without paying any attention to the demands and reactions of the audience. This short-sightedness, he argues, has led to a worrisome attendance-gap between films imported from the West and DEFA films: where the former are nearly always sold out, the latter can scarcely scrape together an audience at all. In the following issue of *Neue Filmwelt*, a letter from Rolf Behrends of Meißenfels puts a finer point on the problem: "I think we're getting to the root of the problem.... DEFA doesn't quite understand yet how to make really good comic and romantic movies." Similar letters appeared in the SED's central organ *Neues Deutschland* (New Germany). Lilo Hübner of Klein-Machnow, for instance, writes: "Especially now, as we build socialism according to plan, we need more films that make us laugh and be happy."

By the next year, the message was starting to get through. In the spring of 1953, *Neues Deutschland* asked a number of prominent DEFA directors and writers to submit editorials in response to three questions: "1. Do they consider our DEFA films exciting, i.e., enthralling, and where in their opinion does the excitement lie? 2. Why is there no love in our films? 3. Why are no comedies being made here?" These pointed questions are an obvious invitation to self-critique, and the guiding lights of East German film did not disappoint. In the ensuing months, DEFA

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14. It is uncertain whether these "letters to the editor" are bona fide readers' opinions or ventriloquized editorials. Here I've chosen to treat them as real letters from actual readers, but it might be even more interesting to conceptualize them as the projected viewpoint of an imaginary ideal readership. If this were the case, they would represent an articulation by cultural functionaries of opinions they could not yet officially hold.

engaged in a public spectacle of hand-wringing and self-recrimination. Readers' letters as well stated and restated the same demands: "Why not for once put love at the center?" (Klemm and Klemm). "Always the same question: Why doesn't DEFA make comedies?" (Eyck). The consensus seemed to be that East German films were neither fun nor romantic. The thornier questions were why, and what to do about it.<sup>15</sup>

Director Kurt Maetzig opens the discussion with a lengthy defense of love as a theme in progressive socialist art. He asks: "Why does a simple love story that comes to us from abroad, such as *One Summer of Happiness*, bring in millions of viewers who only rarely go to our films?" ("Warum gibt es keine Liebe?" 4).<sup>16</sup> The task of socialist film, Maetzig argues, is to reach the greatest number of viewers with the message of socialism. If DEFA cannot provide the love stories they desire, East German viewers will turn to the "often bad and kitschy" films from the West. Socialist filmmakers, he claims, should not underestimate this genre, for love stories are uniquely suited to portray the struggle for and realization of human happiness—the goal, ultimately, of all socialist society. Maetzig blames the dearth of romance on socialist writers' mistrust of love as a theme. It is a misplaced wariness, according to Maetzig: "Many just want to see in love a flight from the struggles of our time into the four walls of the bedroom. And so they mistrust all love stories in literature or in film, or want at most to throw a little love into art like a pinch of salt into a nutritious soup. . . . But they are wrong!" Love is only unproductive and escapist, Maetzig claims, within capitalist culture: "Under dying capitalism, love is doomed to unfruitfulness." He elaborates this position with a quote from Thomas Mann's *Dr. Faustus*; the devil says to Adrian: "You shall not love! Love is forbidden to you, in that it warms. Your life should be cold—thus you must not love another person. We want you cold—the fires of production should barely be hot enough to warm yourself in. You'll retreat into them from the coldness of your life."<sup>17</sup>

In the next paragraph, however, Maetzig turns this quote on its head, applying it to life in the East: "But our life must not be a retreat, neither a flight from the struggles of the day and from production into the bedroom nor a flight from cold lovelessness and isolation into the fires of production. The complete human being is the ideal of our epoch." The aptly chosen Mann quote thus performs a double duty here: initially describing cultural production under "dying capitalism," it then becomes a sidelong critique of socialist realism's one-sidedness, its sole reliance on the "fires of production" to warm the cold lives of its heroes (and readers). This risky ambivalence—potentially aligning socialist realism with the devil—might be one of the reasons why, in their concluding comments on the

15. For a brief analysis of the *Neues Deutschland* film discussion, see also Heimann, 130.

16. *Sie tanzte nur einen Sommer* (She Danced Only One Summer), a Swedish film, brought two million viewers to GDR cinemas in 1952. See Heimann, 223.

17. This is Lowe-Porter's translation in Mann, 249.

film discussion, *Neues Deutschland's* editorial board criticizes Maetzig's article as "ambivalent, to some extent erroneously argued" (Redaktionskollegium *Neues Deutschland*). Maetzig's subtle challenge to socialist-realist doctrine contains a revealing assumption. Here, love is represented as existing outside of the sphere of production; it provides a crucial narrative counterbalance, without which one cannot portray "the complete human being." For the next four months, DEFA's loyal socialist-realists would endeavor to prod love back into the fires of production.

The first step in this effort was to reiterate the subordination of romantic love to the broader social sphere. Along these lines, scriptwriter Ehm Welk attributes DEFA's wariness of love stories to a misinterpretation of the social role of love:

Why are there so few films about love here...? I think because the pressing task of settling our political, economic, and governmental concerns has led our [cultural] functionaries to a misapprehension of the meaning of Eros in the fight for a better social order: at least publicly they view love as an entirely personal, indeed, private affair and consider addressing or embracing it to be outdated, bourgeois backwardness that distracts us from the political struggle.

Kurt Stern, another DEFA author, takes a similar line, refuting those who would say: "Today we have to deal with more important things, with peace, with the unification of Germany, with the construction of socialism. We have no time for love." For the sake of realism, Stern says, love cannot be left out: "Doesn't everything that plays an important role in the lives of our people belong in the realm of realistic art? Why not love?" As author Hedda Zinner succinctly puts it, "A film without love (with a few exceptions) is not only not realistic; it is also not at all socialist-realist."

For dramaturge Horst Reinecke, "realism" also plays a decisive role. Reinecke sees the problem less as a lack of love stories than as a lack of "convincing" love stories—a failure to convince due to insufficient realism: "Whether the portrayal of interpersonal relationships at work, in love, and in conflict is convincing or not depends on the artist's ability to show life realistically, universally, and in its typical development. Ideological clarity and artistic mastery cannot be separated."

Here, the magic word "typical" indicates that the discussion has come full circle. Despite efforts like Maetzig's to dig out the roots of the problem, the party line does not budge: love is to remain *typisch*—that is, socialist-realist—in DEFA films. *Neues Deutschland's* editorial board drives this nail deeper with a stinging critique of Maetzig's contribution to the discussion:

Dr. Maetzig wrote: "Our viewers do not mean a film 'about village life' in which a love story also plays a role, they are not talking about the story of an activist brigade

that ends happily with a young couple coming together; no, they mean love itself, as strong and grand as that of Romeo and Juliet, of Ferdinand and Louisa.” And that is precisely the wrong standpoint in that it separates the story of an activist brigade from the story of love between two people.

Of course, love stories in our films are only conceivable when they develop out of real life. But why exactly do we want to see an activist brigade, why exactly the new village life? Because we want to lead people forward with the medium of film as well. The typical love-conflicts of our time play out precisely in the activist brigades, in the new villages. (Redaktionskollegium *Neues Deutschland*)

And with that, *Neues Deutschland* considered the matter settled: DEFA artists would have to find a way to make a new dish from the old recipe.

The conversation, however, was far from over. With *Neues Deutschland*'s film discussion stuck in a cultural-political cul-de-sac, the topic passed to a forum better equipped to handle such “hot potatoes” (*heiße Eisen*): satire.<sup>18</sup> *Eine Liebesgeschichte* (A Love Story), one of the first of the *Stacheltier* (Hedgehog) series, satirical film shorts that accompanied DEFA's weekly newsreel *Der Wochenschau*, lampoons the clumsy efforts of cultural functionaries to find a place for romance in the cultural universe of 1950s East Germany.<sup>19</sup> In this 6 1/2-minute short, written by Richard Groschopp and Günter Kunert in the late summer of 1953, a writer brings his latest work—a love story—to the office of the “Art Experts” (*Kunstsachverständigen*), two nearly identical men in grey suits and dark glasses.<sup>20</sup> They are eager to hear it. Schmidt, the writer, begins reading his story aloud. As he reads, we see the scene he is narrating: a man and a woman, both young and fashionably dressed, share a tender moment in a forest glade while romantic music plays quietly in the background. “He pulls her along,” Schmidt's voice-over narrates, “but they only go a few steps and then stop to entwine and embrace. The loving couple give themselves over to breathless, wordless joy.” The film cuts back to the office, where the Art Experts register their unease:

AE1: Great, really well written, but I think the question of the happy life of our youth isn't emphasized enough.

AE2: That's right. And the role of the emancipation of women is insufficiently addressed. And why?

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18. See Sylvia Klötzer's discussion of the East German satire magazine *Eulenspiegel*: “Under ‘distinguishing characteristics,’ the ‘ID card’ of its title figure reads: ‘incorruptibly clear vision, sharp tongue, . . . long arms (reach from high to low), brave heart,’ and, underlined: ‘seizes hot potatoes!’ (*Packt heiße Eisen an!*)” (“Über den Umgang mit heißen Eisen,” 105).

19. I am indebted to Bill Martin for pointing me toward *Eine Liebesgeschichte*.

20. For an insightful and comprehensive analysis of *Eine Liebesgeschichte*, see Sylvia Klötzer's *Satire und Macht: Film, Zeitung, Kabarett in der DDR*, 53–59.

AE1: Because the writer hasn't yet understood how to develop the central problem of collective unity.

AE2: And therefore the writer should revise his work self-critically.

AE1 and AE2 (*in unison*): Yes, revise.

With hanging head, Schmidt takes his hat and leaves.

Schmidt returns later, enthusiastic about his revised love story: "Your criticisms helped me a lot!" he tells the Art Experts and begins reading once again: "Hanno, the young steelworker, and Irmgard, the tractor driver, sit on a wooden bench." Fade to a crudely built stage-set of an industrial landscape with an enormous sickle moon hanging over silos and smokestacks. "The birds chirp a song of the happy life of our youth. On the horizon, the towering smokestacks spread their mighty arms." Cardboard smokestacks rise on strings. Hanno stands stiffly, turns to Irmgard, raises his sledgehammer to his chest, and intones: "Beloved comrade, how my heart, which otherwise beats only in time with my hammer, has longed for you" (see fig. 3). Irmgard, outfitted in ill-fitting overalls and carrying an enormous wrench, replies: "Oh Hanno, I long for the day when we can begin a happy married life. On an emancipated basis, of course."

HANNO: Irmgard, I love you like—like my riveting hammer. No stepmother's backwardness will ever sabotage us.

IRMGARD: No, together we will stride toward the radiant morning.

HANNO (*reaching into the pocket of his uniform*): Yes. I brought you something: a piece of steel from the latest production.

"Hanno's eyes glowed," Schmidt concludes, "like coke in a blast furnace." Looking up, he expects accolades from the Art Experts, but they have not been listening at all. Both are leaning out the window, watching the scene below. In the park across the street a man and a woman are sharing a tender moment—it is, in fact, a scene identical to the first version of Schmidt's story. "Yes," exclaims one of the Art Experts. "That's life. That's what you have to describe. That's real. We recommend you revise your story." Schmidt snatches up his hat and snarls: "No, I'll write a new story: about true-to-life Art Experts!" The camera freezes on the surprised Art Experts, and the still image becomes a photograph, which is placed among others in a folder. As the folder closes, we see its title: "Superfluous Contemporaries." When it comes to romance, *Eine Liebesgeschichte* suggests, the GDR's Art Experts—*Neues Deutschland's* editorial board, for instance—should leave well enough alone. The meddling, hairsplitting cultural politics of the early 1950s seems to have become "superfluous."

"Der Alptraum" (The Nightmare), a comic sketch published in the popular monthly *Das Magazin* in 1954, tells a similar story. The narrator runs into



**Figure 3.** Hanno and Irmgard pledge to “stride into the radiant morning” in Richard Groschopp’s 1953 satirical sketch, “A Love Story,” from the *Stacheltier* (Hedgehog) series. Source: Bundesarchiv [FilmSG1/BArch/26065 Eine Liebesgeschichte].

his friend Paul, a dramaturge for the DEFA studios. Paul looks terrible: sunken cheeks, bloodshot eyes, gnawed fingernails, and a nervous tic. We then learn why: Paul is just returning from a meeting of the DEFA board, where his latest script, “There Is Only One Happiness,” was “nearly” accepted. “Just a few things have to be changed,” he says.

The hero can’t go under at the end. That’s not typical for us. He should be decorated instead. His girlfriend shouldn’t cheat on him—that’s not typical. She should be a DFD functionary. And the union meeting should be more earnest, not so silly—that’s not typical here. And the title has to change. Suggestion: *DFD and Love*. Then the film can be made. (T.N., 48)

The pointed reference to the DFD (Democratic Women’s Federation of Germany) suggests a real-life corollary to Paul’s tribulations in “Der Alptraum.” A year earlier, the DFD had singled out Slatan Dudow’s 1952 film, *Frauenschicksale* (*Destinies of Women*), for harsh public criticism. Dudow’s film tells the story of four women in Berlin, all of whom are in love with the same man: a con and ladies’ man named, appropriately enough, Conny (Hanns Groth). By the end of the film, Renate (Sonja Sutter), Barbara (Anneliese Book), and Anni (Susanne Düllmann) all

see the light and turn away from Conny toward a new life in the East.<sup>21</sup> Even with its abundance of ungainly propaganda, *Frauenschicksale* did not pass ideological muster easily. In an editorial on August 29, 1952, in *Neues Deutschland*, the DFD's board of directors had written: "This film shows the destinies of women . . . destinies that do exist in real life. But are these destinies really typical for the women of the German Democratic Republic? No, because they pertain only to the smallest percentage of our women." The film, in short, is not positive enough:

The new aspects of our life are not expressed convincingly enough, while the criticisms of the old ways succeed. The figure of a young German woman is missing whose development does not follow the path of a "Conny," but rather the path taken by thousands of women in the Republic and the Democratic Sector of Berlin, the path of work—at first to support themselves and their families, and then because our social transformation allows them to find a new relationship to work. (Bundesvorstand des DFD)

Rather than the "path of a 'Conny'"—rather, in other words, than the narrative logic of romance, whereby the changing fortunes of love determine the lover's fate—the DFD demands a more "realistic" approach: the "path of work." As the satire of "Der Alptraum" brings out, such relentless politicization—which would add even more ideological certainty to Dudow's already unsubtle moral tale—hardly sounds like a formula for gripping cinema. The insistence on "typical"—read: ideal—characters and content would leave little possibility for drama, humor, or romance.

Between 1952, the year *Frauenschicksale* was released, and 1954, the year "Der Alptraum" was written, massive changes were underway in the GDR's cultural and political environment. Thus in "Der Alptraum" the narrator's second encounter with Paul reflects a radical turnaround. The revised *DFD and Love*, Paul says, has been accepted. Just a few changes have to be made:

It should be called *There Is Only One Happiness*. The union meeting is too earnest and dry. It's sometimes like that here, but the average isn't the typical. The meeting should be funnier. And the girl. She shouldn't be a DFD functionary. Why not just a plain, nice, happy girl for once? And the hero doesn't necessarily need to be decorated at the end—better at the beginning or in the middle, or perhaps not at all. (T.N., 49)

Here, as in *Eine Liebesgeschichte*, the second revision of the love story restores the original version nearly point for point. Whereas Schmidt is infuriated by this reversal, Paul is just relieved: "This'll be a film," he says (49).

21. The decadent Isa von Trautwald, however, stays with Conny. Not to leave virtue unrewarded, Renate, Anni, and Barbara all end up with more suitable partners by the end of the film.

In both of these sketches, the repeated demand to rework the love story according to a changing standard of “realism” leads to two very different products: first, a politically correct (if ham-fisted) piece of agitprop, then a relatively apolitical (and somewhat kitschy) “traditional” love story. In both cases, the satire draws on the audience’s preexisting understanding of how a love story is “supposed” to look. Against this backdrop, the first revision seems ridiculous. The second comes as a relief. This relief marks the restitution of the love story’s customary prerogatives, its traditional narrative and ideological autonomy, over the extreme politicization demanded by the Art Experts and by the DEFA board in “Der Alptraum.”

These coinciding satirical accounts of the trials of writing DEFA love stories signal a significant change in the cultural climate of the GDR. As if overnight, DEFA’s commitment to the primacy of politics, even in love, seems to have become laughable. To have credibility as a mass medium, the GDR cinema would have to learn to produce “real”—that is, nonrealist—love stories. In the meantime they outsourced this task to the experts. In 1954 East Germany’s Film Office (Hauptverwaltung Film) bought the rights to more than a dozen West German features, most of which, as Heimann notes, had a “noncommittal” quality: “*Fanfares of Love, Hocuspocus, I and You, A Lovesick Ride on the Moselle, As Long as You’re Near Me, Don’t Forget Love*” (52, 226). The sudden appearance of such titles on East German cinema marquees must have been startling for moviegoers; less than a year earlier, they would have been considered proof of the “decline of art and culture in West Germany,” as a June 23, 1953, editorial in *Neues Deutschland* described it. “As far as artistic merit is concerned,” the editorial sneers,

we can illustrate the general level of the repertoire . . . with the following: the two cinemas in Bad Hersfeld, Hessen, were recently playing simultaneously *The Hostess from Worthersee, Rose of the Mountain, When the Heath Dreams at Night, Roses Bloom on the Grave in the Meadow*. If one understands anything about capitalist film production, one knows that such titles conceal the most vulgar, mawkish, and dishonest kitsch. (“Vom Verfall der Kunst und Kultur in Westdeutschland”)

First pillorying sentimental Western love stories, then importing them by the dozen, the party made the U-turn parodied in *Eine Liebesgeschichte* and “Der Alptraum.” Given the vehemence with which cultural functionaries fought to ward off the influence of Western entertainment films in early 1953, it is striking how self-evident the opposite position had become by 1954.

### “How life laughs and loves today”: *Das Magazin* and the New Course

The immediate cause of this cultural-political turnaround is not hard to identify. The sudden escalation of workers’ disgruntlement into a full-blown general strike

on June 17, 1953, necessitated decisive action on the part of the party, not just in the workplace, but in every aspect of public life in the GDR. Scrambling to placate a citizenry not only seething with the resentment that sent them into the streets in the first place, but now also traumatized by the violent suppression of the demonstrations by Soviet tanks and troops, the SED availed itself of a time-tested strategy. As Heimann describes it,

At first the state reacted...pragmatically, in accordance with the motto "Bread and Circuses." At the end of July, steps were taken to increase the number of purely entertaining films in the program.... While the proportion of East German or Soviet political "thematic films" had until June 1953 exceeded "entertainment" films by a ratio of 60% to 40%, the proportion of the latter now increased to 75%. "Thematic films" would now only make up a quarter (!) of the moviehouses' schedules.

The lack of films in this rather vague category of "entertainment" was offset by the increased purchase of Western films in the second half of the year. (223–24)

If films, especially love stories, were the "circuses" of post-June 17 East Germany, the "bread" was to be supplied by the "New Course," as the economic and social reforms introduced in the second half of 1953 were called. Essentially the New Course marked the emergence of an East German consumer culture: from now on, commodities and consumption would play an increasingly significant role in the GDR's ideological self-understanding. The death of Stalin was not incidental to these developments. In the face of a society boiling over with rage and frustration, and suddenly deprived of the potent political fetish represented by the figure of Stalin, SED officials put their faith in a new fetish object (one close to hand, if in the wrong hands); the policies and rhetoric of the mid- to late 1950s evince an increasing appeal to the logic of the commodity fetish in the official culture of the GDR.

As I outlined in the introduction, this particular commodity fetish has a socialist-utopian flavor. According to the SED's rhetoric, the material existence of the domestic commodity would prove the ascendancy of the socialist system. It is this legitimatory burden that lends the East German commodity its characteristic fetish quality; it was deliberately cast as a reification of socialist social relations, a materialization of Marxist-Leninist ideals. In *Utopie und Bedürfnis*, Ina Merkel draws attention to the increasing symbolic significance of commodities and consumption for East German ideological self-understanding:

The sphere of consumer culture was to a large degree symbolically freighted. The new department stores, as "display-windows of socialism," were to demonstrate the success and even the superiority of the new social order. They were to reflect the new standard of living. In the end the contest between the [capitalist and socialist] systems would be held on the field of consumption. (164)

Or as Walter Ulbricht observed in 1959, “[We will] prove the superiority of socialism . . . not with any old durable goods, with trash, with surplus product, but instead with commodities which possess a high use-value, which are beautiful and tasteful, which the working person can buy and use with pleasure.”<sup>22</sup> Summing up her argument, Merkel connects these developments to the SED-state’s ongoing crisis of legitimacy:

The real problem lay not in the fact that the East did not succeed in becoming like the West, but rather that the East tried to become like the West. It had to do this because it had not earned the legitimacy of its rule, but rather had ended up in power as a result of World War II. By means of the history of consumption one can show that the social history of the GDR was defined by the effort of the rulers to acquire the people’s mandate. Instead of attaining this endorsement in the actual sphere of political power (democracy, legal security, freedom of speech, and travel), they displaced it onto the sphere of consumption, the area of immediate need. (416)

The danger inherent in this policy—pegging socialism’s success and the party’s mandate to the availability of consumer goods in the GDR—was that the East German manufacturing sector could not produce enough of these goods to back up the party’s promises, let alone outpace the West. The *Aufbau* period’s exclusive emphasis on heavy industry had led to a critical shortage even of basic consumer goods, and luxury items were out of the question. Nonetheless, the SED continued to promise satisfaction through commodities under the aegis of the New Course, thus lending official sanction to East Germans’ dalliance with the consumerist lifestyle. In this way the fetish character of the commodity—of consumer goods in particular—was deliberately cultivated by the policies and rhetoric of the SED, even though the object of fetish was noticeably absent from East German homes and stores. The SED attempted to offset this jarring discrepancy through an institutionalized *promesse de bonheur*, whereby present hardships were mortgaged against the promise of future prosperity. As the famous SED slogan expressed it, “As we work today, so shall we live tomorrow” (*Wie wir heute arbeiten, werden wir morgen leben*).

As this future prosperity drifted further and further away, the effort to keep the party’s legitimacy afloat called for all the ideological legerdemain that GDR public culture could summon. The love story would have an important role to play in this effort. Though there were scant commodities to romanticize, there would at least be romance to commodify.<sup>23</sup> This necessity helps to explain the policy change reflected in *Eine Liebesgeschichte* and “Der Alptraum” and the explosion of imported

22. *Der Handel im Siebenjahrplan der DDR und seine Aufgaben zur weiteren Verbesserung der Versorgung der Bevölkerung*, 105; qtd. in Kaminsky, 50.

23. Here I am alluding to Illouz’s distinction, as elaborated in the introduction, between the “romanticization of commodities” and the “commodification of romance” (27).

romantic films in 1954. The cultural face of the New Course combined entertainment, romance, consumer culture, and socialist optimism. All of these elements can be seen in the genesis of the GDR's first entertainment magazine, *Das Magazin*. In the verses introducing *Das Magazin* to its readers in January 1954, it is explicitly cast as a child of the New Course:

*The Birth of the Magazine*

The compass points a bold New Course  
 And has for many weeks.  
 There's sausage on our buttered bread  
 And lots for us to eat.  
 Coffee, even, from the south  
 From China silk and tea,  
 And pretty ribbons for your dress  
 From Prague to far Qarshi.

“Man does not live by bread alone”  
 The Bible somewhere states,  
 Which is why a clever chap  
 Said: “Wouldn't it be great  
 If with the *Bockwurst* we could find  
 A flower at the store,  
 Half rosey-red, half violet-blue  
 To make the spirit soar.”

And lo, a board of editors  
 Was piece by piece compiled  
 And through its labor, day and night,  
 United bore a child.

.....  
 Go forth, my child, to East and West  
 To women and to men,  
 And when you're all grown up you'll find  
 You draw both parties in.  
 Show how life laughs and loves today  
 And on the “New Course” makes its way.  
 And show as well the toil and fuss,  
 How after we have worked all week  
 The flowers' scent is twice as sweet  
 Because they bloom for us.

*Die Geburt des Magazins*

Der Kompaß steht auf Neuen Kurs  
 Nun schon seit vielen Wochen.  
 Es gibt mehr Wurst aufs Butterbrot,  
 Und Mutter hat gut kochen.  
 Selbst Kaffee kommt aus fernem Süd,  
 Aus China Tee und Seide;  
 Vom Böhmerwald bis Samarkand  
 Kommt Schmuck zum neuen Kleide.

“Der Mensch lebt nicht von Brot allein.”  
 Das steht schon in der Bibel,  
 Weshalb ein Mann mit Köpfchen sagt:  
 “Es wäre gar nicht übel,  
 Wenn zu der Bockwurst der HO  
 Uns noch ein Blümlein blühte,  
 Halb rosenrot—halb veilchenblau  
 So recht was fürs Gemüte.”

Ein Redaktionskollegium  
 Ward Stück für Stück erkoren  
 Und hat in Tag- und Nachtarbeit  
 Vereint das Kind geboren.

.....  
 Zieh' hin, mein Kind, nach Ost und West  
 Zu Mädchen und zu Knaben,  
 Und wenn du gut gewachsen bist,  
 Dann woll'n dich beide haben.  
 Zeig', wie das Leben lacht und liebt  
 Und sich auf “Neuen Kurs” begibt.  
 Und zeig' auch, wie wir schufteten,  
 Wie nach des Tages Arbeitsmühh  
 Die Blumen doppelt schön uns blühh,  
 Weil für uns selbst sie duften.<sup>24</sup>

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24. Schmidt, I.

Just as the New Course was to offer coffee and silk alongside sausage and bread, *Das Magazin* would add humor and romance to the uniformly political bent of the East German press. As Manfred Gebhardt notes in his history of this periodical, “*Das Magazin* was given an eminent political task, which it fulfilled until the end of the GDR: socialism should be fun” (12–13). As emphasized by the above verses, penned by the magazine’s first managing editor, Heinz H. Schmidt, *Das Magazin* was intended for young and old, men and women, committed socialists and the apolitical. Its contents covered travel, sports, adventure, fashion, humor, and, above all, romance. The cover of every issue promised the latter with a colorful, often humorous image of a romantic couple engaged in a seasonally appropriate activity—lounging on the beach, celebrating New Year’s Eve, costumed for carnival, and so on. After 1955, *Das Magazin*’s covers were drawn exclusively by one artist: Werner Klemke (see fig. 4). As another East German graphic artist, Axel Bertram, remarked, “Werner Klemke had just one theme, well suited to the *Magazin*, namely love: heavenly love, earthly love, instant love, and eternal love” (Gebhardt, 38).

Of particular importance here is the *kind* of romance propagated by *Das Magazin*. Like the love stories revised and restored in *Eine Liebesgeschichte* and “Der Alptraum,” *Das Magazin*’s New Course romance can be seen as a return to a previous romantic mode, one harking back to a prewar, presocialist order. In precisely this sense, Gebhardt refers to the magazine’s first years as those of an “anachronism with a future” (25). Gebhardt relates how Arnold Zweig, speaking at the magazine’s ten-year anniversary party in 1964, unpacked the word *Magazin* from the Arabic *machazin*, meaning “a warehouse or department store”:

He recalled the burgeoning of [printed] magazines in the 1920s, which coincided with the boom of the great department stores, the *machazins*, in Berlin. Both magazines, the department stores and the periodicals, were expressions of a new attitude toward life, a mass mood: the emporiums with their constantly growing selection, where anyone could buy anything any time, quickly, cheaply, and conveniently. . . . And the periodicals of the same name, which with their multifarious offerings of short, easy-to-read articles, from literary fiction to trivial stories, tried to give something to everyone in every issue. Colorful pictures and brief texts seduced the reader to open it. (15)

As this comparison attests, the lifestyle endorsed by *Das Magazin* was unapologetically consumerist: this was the new attitude of the department-store boom, a time when “anyone could buy anything any time.” The mode of romance found in *Das Magazin* might best be understood in terms of a concept that had its origins in the Hollywood star-system of the 1930s: glamour. In his article “Hollywood Glamour and Mass Consumption in Postwar Italy,” Stephen Gundle analyzes how postwar economic and ideological reconstruction in Italy brought with it a new set of practices, aspirations, and ideals, an Americanized “way of



Figure 4. *Das Magazin* covers by Werner Klemke. Source: *Das Magazin*, March 1959, June 1962, August 1965, July 1971.

life” conforming to the dictates of American capitalism. The thin end of this wedge was glamour:

Glamour, it may be said, is the language of allure and desirability of capitalist society. Its forms change but it is always available to be consumed vicariously by the masses who see in glamour an image of life writ large according to the criteria of a market society. As a language it is a hybrid, in that it mixes luxury, class, exclusivity, and privilege with the sexuality and seduction of prostitution, entertainment, and the commercial world. (339)

This seductive mix of old and new, Gundle argues, was inseparable from the Hollywood star-system:

Glamour as it is understood today, as a structure of enchantment deployed by cultural industries, was first developed by Hollywood. In the 1930s, the major studios, having consolidated their domination of the industry, developed a star system in which dozens of young men and women were groomed and molded into glittering ideal-types whose fortune, beauty, spending power, and exciting lives dazzled the film-going public. Writing in 1939 about American film stars, Margaret Thorp defined glamour as “sex appeal plus luxury plus elegance plus romance.”<sup>25</sup>

“The place to study glamour today is the fan magazines” [she noted]. “Fan magazines are distilled as stimulants of the most exhilarating kind. Everything is superlative, surprising, exciting . . . Nothing ever stands still, nothing ever rests, least of all the sentences . . . Clothes of course are endlessly pictured and described usually with marble fountains, private swimming pools or limousines in the background . . . Every aspect of life, trivial and important, should be bathed in the purple glow of publicity.”<sup>26</sup> (Gundle, 338)

*Das Magazin* found its inspiration in this era, the heyday of classic Hollywood glamour. Thus it is no coincidence that an article in the April 1954 issue of *Das Magazin* argues for the creation of an East German star-system. Shuttling back and forth between the astronomical and colloquial definitions of “star”—or, in the article’s tongue-in-cheek acronym, “ST-ate A-pproved entertaine-R” (ST-aatlich A-nerkannter R-ahmenkulturarbeiter)—the author (“Klaus” [Klaus Bartho]) scolds DEFA for having neglected this important aspect of movie culture. Sometimes, he says, stars fail to appear at all. “Astronomically, this can be observed in the ‘black

25. Thorp, 65. Thorp also calls attention to the peculiar spelling of glamour in the American context: “The natural American spelling of glamour would be g-l-á-m-o-r, with the accent on the first syllable. Hollywood spells it with a *u*, accenting the last syllable and drawing it out as long as possible, whether in derision or enthusiasm—glamour” (65).

26. Thorp, 69–74; qtd. in Gundle.

hole' of the starry sky at night, artistically it can be observed in DEFA" (36). "When you see a shooting star," he concludes, "you can wish for something. I wish for a star. Not an engineered, subsidized, dollar-made one, but a real one, a great and shining DEFA-star" (37). In a sense, then, *Das Magazin* is a fan magazine in reverse: in contrast to the magazines of the '30s, which sprang up to document the lifestyles of Hollywood stars, *Das Magazin* positions itself here as a harbinger of the GDR star-system—a glamour magazine in advance of the glamour.

### Countercurrents: *Eine Berliner Romanze* and *Berlin, Ecke Schönhauser*

Yet not all of East Germany's cultural producers accepted the burnished promises of the New Course. For many, East German commodity culture represented not an "anachronism with a future," but rather a betrayal of the German socialist experiment. Some of the strongest critiques of consumer culture in the 1950s were made by Gerhard Klein and Wolfgang Kohlhaase in the first two of their so-called Berlin films: *Eine Berliner Romanze* (A Berlin Romance, 1956) and *Berlin, Ecke Schönhauser* (Berlin, Schönhauser Corner, 1957). Both of these films resist the New Course ethos by disavowing consumerism in the East, portraying it as a Westernized habit that must be overcome before real socialist relationships can be constructed. Where we earlier saw the glamorous gratifications of traditional romance contravening socialist realism's rigid politicization of social bonds, love here has the opposite valence: within Klein and Kohlhaase's films, the romantic plot offers a means to circumvent the mediation of interpersonal relationships by commodities.

In deploying the love story to this purpose, however, the films jump over their own ideological shadow: though they reject the insinuation of commodities into interpersonal relationships, they also fail to suggest an alternate source of social cohesion. The process begun by these love stories is left unfinished. As we will see in chapters 2 and 3, GDR culture in the 1960s and 1970s is characterized by an ongoing search for the broad and deep social ties that might bind East Germans to the socialist experiment.

*Eine Berliner Romanze* tells the story of Hans (Ulrich Thein), a young, unemployed auto mechanic from West Berlin, and Uschi (Annekathrin Bürger), a salesgirl and would-be model from the Eastern half of the city. Their relationship has an unpropitious start: when they meet, Uschi is on a date with Hans's friend Lord (Uwe-Jens Pape), a fashionable West Berlin ladies' man. Lord had spotted Uschi window-shopping on the Kurfürstendamm, West Berlin's golden shopping street, and asked her to a movie: *Lockende Sünde* (Tempting Sin). Although she had earlier that day turned down a friend's invitation to see *Lockende Sünde*, declaring it "too dumb," Uschi is willing to go to the film with Lord.

Lord, we may infer, is the embodiment of the "tempting sin" of West Berlin. Uschi gravitates toward his charm, his good looks, and, perhaps above all, toward

the transistor radio he wears around his neck: “I love transistor radios,” she explains. The *Kofferradio* was an important piece of iconography in DEFA films from this period. The object itself, as well as the “hot jazz” that usually blared out of it, identified its owner as a rock-and-roll rebel, a *Halbstarke*. The symbolic valence of the *Kofferradio* is owed also to its status as a reminder of the failures of the GDR’s system of production and distribution: GDR transistor technology lagged behind that of the FRG, and when an East German model was finally developed, it fell victim to the sluggish reactions of the command economy. In the early 1960s, 80 percent of GDR radio production was still devoted to vacuum-tubed giants (Kaminsky, 113). To own a *Kofferradio*, then, generally signified that one had the means to secure one in the West. Uschi’s “love” of *Kofferradios* thus carries with it a number of implications: what attracts her to Lord is his affluence, his rebelliousness, and, above all, his Westernness.

Uschi has little time, however, for Hans. When Hans tags along on her date with Lord, she makes it clear that three’s a crowd. And after Hans drops ice cream on her dress, her impatience gives way to open contempt. “I hate you,” she tells him and frets about the stain. Hans refuses to take the hint and cleverly manages to take Lord’s place on a second date, but it is a disaster. Eventually, Uschi insults him: “I think you’re fresh, ugly, and mean”; and he responds: “I think you’re dumb.” She pours her coffee on him. Though angry and humiliated, Hans pays for their coffee and buys their ferry tickets home. This display of chivalry seems to win Uschi over. She helps Hans clean his shirt, and from then on the two are a pair.

From the first, then, consumer goods—especially clothing, which, in light of Uschi’s work as a model in East and West, takes on particular significance in the film’s rendition of the Cold War commodity race—frame and mediate Uschi and Hans’s relationship. Her hostility toward him begins with the accidental staining of her dress and ends with the deliberate staining of his shirt. An uncharitable reading might note that her affection is secured only by his dogged willingness to pay for her entertainment. Their relationship seems to continue in this vein: on their third date (or first intentional one), Hans gives Uschi a transistor radio, which he has bought on credit. He also pays for her courses at a West Berlin modeling school and borrows a friend’s apartment to impress her with his independent lifestyle.

This is not the story of a gold digger and her prey, however. This, the film would have us believe, is a typical courtship under capitalist conditions. Uschi and Hans are simply participating in the exchange economy of the date, the ultimate expression of Illouz’s “commodified romance” (53–54).<sup>27</sup> If romance is coextensive with

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27. As Illouz reminds us, the consumer economy of the date is not just a matter of the man’s footing the bill, nor is it dependent entirely on his buying power: “Men were expected to pay for the date, and women had to spend money for ‘grooming.’ The market constructed and reinforced definitions of masculinity and femininity that made *both* men and women depend on different practices of consumption” (74).

spending money, then West Berlin had an incontestable advantage over East Berlin in the 1950s. It is thus perhaps inevitable that Uschi and Hans's courtship takes place entirely on ground that Klein's film cedes to the West: the "romantic" settings of movie theaters, dance halls, and cocktail bars. The problem faced by the film narrative, then, is how to counter the West's advantage, how to coax Uschi, Hans, and the viewer away from a commodity-based model of romance.

*Eine Berliner Romanze* mobilizes both narrative and form in this effort. As the plot's unfolding gives the lie to an untenable standard of romance, the increasingly stark contours of the film's neorealist aesthetic present the viewer with a compelling visual argument: beyond the smoke and mirrors of Hollywood romance, love must still take place in the real world. It requires more than attraction and affection to keep it alive and is endangered by more than petty misunderstandings. This young couple, we might say, must find their way in the world of the *Bicycle Thief*, and not in that of the film posters its hero Ricci has been employed to hang.<sup>28</sup> In Klein's depictions of the West a gulf yawns between the daydream of romance and the day-to-day struggles of life as a working-class West Berliner. Visual and audio cues distinctly mark this gap. A world away from the bright lights and glossy sheen of the Kurfürstendamm and the amusement park, the apartment where Hans lives with his mother is cramped and dark. A streetlight flickers from time to time through the window, a faint, gloomy echo of the shopping street's neon promises. Rather than the up-tempo, Dixieland-inspired jazz of the soundtrack hitherto, the scenes in Hans's mother's apartment are characterized only by diegetic, "real world" sound, including the roar of a train going by overhead.

In these scenes at home with Hans and his mother, we can see and hear the influence of Italian neorealism on Klein and his cinematographer, Wolf Göthe. The film's scriptwriter, Wolfgang Kohlhaase, commented in 1996: "For us and some of our friends neo-realism was a revelation. We were fascinated by the themes and the methods, the social commentary, the way they relied on the poetry of everyday life, the sober tone which [fit] well with the post-war era" (128). Both the film's aesthetic sensibility and its plot take a neorealist turn when Hans and Uschi's Hollywood romance becomes an everyday affair. Hounded by creditors and working only intermittently, Hans finds it harder and harder to make ends meet. He joins the throngs of men looking for work, eventually taking a job doing demolition at a construction site. Hans and his coworkers are paid for speed and not held to safety standards. After Hans is injured by a falling beam, he is forced to quit his job and suddenly finds it impossible to keep the illusion of prosperity going. He explains this to Ushi with a telling cinematic reference: "You just have to imagine you're at the movies. The boy rents a cozy room, the girl becomes a model because she's

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28. Both Stephen Gundle and Peter Bondanella point out the significance of the fact that Ricci, the main character of De Sica's *Bicycle Thief*, has been hired to post advertisements for a Rita Hayworth film (Gundle, 341; Bondanella, 57).

so pretty. But it isn't true. The boy can't pay the rent. The radio isn't paid for, either . . . Does that matter to you?" More to the point, did it matter to young East German moviegoers? Did they want pretty illusions, or real life? Here, as in the film debate in the early part of the decade, realism is juxtaposed to Hollywood's shimmering phantasmagoria. Yet whereas East German filmmakers had earlier tried to counter the charms of Western commodity culture with the rigid certainties of socialist realism, Klein and Kohlhaase now used neorealist techniques to expose the shadow side of West Berlin's opulence (see fig. 5).

To the same degree that these techniques successfully disarm Western, capitalist tropes of romance, the film's skepticism vis-à-vis consumer culture also flies in the face of New Course optimism. When so much had been staked on consumer satisfaction in the East, the film's sharp turn away from consumption would have rankled some officials, even if few would have admitted to this objection. Compared with the flashy promises of the New Course, the conclusion of *Eine Berliner Romanze* seems all too mundane. Hans and Uschi decide to move to East Berlin in the end, but their reasons are more practical than romantic: Hans needs a job. The final voice-over sums up the film's message: "Now the two are a couple, one of thousands in Berlin. . . . And together they will find their place, Uschi und Hans, in the middle of our life, in which there is work, struggle, and love."

Love has a heavy burden in this trinity of life in the GDR. If Uschi's earlier statement that "you're always supposed to work over here" is to be proved wrong, love must offer compensation for the glamour and adventure left behind in the West—not just to Uschi and Hans, but more importantly to the film's viewership—for as the public's distaste for 1950s socialist realism made clear, "work" and "struggle" were not the box-office draws the party had hoped they would be. Though unwilling simply to furnish a pipe dream knocked off from the capitalist culture industry, Klein and Kohlhaase still had to find a generically satisfying conclusion to their Berlin romance. That love is considered adequate to this task attests to the potency of the romantic code. In (literally) giving love the last word, however, *Eine Berliner Romanze* undermines its own critique of Hollywood's modus operandi. Ultimately, it is forced to drop its critical-realistic perspective and rely on a compensatory machinery, the narrative catholicon of the romantic happy ending. This fallback is not simply a narrative strategy among many, but rather symptomatic of a larger structural problem. The film's reliance on generic means to achieve social integration attests to the critical attenuation of East Germans' affective ties to their homeland.

A year after *Eine Berliner Romanze*, Klein and Kohlhaase released the second in what was to become a trilogy of "Berlin films": *Berlin, Ecke Schönhauser*. In many ways, *Berlin, Ecke Schönhauser* continues the work begun in *Eine Berliner Romanze*, employing many of the same narrative and formal techniques to tell the story of a young man's choice between life in the East and in the West. Here, however, the neorealist style that had remained largely circumscribed in *Eine Berliner Romanze*



**Figure 5.** Promotional flyer for the film *A Berlin Romance*. The text reads: “Berliners fall in love everywhere. And love does not stop at the sector borders. Yet the ruinous division of our city often puts the love of young Berliners to the test. And Uschi and Hans don’t have it easy with their first love, until they learn to differentiate between real values and false luster. This DEFA film tells of the fate of these two [lovers] as they make their way from tender flirtation to solid companionship in the great divided city.” Source: Bundesarchiv [FilmSG1/BArch/1454 *Eine Berliner Romanze*].

to a specific function—that of debunking Hollywood romantic conventions and the empty promises of Western consumer culture—becomes the dominant aesthetic throughout. *Berlin, Ecke Schönhauser* shines on the East the same harsh light its predecessor had shone on the West. As several commentators have pointed out, this feature ensured the film a starkly split reception: accolades from the public and many reviewers, rebukes from the side of the party and the high priests of socialist realism.<sup>29</sup>

As in *Eine Berliner Romanze*, one of the central problems in *Berlin, Ecke Schönhauser* is that of the interlacing of commodities into the fabric of society. Where in the former film such commodity mediation had been assumed to be confined to the West, we now see that it has crept over to the East. *Berlin, Ecke Schönhauser* takes us into a milieu where the ideals of socialism have little cachet. For these young East Germans, Westernized attitudes and behaviors set the standard for social interaction and personal ambitions. Thus, as in *Eine Berliner Romanze*, the ideological mission of *Berlin, Ecke Schönhauser* entails breaking these bonds with

29. See Claus, 109–10.

the West and replacing them with corresponding attachments to the East. As we will see, the film is adequate to the former task. The latter, however, will prove more difficult.

The opening sequence of *Berlin, Ecke Schönhauser*, which actually occurs last in the film's plot time, may be understood as a literalization of such a turning away from the West. After the credits, the camera follows a young man as he runs through the streets of Berlin. It pauses on a sign announcing the beginning of the "Democratic Sector": East Berlin. We then learn who is running, and where, when the film's protagonist, Dieter, bursts into an East German police station and announces: "Kohle is dead." These words begin the film's framing device: Dieter's confession to a kind but severe *Volkspolizei* commissioner. Dieter asks about "a girl" and insists that she has "nothing to do with it," then starts the story from the beginning. We follow Angela from her mother's apartment down to the street corner where Dieter and the neighborhood boys used to gather. They are dancing boogie to their own accompaniment, singing and clapping the time.

For this milieu, the coveted *Kofferradio* of *Eine Berliner Romanze* is out of the question: West-marks are precious and hard to come by, as we learn when Karl-Heinz dares Kohle to break a streetlight with a stone. For one Mark East, Kohle refuses to take the bet; for one Mark West, worth several times as much, he steps up to the challenge. After he breaks the light on the first throw, irate passersby call the police, who round up a few of the boys and take them to the station. There, the same police commissioner to whom Dieter will later make his confession interrogates the boys. He chides them for wasting their strength and wants to know why Karl-Heinz and Kohle are not working. The former, it turns out, is living off his bourgeois parents; the latter cannot find a suitable job. The commissioner promises to secure an apprenticeship for Kohle. At this point Dieter speaks up: "You can't do anything for me," he says. "I have a steady job and feed myself." Throughout the film, Dieter's excellent—even, at one point, heroic—work performance is a sticking point for the representatives of the party. From their perspective, it seems impossible that such a good worker could be so unreliable politically. As the secretary of the factory's youth organization puts it, "I don't understand you: you do your work, you're a good man, but evenings you play the tough guy." Dieter's social integration, it seems, is only half-complete: he is well established at work but otherwise has no strong emotional attachments to his society. During his interrogation, the commissioner asks him: "What are you interested in, anyway?" Dieter replies:

"Motorcycles."

"And other than that?"

"Soccer."

"And what else?"

"Nothing else."

A review of Klein's film in the FDJ newspaper *Junge Welt* suggests that the real origin of the "youth problem" (*Halbstarckenproblem*) lies in this paucity of extravocational ties, in the fact that "many young people are left to their own devices after work" (M.P., 8).<sup>30</sup>

*Berlin, Ecke Schönhauser's* neorealist aesthetic highlights the inhospitable atmosphere that surrounds these young East Germans, taking us into their cramped homes and broken families. The strongest visual correlative to the social position of Dieter and his friends can be found in the setting that gives the film its name: the corner of Schönhauser Boulevard, to which we are introduced in the film's establishing title shot. This small triangular patch of concrete under the elevated-train tracks is utterly public, wedged between several well-traveled streets, and yet the only autonomous space available to Dieter and his friends.

The danger presented by this state of affairs is captured in a statement made by the commissioner at the end of the film, a phrase that gave the film its working title: "Where we are not, there are our enemies" (*Wo wir nicht sind, sind unsere Feinde*). Although Schönhauser corner is in the heart of East Berlin, the party has no positive influence there at all and is able to intervene only negatively, through the police. The party's enemies, however, are all too present. Dieter and his friends are united by a shared taste for Western music, movies, and fashion. Their relationships, in other words, are shot through with commodities. It is the promise of a West-mark, we recall, that sets the whole story in motion. For Kohle, this prize means the price of a movie ticket. He brags to the commissioner that he has seen at least a hundred films "drüben" (over there). Angela is equally impressed by Hollywood, informing Dieter at one point that she likes men who look like Marlon Brando. The most Westernized member of the group is Karl-Heinz, who begins trafficking in currency and identity-papers to earn the money for, among other things, a new leather jacket.

As might be expected, such consumerist proclivities turn out to have higher stakes than these young rebels first imagine. When Dieter and Kohle try to collect on the promised West-mark, Karl-Heinz pulls a gun, and Kohle hits him on the head. Dieter and Kohle assume they have killed Karl-Heinz and flee to a refugee camp in West Berlin. When it seems that he will be separated from Dieter, Kohle drinks coffee mixed with cigar tobacco to bring on a fever, a trick he claims to have learned from the movies. Kohle dies from the poisonous mixture—a victim, literally, of too many Hollywood movies. By the middle of the film, Angela seems also to have been betrayed by her Westernized tastes: her preference for rebels, for Marlon Brando types, leaves her pregnant by a man who has fled to the West.

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30. The Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth), or FDJ, was East Germany's equivalent of the Boy Scouts (though girls were encouraged to join the FDJ).

In this way the film's main characters are forced to live out their Hollywood-inspired fantasies of romance, gunplay, and crime. These elements of *Berlin, Ecke Schönhauser's* plot seem cut to the party's official line on the consequences of receptivity to Western popular culture. The capitalists, according to SED rhetoric, used music and movies to lead East German youth into rebellion and crime:

In this way it became easier for the pied pipers of the RIAS [Radio in the American Sector] and the always-outdated relics of the capitalist age in our own Republic to use their temptations and traducements to lure our youth into idleness, in some cases into hostile activities and even into forsaking our Republic for the land of yesterday, where there is no future, where the old powers rule, those powers that entice today and tomorrow come with the whip, with terror and murder. ("An euch alle, die ihr Jung seid")

This turgid sentence captures the party's official position on the origins of the "youth problem": it is not that the East German *halbstarke* rebels turn to Western popular culture to express their restlessness and discontent, but rather that the incursion of Western popular culture into the GDR creates the *Halbstarcken* in the first place. "Hot" jazz and Hollywood movies, according to the East German authorities, were simply two more weapons in the Cold War.

Although *Berlin, Ecke Schönhauser* takes a more nuanced view of this matter, partially exposing the domestic roots of the East German youth problem, it is faced with a conundrum similar to that faced by the party and the Politburo: how to disrupt the ties of East German youth to West German commodity culture. And here the film has recourse to a stratagem far less tractable this side of a movie script: Dieter returns to the East not because he likes his job, nor because of a newfound appreciation for the socialist order, nor even on account of his unpleasant experiences in the West German refugee camp. Rather, he returns because of his love for Angela. In her book *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany*, Uta Poiger points out that this resolution parallels those prevalent in the West German discourse on the youth problem:

*Berlin, Schönhauser Corner*, like the West German liberal discourse on adolescence, also focused on a heterosexual relationship to resolve overdrawn East German rebelliousness. As the East German program flyer said, Dieter's girlfriend Angela was the only one who gave him support. Dieter returned to East Berlin to "create a meaningful life together with Angela." (128)

Though Poiger is right to stress the importance of the film's love plot, a crucial aspect of this story line must be added here: by the end of the film, Angela and Dieter's relationship is no longer simply a bond of mutual affection or of shared

interests, but rather a relationship sanctioned and mediated by the party, as represented by Dieter's brother and the commissioner.<sup>31</sup> When Dieter flees to the West, his brother, having learned his lesson from Dieter's delinquency, offers to let Angela move in with him. That Dieter's brother is a party-loyal policeman, however, gives this arrangement a further significance. In a way, the policeman's role as boyfriend ersatz is a literalization of the film's motto. Rather than letting Angela fall victim once again to her taste for rebels, Dieter's brother moves bodily into the space of her desire. The commissioner as well plays a role in reuniting the young couple. When Dieter returns from the West, the commissioner tells him that Angela is expecting a child, and urges him to "go to her."

In this sense, the resolution of the love story in *Berlin, Ecke Schönhauser* modifies the strategy of legitimation found in *Eine Berliner Romanze*. Where the latter relies on romantic love alone to draw the protagonists together and toward better prospects in the East, the former adds a pair of policemen to the equation—for romantic attraction, as we have seen, is a hazardous undertaking. It is as likely, and perhaps more so, to turn to the West as to the East—away from the "work and struggle" of building socialism and toward the glamour of commodified romance. These two policemen guarantee that this volatile force remains contained and directed. They perform, in other words, the function I ascribed to the man in the bookstore photograph from *Das Magazin*, ensuring in this case that what finally brings Dieter and Angela together is "true love" (*wahre Liebe*), and not another Hollywood fantasy. Such romantic oversight is one component of what could be called the Stalinist mode of romance, a phenomenon that will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

In one important respect, however, *Berlin, Ecke Schönhauser* fails to solve the problem it sets out for itself in the beginning. Although by the end of the film Dieter and Angela have seen the error of their Westernized ways, their positive ties to East German society are no more substantial than they were at the start. The film does not—perhaps cannot—suggest how the Western attachments of East German youth could be countered and compensated. The romantic scenario offers a provisional solution, but only insofar as it is mediated by agents of the state: "where we are not," after all, is the enemy. The enemy's bid was clear. What East Germany's "we" had to offer was still under negotiation. Thus the film ends with the commissioner's exhortation "Start over, young man" (*Fang neu an, Jung!*). At least with regard to the question of social attachment, we end where we began.

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31. The heterosexual relationship of West German liberal discourse, on the other hand, is a reaction *against* this kind of authoritarian mediation: "In such personal relationships the *Halbstarcken* can build their own world and feel that they can show themselves as they really are and still be taken seriously" (Bondy, 92). The therapeutic value of "building one's own world" would not have received much support in the GDR at this time. Instead, the focus was on assimilating into the shared world of socialism.

### **“Like in a film, until you get used to me”: *Der Kinnhaken* and the Wall**

In the early 1960s, the party took drastic measures to prevent young people from selling or seeking the “wares of love” in the West. Almost overnight on August 13, 1961, the “Antifascist Wall of Protection,” or Berlin Wall, was built.<sup>32</sup> In light of the reading outlined here the Wall’s bold belligerence in fact signals a broad acquiescence. With this gesture the party admitted to the GDR’s inability (temporary, it hoped) to surpass the West as a consumer power, and consequently also capitulated to the overarching logic of commodity culture, the promises and betrayals of the consumer economy. When the inter-German border closed, such decisions as those made by Hans, Uschi, and Dieter became moot. East German officials hoped to recompense this drastic curtailment with increased consumer choice. To this end, the New Course was extended and amplified into the New Economic System (NÖS), a wide-ranging set of initiatives designed to make good on the promises of the 1950s reforms.

As Charles Maier points out in his book *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany*, the New Economic System gave the GDR a firm push in the direction of a decentralized market economy:

Between December 1962 and early 1963, the SED thrashed out major proposals for economic decentralization along the lines envisaged by the Soviet and Czech reformers.... As did similar reforms elsewhere, the New Economic System (NÖS) deemphasized central planning and placed more power in the associations (VVB) of socialized industries (VEB). Profits were to serve as measurements of firm performance and could be retained to cover reinvestment and finance.... The logic of reform in the late 1960s was to free prices, which alone might reliably communicate social preferences, allow supply and demand to converge, and reconcile the needs of the present with ambitions for the future. (87–88)

Annette Kaminsky draws attention to the significance of these economic reforms for the East German consumer:

The “New Economic System of Planning and Leadership” (NÖSPL [or NÖS]) was supposed to modernize the GDR economy within a few years and give new impetus to the production of consumer goods. The Sixth Party Congress in 1963 announced that a new era had begun, and blamed all previous problems on the “imperialist class enemy.” For years, the enemy had been drawing massive profits through the open border, at the cost of the East German people. Now the promised improvements

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32. “Antifascist Wall of Protection” (Antifaschistischer Schutzwall) was the official name for the Berlin Wall in the East.

would be implemented without further disturbance. In particular, the people would be able to satisfy their increased demands for consumer goods. (72)

The New Economic System, like the New Course, relied on the promise of future enjoyment to compensate present inconvenience—an enjoyment with a distinctly consumerist character. The problem, then, was how to convince East German consumers that GDR commodities would be worth the wait.

This seems to be one of the motivations behind Heinz Thiel's 1962 DEFA film, *Der Kinnhaken* (The Uppercut). The film opens with a radio report breaking the news of the border closure. Carolin (Dietlinde Greiff) panics and heads to the newly built Wall in an effort to find a way into the West. As she explains to Georg (Manfred Krug), the kindhearted factory-militia soldier who stops her at the border, she has a good job in West Berlin and needs to get across. He temporizes, offering to smuggle her over at a later date. When she visits him at home to discuss the plan, he reveals that he has no intention of taking her across. "What should I do?" she asks him. "You can come visit me," he replies, handing her a set of keys to his apartment. "Tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, more and more, like in a film, until you get used to me." Georg's invitation to Carolin, to keep coming back until she learns to like him, parallels the film's implicit (and rather cynical) message to the citizens of the GDR: "Since you can't leave, you might as well learn to like it here." In line with this effort *Der Kinnhaken* is a veritable advertisement for the products and attractions of East Germany. Just after this conversation between George and Carolin, for instance, the film cuts to footage of the bright lights of East Berlin's nightlife and the neon signs of stores reading "His" and "Hers."

The GDR of Thiel's film is a consumer paradise, even if, as the characters point out in a number of scenes, a few of the products aren't quite up to Western standards yet. In one exchange Georg jokes about the poor quality of GDR whisky, in another about the unavailability of seamless stockings in the East. In the grocery store where Carolin gets a job there is a shortage of apples, much to the annoyance of one customer. Yet just as Georg's patience will pay off eventually in Carolin's love, the frustrated East German consumer is assured that, as the banner above Georg's workplace proclaims, "As we work today, so shall we live tomorrow" (Wie wir heute arbeiten, werden wir morgen leben). Consumption is acceptable, *Der Kinnhaken* tells the viewer, as long as the socialist commodity is consumed. And the film does depict the alternative: it turns out that Carolin's lucrative job in the West was nothing short of prostitution, as we learn when her pimp, Bubi, comes to the East to blackmail her into going to Switzerland to be with her "boyfriend," "Uncle Franz." Having learned of Carolin's unseemly past, Georg's friend Hübner (Horst Bastian) puts it bluntly: "She did it for money. That's a fact." The patient and forgiving Georg, however, decides to give Carolin another chance, and after he delivers the uppercut of the film's title to Bubi's chin, he and Carolin become a happy couple.

Read allegorically, the message of the story to the East German consumer might be summarized as follows: “The closed border is there to protect you from yourself, to stop you from prostituting yourself for Western goods. Though you may have sold your love in the past, we’ll afford you a second chance at respectability. And if you wait patiently, we’ll soon have the very products here for which you were selling yourself there.” In this way *Der Kinnhaken* participates in the effort to create a consumer culture in the GDR to rival that of the West. Though the film does admit shortfalls in the East German production of consumer goods, it predominantly showcases the quality and variety of East German commodities: in the store where Carolin and her friend are cashiers, in Georg’s gadget-filled apartment, in the factory where Georg works (the VEB Electro-Apparate Werke), and on the streets of East Berlin, *Der Kinnhaken* reminds East Germans that they are surrounded by a wealth of socialist commodities, a wealth that is only increasing. To avert the danger of undifferentiated commodity fetishism, the film makes it clear that what is responsible consumption in one state is base prostitution in the other. Essentially *Der Kinnhaken* is about marking boundaries: just as the “Antifascist Wall of Protection” (Antifascistische Schutzwall), had to be built to protect East Germans from Western exploitation and aggression, the film seems to say, a clear distinction has to be drawn between socialist consumption and capitalist prostitution.

And so we are back where we started, searching for the thin line between “wahre Liebe” (true love) and “Liebesware” (wares of love). It seems that the only thing keeping the former from becoming the latter is the state’s intervention: the Wall of Protection, the commissioner and Dieter’s brother, Georg’s uppercut, the man in the trench coat. As we will see in chapter 2, this intervention, a facet of the control strategy known broadly as Stalinism, in fact implies the failure of Stalinist ideology—in large part a failure to offset the pleasures of capitalism. This discrepancy is particularly apparent in the East’s attempts to find a romantic mode that could compete with the glamorous allure of Western love stories. In this light the increasing commodity orientation of East German romance seems to be a strategic retreat, buying time until the GDR could produce adequate commodities to romanticize. Chapter 2 will track the effort in the early 1960s to develop a “neue Romantik” (new romance) that would lend romantic valence not to the gratifications of consumption but to the rigors of production.