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Spectral cinema from a phantom state: film aesthetics and the politics of identity in *Divided Heaven* and *Solo Sunny*

Thomas Austin *

* t.r.austin@sussex.ac.uk

School of Media, Film and Music, University of Sussex, Brighton, BN1 9RQ, UK

In this essay I draw on close textual analysis to consider the interface between film aesthetics and the politics of identity in Konrad Wolf's *Der geteilte Himmel / Divided Heaven* (1964) and *Solo Sunny* (1979). Both films focus on women who have to confront painful processes of self-realisation in specifically East German contexts. They also show Wolf and his collaborators working in two very different modes, from a *nouvelle vague*-inspired mix of location shooting and self-conscious formal artifice to a more laconic style and mobile camera that borrow from documentary aesthetics. Viewed from the perspective of today, the films resist the reductive stereotyping of what Christa Wolf in 1991 called the 'phantom' East Germany, and offer a more productive haunting. As living ghosts in the post-reunification era, they are a reminder of the necessity of remembering, and so confound both a negative 'master narrative' of the GDR and a collective amnesia with no interest in this history.

Keywords Konrad Wolf; DEFA; East Germany; film aesthetics; politics of identity

When viewed in retrospect, any lived experience has the potential to become a ghostly revenant, shaped and coloured by the contingencies of memory re/created in the now. Due to its capability to capture moments in time for an audience, film is particularly susceptible to a nostalgic or melancholic backward gaze (see Mulvey 2006). In Bazin's famous formulation, cinema's photographic grounding instantiates humanity's 'mummy complex', a preservative obsession seeking 'a defense against the passage of time' (Bazin 1967, 2005, 9).ⁱ But if this is true of cinema in general, some cinemas, and some films, might prove to be more spectral than others. East German cinema is certainly a candidate for this category. As a failed socialist utopia, a phantom state no longer on the map, it is tempting to approach the GDR under the heading of 'if only'.ⁱⁱ Larson Powell notes that 'In the case of DEFA film, the inherent spectrality of the filmic medium is [...] doubled by that of GDR society itself, which was always conceived of as a nation 'in transition' toward an eventual higher state it was never to reach' (Powell 2014, 185). As Barton Byg has suggested, there is a risk that East German cinema becomes the mythologised site of a 'romanticized "otherness"', both within Germany and beyond: 'The GDR is more evocative in film now that it does not exist' (Byg 2013, 76,78). But this hazard should not preclude critical engagement with what Anke Pinkert has termed 'an alternative cultural archive that [ought to be recognized as] part of, rather than excluded from Germany's postwar transformations' (Pinkert 2008, 205). In the midst of the Cold War the novelist Christa Wolf ruefully recalled her youthful optimism in a young country: 'those glorious rambling nocturnal discussions about the paradise on whose doorstep we were sure we stood, hungry and wearing our wooden shoes. [...] Make a wry face if you like, but all the same, one must, once in a lifetime, when the time was right, have believed in the impossible' (Wolf 1968, 51-52). Three months after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in a speech both melancholic and prescient, Wolf asked: 'what will become of East Germany's forty years of history? [...] when it is gone it will leave a phantom pain [of] grief, shame, and remorse'.ⁱⁱⁱ Now, nearly 30 years after die Wende, the cinema of East Germany, haunted by the ghosts of hope and loss, continues to demand analysis.^{iv}

In this essay I consider two films by Konrad Wolf, the most powerful and successful director in the GDR. (Wolf was president of the GDR Academy of the Arts from 1965 until his death in 1982. His

older brother Markus was head of GDR espionage, the General Reconnaissance Administration, from 1953 to 1986.) Scholarship has tended to concentrate on Wolf's formally innovative autobiographical account of fighting with the Red Army in the liberation of Germany, *Ich war neunzehn / I Was Nineteen* (1968).^v I focus instead on the representation of the travails of the heroines in *Der geteilte Himmel / Divided Heaven* (1964) and *Solo Sunny* (1979), both of whom have to confront painful processes of self realisation in specifically East German contexts. The two films combine generic templates (romance and breakup, the struggle to 'make it' as a performer) with indirect commentary on everyday life under the communist regime. The stories of Rita in *Divided Heaven* and Ingrid/ Sunny in *Solo Sunny* can be considered *Gegenwartsfilme* insofar as they are 'social dramas' 'set in the present day of the contemporary GDR' (Rinke 2006, 4). But they both also evince an abiding interest in the plasticity of film form. These films, one made shortly before the notorious eleventh plenum of the Central Committee of the SED / Socialist Unity Party in 1965 and the other more than a decade after, manifest significant shifts in content, particularly attitudes towards state ideology that validated the collective over the individual.^{vi} They also show Wolf and his collaborators working in two very different modes, from a *nouvelle vague*-inspired mix of location shooting and self-conscious formal artifice to a more laconic style and mobile camera that borrow from documentary aesthetics.^{vii}

Divided Heaven: space, staging and social relations

Divided Heaven is an adaptation of Christa Wolf's novel of the same name.^{viii} It plays out in a series of extended flashbacks as the protagonist Rita, a trainee school teacher, recalls the previous two years during her slow recovery from a nervous breakdown, precipitated by the end of her relationship with Manfred, a research chemist who defects to the West. The film's stylistic 'excesses' draw on the French New Wave and in some ways anticipate those of the New German Cinema on the other side of the border.^{ix} A key influence is Alain Resnais and Marguerite Duras' investigation of memory, relationships and history in *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959). Joshua Feinstein notes that 'Wolf himself acknowledged similarities between the two films [including] elliptical editing techniques pioneered by Resnais' (Feinstein 2002, 118). As Thomas Elsaesser and Michael Wedel suggest, *Divided Heaven* is 'stylistically, as well as thematically close to the international art cinema [...] [and] situates itself somewhere between Marguerite Duras' films with Alain Resnais, or the early Antonioni films with Monica Vitti' (Elsaesser and Wedel 2001, 17-18).

Wolf, his director of photography Werner Bergmann and editor Helga Krause cram a battery of foregrounded techniques into the first four minutes of the film. The opening sequence, which establishes the urban milieu of Halle while a female voiceover talks about summer coming to an end in phrases taken from the source novel, includes extreme high angles, canted framing, and an extended 12-second shot of two lines of poplars. The trees extend from the bottom to the top of the frame on either side of the camera, and recede into the distance to create two diagonal blocks of shimmering leaves, while the paler sky between them comprises a distinct V shape. The next shot offers a subtle graphic (mis)match: an extreme low angle of a smoking factory chimney, an inverted V in the centre of the frame, reverses the previous composition. As the camera tracks left, the chimney slides to screen right, and the line of white smoke shifts from a horizontal line to a diagonal, stretching from top right to bottom left of the screen, while the title appears at screen left. Wolf uses canted framing again when the scene shifts to Rita's collapse at the train factory where she works,^x and then repeatedly deploys a split screen as, during her slow recovery, she recalls the beginnings of her relationship with Manfred. These and other foregrounded framing and editing devices provide an analogue not only for the multiple shifts in perspective and spatial / temporal location in the original novel, but also for Christa Wolf's self-conscious foregrounding of the act of writing, of telling the tale.^{xi} For instance, a statement made in one scene may be answered in the next. The continuity of dialogue run over discontinuous visuals creates a disjunction between sound and image. An example is the shift from the couple having dinner with Rita's mother to them window shopping. But the di-

sruption is managed through tight framing and an eyeline match between Manfred and Rita, resulting in a jump cut that takes a moment to register. The narrative ellipsis produced is thus conventional (at least in terms of art cinema) rather than destabilising, but it nevertheless calls attention to the filmic mediation of Rita's story.

A later temporal slippage occurs between a sequence of Rita being visited by her fellow trainee teacher Sigrid as she convalesces in the countryside, and the pair talking in a Halle café. The two scenes appear to be consecutive in terms of fabula, but when Manfred appears in the same café it becomes clear that this is a flashback to a moment prior to his defection. In this instance the refusal of temporal linearity facilitates a moment of prefiguration as Sigrid confesses to Rita that her parents and younger siblings have defected to the West, and she has kept it secret for two weeks. Her revelation anticipates Manfred's decision, which follows the rejection of his new chemical process. After Sigrid tells Rita 'Now they're over there', there is a cut to Manfred informing his colleague Martin that 'science enters everyday life faster elsewhere than here', to which Martin replies 'west of the Elbe for example?' However, despite the parallel between the coded terms 'over there' and 'elsewhere', Rita will not be publicly denounced for Manfred's flight in the way that Sigrid is for that of her family. On the cut from countryside to café the female voiceover narration declares 'You can only fight misfortune when you look it in the eyes', something which 'the good socialist daughter'^{xii} Rita (like Sigrid) will do by choosing to remain in the East.

Wolf is particularly fond of using mise en scene and camera placement to produce split screen effects.^{xiii} In a recurring pattern, a static object on screen left occupies two thirds of the frame, while Rita and Manfred occupy the right of the frame, moving towards or away from the camera. Instances include a shop window on screen left while the couple walk away from the camera on screen right; a weathered wall on screen left while the lovers run towards the camera screen right, then a graphic match to the next shot in which the camera stands on steps leading from street level to a higher pavement as the couple ascend, running towards and then away from the lens. (These last two shots are reworked when Manfred searches for Rita, and are used again, empty of people, once Rita has returned to Halle at the film's end.) When Rita and the increasingly cynical Manfred argue during a train test run, a more evenly balanced split screen appears, this time with her in focus in the foreground, while he stands out of focus in the background. Wolf's formalist interventions gradually become narratively integrated, embedded in and expressive of Rita's story and her changing understandings of herself and others, and of the society in which they are living. Flamboyant film style and symbolism in *Divided Heaven* work largely with, rather than against, narrative progression and efficiency, even while they refuse the conventional 'invisibility' of classical Hollywood narration. Technique becomes harnessed more tightly to character development and point of view as the film moves towards its climax, the meeting of the now estranged lovers in West Berlin.

The key signifier of Rita's relationships to Manfred and the members of her work unit in the train factory is their respective placement in filmic space. A hierarchy plays out in the film whereby staging in depth is deployed to validate characters and their relationships while shallower, planimetric stagings tend to isolate individuals or show them at odds with others around them. Thus Rita's increasingly comfortable integration into the work unit is figured by staging along diagonals, such as the tracks in the factory along which she walks with the young boss Wendland.^{xiv} While her engagement to Manfred is happy and healthy the couple appear comfortable in deep space and move through it at will (as in the shot where they run towards and then away from the camera on their way across town). By contrast, Rita is filmed in shallow focus, alone in her misery, when she learns from Manfred's mother that that he has decided to defect to the West. Subsequent scenes of their strained reunion in West Berlin are flat and planimetric, shot largely with shallow staging or focus to block off or blur depth cues. (Rita waiting at the door to Manfred's flat, the pair sitting in his bedsit, eating lunch in front of a restaurant's closed Venetian blind, walking in front of a giant Persil advert on the side of a building or shot against dark panes of glass on which patterns of light are

projected.) (See Figure 1.) Rita's ultimate recovery from her depression is marked with a confident regained mobility among the crowded streets of Halle. No longer a member of the heterosexual romantic couple, she is integrated instead into the wider communities of the work unit, the town, and the state.

As Wolf's authorial gestures become increasingly justified by the unfolding drama, they appear less intrusive and come to serve the diegesis as if they are emerging 'inevitably' from it. This formal compromise parallels Rita's decision to stay in the GDR, and could be compared to those of both the director Wolf and novelist / co-writer Christa Wolf, who, as ameliorationist artists and established members of the SED central committee, hoped to mitigate the worst excesses of the communist regime through subtle criticism from within rather than beyond the state, even after the clampdown of 1965. (The screenwriter Angel Wagenstein has described Wolf's biopic *Goya* (1971), in which artistic freedom is pitted against a brutal, corrupt and censorious regime, as a coded response to the eleventh plenum. In political terms it was 'a suitcase with a false bottom'.)^{xv}

'making it': identity and individuation in *Solo Sunny*

Solo Sunny was written and co-directed by Wolfgang Kohlhaase, who also wrote Wolf's *I Was Nineteen*, *Der nackte Mann auf dem Sportplatz* / *The Naked Man in the Stadium* (1974), and *Mama Ich lebe* / *Mama I'm Alive* (1977). In a major personnel change Wolf and Kohlhaase used a new cameraman, Eberhard Geick, who was based in East Berlin, and had a background in documentary. Both directors made claims about the topicality and enhanced realism of *Solo Sunny*, grounded in the 'authentic' representation of its protagonist's everyday life in the rundown tenement blocks of Prenzlauer Berg, East Berlin, as filmed by Geick. In contrast to the highly symbolic treatment of West Berlin as a site of anomie and alienation in *Divided Heaven*, Prenzlauer Berg becomes central to the rhetoric of capturing lived experience in the following joint interview published in the film magazine *Film und Fernsehen*:

Kohlhaase: '[Geick] is younger than us and he brings that to the film. [...] Geick doesn't polemicise with the camera, and he doesn't create fashion shoots, neither beautiful nor ugly [...]. He sees and allows us to see where and how people live' (Wischnewski 1980, 12).^{xvi}

Wolf: 'With regard to Geick's Berlin relationship: he lives where the story takes place, he has an elementary connection to the things and people. You can turn doves and a cat into touristic-artistic shit or portray a human moment that tells us something about the relationship between human, environment, and nature. I believe the picture of the city here is realistic, because of its constant objectivity and individuality. The clichéd alternative – evil resides in the backyard and the good in new buildings – is not possible' (Wischnewski 1980, 12).

In the same interview Kohlhaase describes the key theme of the film as: 'How much courage do you need to find and to maintain an idea, a perception of yourself?' (Wischnewski 1980, 15). Interviewer Klaus Wischnewski suggests: 'The yearning for a "solo" as guiding principle is a very real, measurable, professional thing and at the same time a metaphor that is unobtrusive and translatable' (1980, 15). That former factory worker and struggling singer Ingrid / Sunny is far from an ideal heroine was part of the appeal of the film for audiences tired of the exemplary figures of socialist realism. Wolf later observed that 'identification with Sunny develops in a strange way, from initial aggressive aversion, particularly in young girls, who initially reject Sunny's harshness. But then identification sets in, made all the more intense by the desire to be just as strong and determined as this cinematic protagonist' (quoted in Rinke 2006, 201).

Ingrid / Sunny's insecure and schismatic identity is repeatedly emphasised by uncanny doublings of her voice and body. All the scenes of vocal performance are haunted by the absent body of Regine Dobberschütz. The actress Renate Krößner constitutes the physical embodiment of Ingrid / Sunny,

and speaks all her dialogue, but lip synchs to vocals recorded by Dobberschütz, a professional blues and jazz singer.^{xvii} The character of Ingrid / Sunny is thus a composite of two women, only one of whom appears on screen. Moreover, the first of several mirror scenes reworks the convention of looking in a mirror as a cue to character interiority, along with the cliché of a performer fashioning herself in front of the glass, to suggest the fragility of Ingrid's self-presentation as Sunny. Seated silent and expressionless, looking at her reflection in a dressing-table mirror, Ingrid / Sunny plays a tape of an instrumental track. As she begins to chew a sweet, the camera, positioned behind her head, tracks slowly up and left, effectively replacing her mirror image with that of a black and white promotional photograph of her on the bedroom wall, which is then held for 15 seconds. What makes this moment of autoscopy particularly *unheimlich* is that composition and camera movement function to animate the static photograph, so it appears to be looking at Ingrid / Sunny, rather than other the way round.^{xviii} Furthermore, one inference to be derived from Sunny's inscrutable photograph is that the doppelgänger is judging her, asking if she is able to secure her identity as Sunny, to really 'make it', both as a coherent individual and as a star.^{xix} Thus scrutiny and surveillance of the self becomes internalised, via a device that points both intertextually and extratextually, gesturing to the insecurity and ambition of the wannabe star familiar from countless films, and to the everyday self-monitoring and justifiable paranoia of citizens under the panoptical regime of the GDR.^{xx}

In contrast to Rita's positive experience of industrial labour, Ingrid's persona as the singer Sunny is partly predicated on the repudiation of her prior job as a factory worker. Her efforts to secure this new identity (as a functioning person and desiring subject, not just as a performer) form the central problematic of the film. In an act of refusal and reappropriation she has defaced a group photograph of her old work unit by cutting out her own head. (By contrast with this picture of Ingrid in the factory, all the photographs of Sunny on show in her flat are portraits of her alone.) Now an absence in a posed image of collectivity, she has symbolically obliterated her previous self. As she shows the framed photograph to her new lover Ralph, the reflection of her face in the glass appears in the gap left above her headless body. Careful framing and lighting visualise the 'privatisation' of the old black and white photograph, placing Sunny, in colour, as a kind of cheerful ghost, smiling and sticking out her tongue, haunting her own past from the present. She is located both in and beyond the group, looking into and out of it in compositional / spatial terms, while in temporal terms she looks back at the group and her earlier life.

The sequence echoes and reworks a scene in Wolf's earlier film *Sonnensucher / Sun Seekers* (1958), which concerns another young heroine in search of a secure identity. Lotte Lutz, an 18-year-old orphan who has fled an abusive older man in the countryside and ended up working in a uranium mine, is forced to choose between three men competing for her affections.^{xxi} She is shown a photograph by Sergei, a Soviet officer, which shows him with his then wife, later killed by the SS. Although not perfectly matched as in the *Solo Sunny* composition, Lutz's face is reflected in the glass and thus superimposed over the dead wife in an image which figures the possibility of her marrying Sergei. Ultimately she remains unmarried at the end of the film, and lives with two friends and her two-year-old child from a previous relationship, rather heavy-handedly symbolising the autonomy and aspirations of the young GDR. While *Sun Seekers* gives Lutz a model trajectory of 'self-improvement' and integration into the collective, *Solo Sunny* markedly refuses this type of progress narrative. Instead it celebrates the project of individuation. But this is shown to be a difficult, ongoing process, shadowed by the threat of failure, despair and psychic collapse.

Sunny is constantly at risk of having to revert to being Ingrid. She is presented as not particularly talented, and is prey to self-doubt. A crucial affirmation of her Sunny persona is made in the (English) lyrics written for her by Ralph; 'She is Sunny, they will say, some sweet day'. But in a second mirror scene, she is applying eye makeup backstage in front of a tripartite mirror when Hubert, the band leader tells her, 'You look like a whore'. The self scrutiny of the earlier mirror shot has been replaced by exposure to male judgement and disapproval. Ultimately dumped by the band, she sits

on the train back to Berlin, peeling off her false eyelashes in a gesture that literalizes her gradual disintegration. The film's laconic but carefully layered style offers another metaphor of collapse when the timer switch goes off in Ralph's hallway, leaving her in the dark as she ponders why he won't let her in. Having discovered another lover, she flees to a female friend's flat, where some days later takes an overdose of sleeping pills and alcohol. One of the nurses pumping her stomach asks what the patient's occupation is. 'Pop singer.' 'Oh please!' she exclaims with disdain. Back working at the factory, Ingrid watches and listens aghast as she is confronted by an unwelcome double, another young worker performing a song in the women's toilets. Seeking her approval, the *doppelgänger* inadvertently presents a distorted parody of Sunny herself, embodying her fears of mediocrity.^{xxii} The trite chorus of her song, 'I want to love, I want to live' is a travesty of Sunny's key existential dilemma, evident throughout the film and reiterated in her discussion with a psychiatrist following her suicide attempt. Something of this aspiration is captured in shots of a passenger jet flying overhead, an image first shown when she and Ralph embrace in a graveyard, and later (not quite) repeated when she sleeps, having discovered his infidelity. These images condense Ingrid / Sunny's longing and fantasy for fulfilment, both emotional and professional, but only in the most incoherent and inarticulate fashion, as befits the filmmakers' concerns with capturing a flavour of everyday life rather than proposing doctrinaire 'polemics'.

In her pursuit of self-fulfilment, Ingrid / Sunny passes through a cycle of emotions, from energetic aspiration which, when blocked, is followed by dejection and the abandonment of hope, before she musters the strength for renewed attempts to 'make it'. Her ongoing search for self might be interpreted as part of a gradual withdrawal from the public sphere, a 'retreat into popular subjects' that Horst Claus locates in DEFA's output following the 1965 plenum (Claus 2002, 144). But Sunny's intermittent doubt, inertia and melancholia can also be seen as highly topical, a coded response to the frustrations of idealism (both individualist and socialist) during the Honecker years, marked as they were by 'system maintenance' and 'the bureaucratisation of rule'.^{xxiii} Thus, following Anke Pinkert's rehabilitation of the term, screen melancholia becomes significant, not as a private response to loss, but as a 'social (or socially legible and relevant)' practice: 'melancholic modes produce a wide array of meanings in relation to losses unfolding across the individual and the collective, the psychic and the social, the aesthetic and the political realm' (Pinkert 2008, 9-10).

In the film's penultimate scene, a bravura extended closeup of Sunny's face is held for 30 seconds while she watches and listens to a young new band rehearsing. (See Figure 2.) The extended shot mobilises what I have termed the *surface-depth hermeneutic*, whereby the reliability of the face as a visible index of interiority, character, thought and emotion, is both proposed and refused (Austin, 2016). Perhaps more than any other image in cinema, the close-up of the human face is a surface that conventionally implies intimate access to, and knowledge of, the 'truth' of the human subject. Yet the materiality of the face can also exceed or confound intelligibility, through its opacity and what Siegfried Kracauer called its 'puzzling indeterminacy' (Kracauer 1997, 46, cited in Trotter 2007, 60). Jacques Aumont points to the double significance of the face as 'both sensible and legible at the same time' (Aumont 1992, 85, cited in Doane 2003, 94) and to its 'hesitation between two poles, that of appearances, of the visible [...] and that of interiority, of the invisible or of the beyond-the visible' (Aumont 1992, 15, cited in Doane 2003, 96). As Mary Ann Doane notes, 'Almost all theories of the face come to terms in some way with this opposition between surface and depth, exteriority and interiority. There is always something *beyond* [...] It is barely possible to see a close-up of a face without asking: what is he/she thinking, feeling, suffering? What is happening beyond what I can see?' (Doane 2003, 96).

Thus the dependability of the face as a legible cue to the inner depths of the person on screen cannot be taken for granted, but is always open to question. In this scene, Sunny stands against a white wall wearing a flat cap, her expression shifting from laughter to a softer movement of exhalation, her eyes moving to and fro surveying the band, until the scene cuts to a final shot of pigeons and Berlin

rooftops in the snow. In the absence of a clarifying voiceover or subsequent narrative action, Sunny's interiority remains just out of reach. Her face is mobile and framed for scrutiny, but stays largely ambiguous.^{xxiv} A shift in the sound mix replaces the diegetic music of the band's energetic jazz funk with an instrumental version of the 'Sunny theme' for which Ralph wrote the lyrics. The move emphasizes attention on Sunny's internal state, without asserting exactly what she is thinking, remembering, or feeling. Instead the shot remains productively uncertain. Is she vulnerable, anxious, hopeful, resilient, determined? Perhaps all of these, as she continues in the never-quite-finished process of becoming a person. Wolf comments: 'I want her not just to get up again, but to continue walking. I want her to survive' (Wischnewski 1980, 15).

Conclusion

Despite their formal contrasts and thematic differences (from failed romance and *nouvelle vague* stylings in *Divided Heaven* to documentary aesthetics and the doppelgänger trope in *Solo Sunny*) both films share a paramount investment in the symbolic integration of their heroines into East German society. This is figured in the last scene of each by visually linking a closeup of the protagonist's face to images of the GDR as a functioning collective. Qualities of 'character' and perseverance are ultimately looked for in the individual's face following the logic of the surface-depth hermeneutic, which is a dominant convention in socialist as well as capitalist filmmaking. Thus in *Divided Heaven*, Rita's return from Manfred in West Berlin to her factory colleagues, and subsequent recovery from a nervous breakdown, are followed by optimistic closeups of her in a new haircut as she walks inquisitively and smilingly through Halle. Over these and a final nighttime shot of the town square, a female voiceover, expanded from the closing pages of Christa Wolf's novel, declares in a rhetorical first person plural: 'the fate of the coming generations depends on the strength of countless people. Sometimes we will get tired [...] But we are not afraid [...] and we sleep soundly [...] we can live life to the fullest'. A similar ideologically conformist and not entirely convincing audiovisual declaration is made at the end of Wolf's *Sun Seekers*. The camera moves without cutting from a closeup of Lutz's parting embrace with Sergei into a crane shot and elevated view as she picks up her child and walks across a field towards the mining town. Any possible regret or ambiguity in this closing sequence is explicitly refused by an assertive male voiceover: 'Move on you two. You will be happy. And not alone. Your path is the path we are all going on. It has just begun.' The conclusion of *Solo Sunny* is much more equivocal. Sunny's connections to the new band, her neighbourhood and the larger GDR (symbolized by the rooftops of Prenzlauer Berg) are represented as uncertain and insecure, at best only hopeful. Resilience and determination as well as loss and fragility are suggested in the extended shot of her face. But the ambiguous open ending notably refuses the questionable certainties declared in the other two films' recourse to voiceover. Instead, Wolf proposes the following justification of the film, through an attempted syncretism that yokes together Sunny's individualism and the socialist ideals that she seems to ignore or reject: 'The real conditions under which socialism establishes itself demand staying power' (Wolf in Rinke 2006, 201).

In September 1991, in a speech to the Academy of the Arts in East Berlin, which was on the point of being dissolved, Christa Wolf issued this warning:

'This Academy is the embodiment of conflicts and contradictions in a stage of German history which, after all, was not simply an "accident", a "mistake", or a mere deviation from the paths of righteousness. If the Academy vanishes, taking with it a great part of those past conflicts, then those of use who are alive today will lose another opportunity to learn about them, and so will those who come after us. The real history of the people who lived in the GDR is being demonized and made to disappear into a dark hole of forgetfulness. The more this plan succeeds, the less hope we have of confronting the real history of Germany -- including the varying lines of tradition in its art - instead of a phantom' (Wolf 1997, 56-57).^{xxv}

Viewed from the perspective of today, the films of Konrad Wolf, along with many other DEFA titles, resist the reductive stereotyping of what Christa Wolf calls the 'phantom' East Germany, and offer a more productive haunting. As living ghosts in the post-reunification era, they both figure and constitute some of the complexities of social and artistic life in the GDR. The tangled histories that they embody are a reminder of the necessity of remembering in all its contradictions, and cannot be reduced to unproblematic manifestations of official ideology, a mistaken and temporary 'deviation' from the dominance of capitalism. Instead they confound both a negative 'master narrative' of the GDR 'which curtails ideas about political alternatives and reform, and simply validates the current federal German political system' (Abhe 2011, 244, cited in Steingrover 2014, 16), and a collective amnesia that Frederic Jameson has called 'the beginning of a market universe which is a perpetual present' (Jameson 1995, 108).

Notes on contributor

Thomas Austin is senior lecturer in Media and Film at the University of Sussex (UK). He is the author of *Hollywood, Hype and Audiences* (Manchester University Press, 2002) and *Watching the World: Screen Documentary and Audiences* (Manchester University Press, 2007), and is co-editor of *Contemporary Hollywood Stardom* (Arnold, 2003) and *Rethinking Documentary: New Perspectives, New Practices* (Open University Press, 2008). He is currently editing a book on the films of Aki Kaurismäki.

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Notes

ⁱ This remains largely true in the present digital era.

ⁱⁱ Under the leadership of Erich Honecker in the 1970s and 1980s, the SED prioritised increasing living standards via the welfare system and consumer growth rather than a more ambitious communist utopianism. See Dennis and Laporte 2013, 4-5.

ⁱⁱⁱ Speech given at the University of Hildesheim, 31 January 1990, published as 'Momentary interruption' in Wolf 1997.

^{iv} Some of these issues are addressed in German films made since 1990. For instance, *Goodbye Lenin* (Wolfgang Becker, 2003) combines post-unification *ostalgie* with acknowledgment of the brutality of the communist regime. Alex's mother has a heart attack and falls into a coma after witnessing him being beaten by police in a protest march. She later recovers, but has no idea that the GDR has ended. So Alex and his friend make fake TV bulletins in which news footage is reframed to show jubilant West Germans, tired of 'careerism and spiralling consumption' rushing to the East.

^v See for instance: Elsaesser and Wedel 2001; Pinkert; Silberman 1995

^{vi} The plenum inaugurated a clampdown on artistic freedom and dissent, partly in order to divert attention from chronic economic problems. By the time of the release of *Solo Sunny* in 1980, the GDR under the leadership of Erich Honecker was marked by 'repressive tolerance' and 'system maintenance' rather than the aggressive totalitarianism of the late 1940s and early 1950s.) See Dennis and Laporte 2013. John Connelly has argued that, due to the Soviets' land reforms and extensive de-Nazification programme which spurred the flight of existing elites through the open border to the West, 'East German society was more thoroughly transformed than any other country in East Europe in the early postwar years. Because of these transformations the SED could enforce rule upon a relatively malleable society' (Connelly 2009, 170).

^{vii} On the latter, see Silberman 1990.

^{viii} Christa Wolf, who is not related to Konrad Wolf, also co-wrote the screenplay.

^{ix} Among many considerations of film style in the New German Cinema, see for instance Elsaesser, 1989; Flinn, 2004.

^x As an aspirant teacher, Rita is required to learn how manual workers live. Arrigo Subiotto notes, 'After Christa Wolf followed the call of the first Bitterfeld conference in 1959 to experience and write about industrial life at first hand, the resulting novel *Der geteilte Himmel* proved to be her one and only excursion into the 'real' world of physical work, at least as a convincingly genuine setting' (Subiotto 1994, 128-140, 134).

^{xi} A device which became a key element of her signature style in later works such as *The Quest for Christa T.*, *Kindheitsmuster / A Model Childhood* (1976), and *Störfall / Accident* (1987).

^{xii} The phrase is Larson Powell's (2014, 192).

^{xiii} In an early sequence he uses a genuine split screen to show Rita in bed alongside the memories she recalls, such as her first meeting with Manfred.

^{xiv} Thomas Elsaesser links staging in depth, often along diagonals, to a particular retrospective temporality that emphasises the futility of hope and an 'already foreclosed future' in Wolf's treatment of the deportation of Greek Jews to the concentration camps in his earlier film, *Sterne / Stars* (1959). Elsaesser, 'Rescued in vain: parapraxis and deferred action in Konrad Wolf's *Stars*', in Elsaesser 2014, 166-170.

^{xv} Wagenstein, interviewed December 2007. DEFA Film Library, University of Massachusetts, Amhurst. Christa Wolf wrote after the collapse of the GDR about 'people [...] who knew they could not live here in the GDR and remain "just" and "guiltless" but who nevertheless stayed because they wanted to sustain an opposition and to help people and were then worn out by the insoluble contradictions and the permanent conflict'. 'To Wolfgang Thierse' (1991), in Wolf 1997, 61. Barton Byg poses the question: 'Was culture a sign of potential for reform that was not realized or an alibi for reform that was by definition impossible, merely prolonging the agony of a doomed and historically bankrupt system?' Byg, 2013, 78.

^{xvi} Kohlhaase goes on to differentiate an ideal of East German film from Hollywood and Western competition: 'We also know the box-office takings and the trend towards entertainment, which has been going for years and for which – as a rule of thumb – we use films that are imported from capitalist countries. What does that all mean for our cinema as an institution? [...] It seems to me that we can't make it more expensive, more colourful, more nude, more fashionable and that we can't throw even bigger cars from even higher bridges, if we measure ourselves on middle class films, like it or not. And then what? Perhaps we could do one thing and no one apart from us could do this. We could make films about us. It sounds as obvious as it is difficult [...]. Even in cinema we could be honest with each other' (Wischniewski, 1980, 14-15). In the event *Solo Sunny* was an unexpected commercial hit in the GDR, and won awards at the (West) Berlin International Film Festival in 1980.

^{xvii}

https://translate.google.co.uk/translate?hl=en&sl=de&u=https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regine_Dobbersch%25C3%25Bctz&prev=search

^{xviii} As Andrew J. Webber suggests, the 'self-seeing subject beholds itself as another, as visual object, or alternatively is beheld as object by its other self. This ambiguity is programmed in the literary coinage of *Doppelgänger* [...] From the start, it seems that the subject may not so much have, as actually *be* the *Doppelgänger* by seeing itself' (Webber 1996, 3).

^{xix} Contrast the 'approving' gaze of the Farrah Fawcett poster in the dressing-table scene of *Saturday Night Fever* (1977), which serves to affirm – perhaps rather too anxiously – the heterosexuality of John Travolta's character.

^{xx} The complaints of Sunny's nosy elderly neighbour also gesture to the surveillance state, albeit as a source of humour, even while they contradict the official denial of inter-generational conflict in the GDR.

^{xxi} Set in 1950, the film was not released until 1972 because of Soviet sensitivity about the mining of uranium in East Germany. Uranium was mined by Wismut AG, a Soviet-owned company that became joint owned by the USSR and the GDR in 1954, following Khrushchev's de-Stalinization policy.

^{xxii} In an earlier argument, the musical troupe's emcee has told her 'You're no Liza Minnelli!' The next scene is a melancholy trip out of Berlin with Harri. Alienated from herself, Sunny now accedes to the advances of a man she has been avoiding throughout the film. At the hotel, two overweight comic singers are greeted with enthusiastic applause while a closeup captures Sunny's silent despair.

^{xxiii} 'Honecker's pragmatic social policy and [...] modest levels of consumerism [accompanied] the bureaucratisation of rule and the retention of the communist party's monopoly of power rather than the realisation of totalistic aspirations and the communist utopia' (Dennis and LaPorte 2013, 4).

^{xxiv} Compare the extended closeup of Rita's tearful face during the opening credits of *Divided Heaven*. Her distress is apparent but elements of ambiguity still persist.

^{xxv} Wolf also questioned the 'elimination of history' inherent in assigning the GDR 'to the realm of evil [...] as nothing but a repellent monotony of oppression and scarcity': 'Our despair about this, if we dare to formulate it, is dismissed as "nostalgia" and stuffed back down our throats.' 'Parting from Phantoms: on Germany' (1994) and 'To Wolfgang Thierse' (1991), both in Wolf 1997, 286, 297-298, 62. Compare Dominic Boyer's more recent critique of a 'discourse on East German nostalgia from GDR-born elites [that] both legitimates their position as spokespersons of a "more healthy" East German identity and performs work on behalf of the dominant interests in West German political culture to delegitimize as "nostalgic" those East German voices that seek greater discussion of inequalities and legacies of the unification process or that, once upon a time, even sought alternatives to the West German colonial status quo.' (Boyer 2010, 21).