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Film Policies and Cinema Audiences in Germany

Abstract

After the war German cinema was by no means free, neither during the period of military occupation nor after the foundation of the two German states in 1949. While the Soviet Union's film policy in Eastern Germany had set the course for the monopolization of film production, the Western Allies under the leadership of the USA had insisted on the destruction of the former Nazi film monopoly structures. With the beginning of the Cold War, the Federal Republic sought to exert a direct but hidden influence on the mass media, even though the constitution of the young democracy prohibited censorship: the state brought the most important newsreel under its control, exercised censorship, intervened in the film market and tried to re-establish cartels. As in Eastern Germany, the medium was to be ideologically rearmed which led to a complex network determined by political, ideological, economic and socio-cultural factors. This overview aims at putting the individual influencing factors in relation to one another. In doing so, a context is presented and analyzed that can shed light on the much-discussed continuities between the Nazi and the West-German cinema. There was indeed a "zero hour": in the structure of the industry and the system of financing film production, in a new aesthetic and a new attitude. But there also have been continuities: in the political view on the propagandistic effect of film and the suggestibility of the masses, and also in reception when these masses pushed through their favor for pre-1945 films, with far-reaching consequences.

1 Introduction

The retrospective, extremely critical examination of post-war West German cinema has often been concentrated on the films themselves – their themes, tendencies, ideological aspects, aesthetics – thus neglecting to some degree the historical conditions of production, distribution, consumption and the important role of the audience, and not least the politics. Based on the widespread assumption of cinema's propagandistic powers, shared internationally throughout the first half of the 20th century, and nurtured by the conviction of the suggestibility of the masses, post-war German film politics was aiming at control – be it through the Allies or in succession through the two newly founded

states of the divided Germany after 1949. Constitutionally forbidden and hidden censorship, stately acquisitions of newsreel companies, interventions in the film market by funding actions were i.a. measures in West German film policies during the Cold War. They not only defined the existential framework conditions, but their direct impact can also be proven right down to the individual work. This cinema stood under considerable pressure, it couldn't develop freely and independently. It had to be resilient. Entangled in a network of mutually influencing factors the West German film 'scene', hardly to be called an industry, produced films trying to serve the masses and being near to them. And the audience knew its power and used it. In the middle of the 1950s this popular cinema reached its high peak, not only in Germany but in all European Countries and the US. Never before and never again would it be so internationally wide-ranging, so versatile in genres and style, so perfectly addressing all the diversified groups that made up the audience.

2 Film Policy of the Allies 1945–1949

For about 20 years after the war, German film production was seldom free of significant political influence. First and foremost steered by the Allied occupying powers (USA, Great Britain, France in the West, the Soviet Union in the East), the film political switches in East and West Germany were set in such a way that they would determine film industrial and cultural developments for decades: with Deutsche Film AG (DEFA) the Soviet Union would build a monopoly-like enterprise in their sector and Berlin zone, whereas the Western Allies, led by the United States, on the contrary smashed the monopoly structures of the Nazi film industry, thus also destroying any industrial film basis for the future. Subsequently, the governments of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG, Bundesrepublik Deutschland) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR, Deutsche Demokratische Republik) further exercised direct state influence, openly in the GDR, hidden in the FRG.

During the early post-war years, the Soviet cultural policy was less restrictive and more lenient than the West Allies' one.¹ Directors, scriptwriters, cinematographers, actors and actresses, all kinds of professionals, were welcomed in the Soviet zone and the Berlin sector with their still functioning, famous studios of Babelsberg and Johannisthal,

1 Juliane Scholz, Die "doppelte Bewältigung" des Nationalsozialismus in BRD und DDR. Spielfilme der Nachkriegszeit als Mittel zur Konstruktion des kollektiven Gedächtnisses, München-Ravensburg 2009, pp. 18–19.

although the Soviet Military Administration was fully aware of these peoples' involvement in the Nazi film industry. But since the fast re-building of a well-functioning film production and distribution in a monopoly-like enterprise was prioritized and a new beginning in artistic and social terms urgently desired compromises had to be made.

In the Western zones, especially the US one, other ideological and economic priorities proved to be relevant: immediate prohibition of all media, their production and distribution, full control through clearing procedures (de-Nazification), slow granting of licenses firstly to cinema owners based on antitrust regulations (no more than 2 cinemas in one town, no more than 10 in a zone), secondly to some private producers in Berlin and Munich, but mainly to people who were sitting in regional cities like Wiesbaden, Göttingen, Bentesdorf near Hannover or Baden-Baden where they would start to build up primitive studios (Decentralization); another priority was freezing the funds and the assets (studios, synchronization facilities, theatres, films etc.) of the former NS film trust Ufa-Film GmbH (UFI) in order to sell them in the future (Re-privatization) and finally to open up the market for the Allies' own productions, aiming at re-orientation, re-education, and big business.

At the time when both German states were founded in 1949, contrasting pictures of the state of film production existed in East and West: in the GDR the monopoly like DEFA was now steered by the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED), the governing Marxist-Leninist political party, which determined the production and distribution, and exercised a far-reaching censorship. Whereas in the FRG, 32 small and vulnerable private production companies were registered, scattered to all parts of the country, most of them not even capable of producing more than two films per year, while the vast assets of the former Nazi monopoly trust UFI remained frozen by the Allies.²

3 Film Policy of the New Federal Republic

On the day of the constituent assembly of the new West German Parliament (7. 9. 1949), the Western Allies passed a law that aimed at forcing the new Federal Government to finally demerge and decentralize the UFI trust through selling its assets by auction to the private sector. Yet, the new Christian Democrat-led Federal Government under

2 Spitzenorganisation der Filmwirtschaft (SPIO), *Filmstatistisches Taschenbuch 1959*, zusammengestellt und bearbeitet von Götz von Pestalozza, Verlag für Filmwirtschaft und Filmkunde, Wiesbaden, p. 4 (URL: https://www.spio-fsk.de/media_content/3167.pdf; 2. 11. 2020).

Chancellor Konrad Adenauer (1949–1963) did not have the slightest interest in this privatization. On the contrary, from now on, the government did everything to not only undermine the UFI law but to turn it into its opposite.

At that point one of the most remarkable continuities can be observed, extending from Nazi film politics via the Allies' to the two German states: the one-dimensional picture of the media, and especially film, as a manageable propaganda instrument for influencing the masses, and the equally one-dimensional image of 'the masses' and their suggestibility.³

Indeed, the two German states were about to convey a lot of messages via film after the Berlin Blockade (1948–1949) carried out by the Soviet Union and during the Cold War: in the East the triumph over Fascism, Capitalism, and the bourgeoisie, the celebration of a first German "Workers' and Peasants' State", the German-Soviet-friendship; in the West the cinematic promotion of Anti-Communism, social market economy, alignment with the West, re-armament; social cohesion, protection of marriage and the family plus other conservative values; advertising the FRG as new, modern and democratic, severing the connections with the past.

One can assume that everything which followed in the West German film policy happened with the knowledge and approval of the Allied High Commission, established by the Western Allies to regulate and supervise the development of the new, only partially sovereign FRG. Especially in the case of the UFI dissolution, however, considerable conflicts seem to have occurred which concerned the fundamental dispute between the demanded privatization and the new monopoly formation of the film industry under state influence, which the Adenauer government was striving for. In the end the Allies yielded.

None of these governmental schemes to clandestinely take over newsreel companies, establish anti-constitutional censorship measures, to secure state influence by restructuring the film industry and other means of interference have been officially discussed.

3 The impact of films on society happened to be the core of a general debate in the federal parliament on 2nd April 1954. All parties were debating for hours about the political, socio-economic, historical, moral, ethical factors of the mass medium, about open or hidden censorship, and the structure of the German film industry; cf. 2. Deutscher Bundestag, Beratung der Großen Anfrage der Fraktion der SPD betr. Äußerungen des Bundesministers Dr. Wuermeling über das Filmwesen (Drucksache 234), Bonn 1954 (URL: <http://dipbt.bundestag.de/doc/btp/02/02022.pdf>; 2. 11. 2020).

4 “Neue Deutsche Wochenschau”: A Stately Enterprise

First of all in 1950, after careful plotting, the conservative Federal Government invested behind the scenes in the privatized “Neue Deutsche Wochenschau” (New German Newsreel), which one year before had emerged from the former British newsreel and now was displayed in 1000 cinemas in the formerly British zone. Soon the merger with “Welt im Bild” (The World in Pictures) followed, the newsreel of the formerly American zone, distributed in 2300 cinemas. On 27.1.1951 all shares of the company passed secretly to the Federal Government which is why “the state-owned productions had a two-thirds majority of the entire newsreel distribution”.⁴

In the framework of the ’50s leading convictions, opinion forming and propaganda purposes were the reasons for an engagement far beyond a reasonable scale. Not only did the federal government as the owner finance the Neue Deutsche Wochenschau production throughout the 1950s.⁵ An advisory board, made up of representatives of various ministries, “‘advised’ and also controlled content and political orientation”.⁶

5 The So Called UFI-Decartelization

Since 1952 and again behind the scenes, the Federal Government was operating against the UFI-law to re-establish the two big, vertically structured film enterprises Ufa and Bavaria in order to build up a stronger West German film industry, which would also facilitate a direct state influence. In 1953 the total assets of UFI in Liquidation had been stated with 85 million D-Mark. When the studios in Berlin and Munich were finally sold in 1956 to three more or less identical consortia under the leadership of Deutsche Bank a “political price” of only 18,3 Million D-Mark had to be paid. Taking the identity of the three consortia into consideration building again Europe’s biggest film enterprise, the question occurred not only to the inferior German film industry, which had participated

4 Uta Schwarz, *Wochenschau, westdeutsche Identität und Geschlecht in den fünfziger Jahren*, Frankfurt a. M. 2001, p. 415.

5 “Der Spiegel” reports, for example, that “only recently” the budget committee had approved “the second subsidy million”. N.A., newsreel, serve mouth-friendly, in: *Der Spiegel*, no. 12, 19. 3. 1952, pp. 30–32, at p. 32.

6 Knut Hickethier, *Ein staatliches Informationsorgan? Zur Organisation der Wochenschau nach 1945*, in: Ludwig Fischer/Knut Hickethier/Johann N. Schmidt/Wolfgang Settekorn (Eds.), “Wir hatten einen Lacher”. Die Geschichte der deutschen Wochenschauen. *Hamburger Hefte zur Medienkultur*, Hamburg 2003, pp. 21–24, at p. 23.

in the bidding process and had lost: behind the companies stand the banks. But who stands behind the banks?⁷

6 Film Funding as a Political Measure

Linked to these attempts of re-structuring and re-building leading production companies the government was launching federal film funding programs aiming at the rise of production figures but also at a “market adjustment” among the small, vulnerable West German production and distribution companies. The funding was combined with drastic censorship measures, for which an inter-ministerial committee with the participation of the Ministries of Economy, Finance, of the Interior and the governmental Press and Information Office took responsibility.

In two so-called “actions”, carried out between 1950 and 1955, the FRG took over guarantees (“Bürgschaften”) of 80 million D-Mark against banks to enable the production of altogether 158 films, which in the end led to stately losses of 31.2 million D-Mark. For producers as well as for distributors the price for benefitting from that program proved to be high. Firstly, because of the complicated application process, secondly because they were confronted with political pre-censorship: the Inter-ministerial Committee examined scripts and checked film casts and crews with the help of the Domestic Intelligence Service (“Verfassungsschutz”) to find out whether there were members of the German Communist Party or whether somebody had worked for DEFA; the officials, supported by some experts, imposed restraints, demanded changes in scripts, shortened budgets, monitored the production process, claimed the right for re-editing when they suspected disparagement of the military or the democracy. In fact, this huge effort was applied to the average, sometimes upscale entertainment films, musicals, melodramas, dramas or comedies, and therefore proves how seriously this mass entertainment was taken and how detailed the censorship was handled. To present some summarized decisions out of the files:

“R. A. Stemmler has to be exchanged as director unless he promises to never work for Defa again” ... “the script has to drop the refugee background” ... “the comedy shouldn’t

⁷ The journalist Reinhold E. Thiel was one of the first to examine the entire process in 1970 for a television film by Westdeutscher Rundfunk and to find interview partners among those formerly involved. A summary of the research results and written excerpts from the interviews can be found in Reinhold E. Thiel, Was wurde aus Goebbels Ufa?, in: Film aktuell, Mitteilungen der Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Filmjournalisten e.V., no. 3, 10. 12. 1970.

mention the atomic bomb but a fantasy weapon” ... “the script about white slavery should additionally be checked by the churches” ... “the emigrant Adolf Wohlbrück shouldn’t get the leading part in that melodrama”.⁸

Those were the framework conditions for around half of the West German feature films produced between 1950 and 1955: strict pre-censorship of content and attitude and post-censorship of the results. The vast majority of these films is long forgotten, among the rejected ones some famous or at least intriguing titles can be found: “Der Verlorene” (1951) by Peter Lorre, “Solange Du da bist” (1953) by Harald Braun, “Alibi” (1955) by Alfred Weidenmann, “Rose Bernd” (1956) by Wolfgang Staudte.

With this ambivalent support, the funding program also aimed at an additional “Market adjustment” by supporting certain companies and by rejecting about 100 film projects of others. In the Nazi’s use of language “Cleaning of production and distribution from unwanted elements” the director of the state funding program described the anticipated result: “It will effectuate a selection by itself”.⁹

7 Behind the Screen: East-West Issues

The instruments of direct governmental intervention outside the law were thus not exhausted. Another inter-ministerial committee, this time on East-West issues, regulated between 1953 and 1966 the import of films from the East Block, secretly and without any legal basis. The committee was responsible for import and screening bans in cinemas but also at film festivals and in film clubs, for the prevention of West-East German co-productions and should specifically prevent contacts between filmmakers from East and West.¹⁰ Until 1966 the committee examined 3200 films, around 130 were banned, including the significant productions “Der Untertan” (1951), “Rat der Götter” (1950) and “Berlin – Ecke Schönhauser” (1957).¹¹

8 Jürgen Berger lists a whole series of further examples, which he took from minutes and correspondence. Cf. Jürgen Berger, *Bürgen heißt zahlen – und manchmal auch zensieren*. Hilmar Hoffmann / Walter Schobert (Eds.), *Die Filmbürgschaften des Bundes 1950–1955*, Frankfurt a. M. 1989, pp. 80–99, at pp. 84–85.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

10 Cf. Ralf Schenk, *Between Worlds. Attempts at Inter-German Co-Production in the Midst of the Cold War*, in: Claudia Dillmann / Olaf Möller (Eds.), *Beloved and Rejected. Cinema in the Young Federal Republic of Germany from 1949 to 1963*, Frankfurt a. M. 2016, pp. 326–339.

11 Andreas Kötzing quotes the text of the censure-protocol regarding “Berlin – Ecke Schönhauser: ... Its communist tendency ... it despises institutions of the Federal Republic (e. g. the emer-

Last but not least the Federal Government also used the *Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle der Filmwirtschaft* (FSK, Voluntary Self-Control of the Film Industry), founded in 1949, as a censorship instrument. In 1953 alone, “479 films were examined, 9 forbidden, 117 films were released only after cuts, re-workings and other constraints, partly of considerable extent ... The standards that were set during these examinations were stricter than abroad” stated MoP Erich Mende (FDP, Liberal Democrats) in the general debate of the *Deutscher Bundestag* about film-related issues on 2nd April 1954.¹² And in this context, Mende warned against a “side censorship” (“*Nebenzensur*”) by the churches which indeed played a decisive role in influencing church members / cinemagoers from the pulpit and through their own film magazines.

Like in a burning glass this general debate illustrates the political backgrounds, broadly shared convictions, hopes and illusions not only of the government but of the parliament, too: across the parties there was agreement that for the benefit of the country’s international reputation German cinema should return to the “world stage”, and the brand *Ufa* was credited as being still internationally recognized as a seal of quality – as if there could have been a way back into the Weimar Republic before the Nazi’s takeover and the repulsion of the Jewish film people.

But also under national political and socio-cultural aspects parliament and government were debating the fundamental criticism of the popular cinema, triggered by a speech Family Minister *Wuermeling* (Christ-democratic) had held publicly, and in which he was reported to have threatened with a kind of “people censorship” (“*Volkszensur*”) according to his and the churches’ opinion: “Above all, it’s the film that we have to blame for the destruction of marriage and family.”¹³ Deeply entangled in their ideas of the medium’s dangerous impact on the public, the parliament debated for several hours on direct or secondary censorship (both illegal), on federal film guarantees, which should

agency reception camps) and does not truthfully describe the circumstances”. In addition, “deprivations of liberty ... are depicted as crimes customary in the West”. Therefore, “almost all members” of the committee had spoken out in favor of not releasing the film. While the participants of the meeting disagreed as to whether legal objections could be raised against the film, it was “for political reasons ... to be rejected in any case”. The committee was called upon by the government “to apply stricter standards in the interpretation of the legal provisions in future cases in order to safeguard the political interests of the state when releasing films from Eastern Bloc countries”. Cf. *Andreas Kötzing, Zensur von DEFA-Filmen in der Bundesrepublik*, in: *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (Ed.), *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 1–2/2009, Bonn 2008, pp. 33–39.

12 MdB Erich Mende, quoted after *Deutscher Bundestag, Beratung der Großen Anfrage* (see note 3), p. 778.

13 Der Familienminister *Franz-Josef Wuermeling*, cited after: *ibid.*, p. 748.

be awarded not only according to economic criteria, but also to state political criteria, on the restructure of a non-existing “film industry”.

All those debates and actions indicate the importance that the government, the parliament, and other political or social groups and namely the churches were attributing to the medium because of its significance in the leisure behaviour of the masses. Cinema at that time happened to be the only easily accessible, comparably cheap entertainment for the public. In 1956, more than 817 million visitors went to film theatres in West Germany and West Berlin: hence the role of “opinion-forming”, not least in the Cold War, which politics and churches attributed to film (and not only in West Germany) and as well the desire for controlling the propaganda function of the medium and for covert censorship which only shows how deeply the new state mistrusted the audience and how little judgment audiences were credited with.

Nevertheless, there was uncertainty about the actual nature of the relationship between cinema and audience, as one member of the Bundestag put it in a nutshell: “It is a question that cannot be answered unequivocally who is more to blame for bad films, whether the producers who make them or the cinema-goers who admire them ... The enormous influence of the cinema-goers on the shaping of the films cannot be seriously denied.”¹⁴

8 Audience and the Dominance of the Nazi Film Heritage: Reprises

Already in the first years after the war the taste and preferences of the audience had proved to be extremely assertive. The hesitant allocation of licenses by the Western Allies and the prevailing supply problems had provoked a one-and-a-half year gap between the end of the war and the premiere of the first “new” German films “Die Mörder sind unter uns”, East Berlin in October 1946, followed two months later by the comedy “Sag die Wahrheit” (West Berlin). All in all, in the four years of occupation only 55 films were produced in the Western zones and the Western sectors of Berlin and 22 in the East (for comparison: in the year 1944 alone there had still been 64).

So what was shown at the cinemas amidst the ruins? Already in 1945 the Hollywood majors selected 32 recently exploited US-feature films for about 350 re-opened theatres in the US zone and Berlin sector. A lucrative business could be established as long as they provided the German audience with Comedy, Musical, Romance, uplifting bio pictures

14 MdB Paul Bausch (CDU), cited after: *ibid.*, p. 773.

or film classics.¹⁵ An almost similar picture could be found in the two other Western zones, while in the East zone the Soviets imported more serious films and set a stronger focus on heroic figures.

Throughout twelve years of Nazi cinema, the German audience had been used to a certain mode of consumption in a cinema of conciliation, distraction, self-affirmation, a cinema they now were yearning for. Facing the demands, the Western Allies reacted with the examination of about 850 films from the Nazi era, of which they successively cleared several hundreds of films to be re-released in their zones and sectors, so-called reprises.¹⁶ Already in the second half of 1945, ten of those films were in distribution, their number increasing up to 212 in 1950.¹⁷ Well known, favored operettas from the '30s and '40s reappeared on the post-war screens, revue films, music comedies, Heimatfilme, exotic adventure films, even (after 1949) Veit Harlan melodramas – almost all of which

15 Juliane Scholz summarizes the criteria for selection by the US occupying forces: “Mostly those that had been produced during the war had a high entertainment value and yet staged American culture positively. The issues of guilt or a clear political statement were not addressed. Rather, the aim was to secure Hollywood’s influence on the German market and to accustom German viewers to the classic ‘Hollywood style’ of film.” Cf. Juliane Scholz, *Die “doppelte Bewältigung”* (see note 1), pp. 14–15. A document in the Bundesarchiv provides information about the most popular films in this period based on box-office results (OMGUS-files: Declassified E.O. 12065 Section 3–402/NNDG no. 775037, Fiscal Section, Annex 1, Receipts from Distribution of films for 21 weeks ending 27 December 1945, dated 26. 1. 1946). According to this document “It Started with Eve” (USA 1941, director Henry Koster) was the favorite title in those 21 weeks until the end of the year 1945, followed by “Young Tom Edison” (USA 1940, director Norman Taurog), or Chaplin’s masterpiece “The Gold Rush” (USA 1925) and, strange enough Hitchcock’s “Shadow of a Doubt” (USA 1943) whereas John Huston’s film noir “The Maltese Falcon” (USA 1941) was one of the least successful.

16 The complete list of “Prüfentscheide der amerikanischen, britischen und französischen Militärregierung für lange Filme 1945–1949” (Review Decisions of the American, British and French Military Governments for Long Films 1945–1949) concerning German production before 1945 can be found in Peter Pleyer, *Deutscher Nachkriegsfilm*, Münster 1965, pp. 427–476.

17 May 1945 – August 1945: 10 German Reprises. Films offered: 98, all Allied resp. 7 “others”; 1945/1946: 30 Reprises, total number of Films offered: 138 (= 108 Allied and 4 others); 1946/1947: 32 Reprises, total offer: 173 (= 4 new German productions, 141 foreign including Austria, 5 others); 1947/1948: 52 Reprises, total offer 239 (= 12 new German, 175 foreign) 1948/1949: 125 Reprises, total offer 340 (33 FRG, 182 foreign productions); 1949/1950: 174 Reprises, total offer 506 (65 FRG, 309 foreign countries); 1950: 212 Reprises, then their numbers were decreasing quickly (Georg Roeber/Gerhard Jacoby, *Handbuch der filmwirtschaftlichen Medienbereiche. Die wirtschaftlichen Erscheinungsformen des Films auf den Gebieten der Unterhaltung, der Werbung, der Bildung und des Fernsehens*, Pullach 1973, p. 282; SPIO *Filmstatistisches Jahrbuch 1954–1955*, p. 86.

would re-return as “new” remakes of the ’50s.¹⁸ In the distribution season of 1948/1949, which happened to be the last one under the direct influence of the Allies, altogether 340 films were distributed in West Germany, of which 175 were imported ones, 125 were German reprises, and the remaining 33 were new German films, accounting for less than 10 % of the total.¹⁹

9 A Zero Hour?

Thus, a remarkable continuation in supply, demand and hidden politics can be stated whereas the production, however, had to face a break. Taking into account the endless later discussions about whether there had been a Zero hour in the German film production or not, it’s quite obvious, that firstly such a relatively long pause of almost 20 months of no new films, secondly the destruction of the German film industry in the US zone and sector, and thirdly the growing awareness in daily life of the complete defeat, the loss of sovereignty, the disastrous working situation can be seen as a caesura.

In late 1946, not only due to economic conditions, a new era of modesty (“Bescheidenheit”) began as it would, at least outwardly, characterize the future Federal Republic. Looking back on 75 years of UFA in 1992, Klaus Kreimeier named some differences between NS- and post-war-cinema while integrating them in the UFA tradition: “On the one hand, the film of the early post-war years denied itself all heroic representations; instead, it continued the tradition of those Ufa films that had declared happiness in an angle, the friendly idyll, and a quiet self-restraint to be a perspective.”²⁰ On the other hand Kreimeier emphasized the “spiritual and emotional” needs of a mass audience, for which continuity in German cinema was the appropriate response to spiritual distress.²¹ For Bernhard Groß withdrawal into the private sphere “contains the undoubtedly polit-

18 A total of 139 films produced in Germany and Austria during the Nazi era were filmed again between 1949 and 1963. Cf. Stefanie Mathilde Frank, *Strange Continuities? Remakes of Interwar Feature Films in the Late 1950s*, in: Claudia Dillmann/Olaf Möller (Eds.), *Beloved and Rejected. Cinema in the Young Federal Republic of Germany from 1949 to 1963*, Frankfurt a. M. 2016, p. 205; cf. also Stefanie Mathilde Frank, *Wiedersehen im Wirtschaftswunder. Remakes von Filmen aus der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus in der Bundesrepublik 1949–1963*, Göttingen 2017.

19 See note 17.

20 Klaus Kreimeier, *Die Ufa-Story, Geschichte eines Filmkonzerns*, München-Wien 1992, p. 443.

21 *Ibid.*, pp. 443–444.

ical moment that something can be lived that no longer exists in the dictatorship: the separation of the public from the private.”²²

So, indeed, the “new” German black&white films were different in comparison to the pre-1945 production.²³ They, therefore, had a problematic stand against the massive entertainment offer from the NS-era with its well-known genres and familiar stars, its elaborate Ufa aesthetics, the lavishly demonstrated production values, the colours, glamour, grandeur.

The majority of the audience despised the new productions, from the “rubble films”, due to their references to current times, their new, poor style influenced by Italian Neorealism, and their quest for honesty to other new films on the market. Especially the rubble films simply were too close to an everyday life that was, in any case, difficult to endure. Although only a few visitor numbers from this period have been passed down, a clear picture emerges: even the unloved imported films of the occupying powers were to attract 3 to 4 times more visitors than the new native ones.²⁴

After the founding of the German states some films were continuing this realistic, sometimes expressionistic, aesthetically ambitious line; they worked in and with genre conventions of social drama and thriller or invented new genres like the *Straßenfilm* around neglected youth and crime, and they found their special audience, but never made it to the top of the box office and seldom into film history. Whereas the mainstream films took off after 1949 which would be the starting point of another long and winding debate, this time about the quality or rather: non-quality of West German post-war

22 Bernhard Groß, *Die Filme sind unter uns. Zur Geschichtlichkeit des frühen deutschen Nachkriegskinos: Trümmer-, Genre-, Dokumentarfilm*, Berlin 2015, p. 273.

23 Based on his criteria, Pleyer puts the proportion of films that refer to the time of their creation at 87,5 %. Accordingly 75 % of all post-war films, produced between 1946 and 1948, showed the effects and destruction of war in some way; Pleyer, *Deutscher Nachkriegsfilm* (see note 16), p. 150.

24 For his dissertation, published in 1965, thus less than 20 years after the period he was studying, Pleyer was still able to obtain figures directly from distribution companies, in this case the German Schorcht-Film distributor and the British J. Arthur Rank Corporation. According to his research results, “Das verlorene Gesicht” (“The Lost Face”, West Germany 1948, Director: Kurt Hoffmann), a timeless mystery story released by Schorcht, had 3.7 million visitors, followed by “Menschen in Gottes Hand” (“Men in God’s Hand”, West Germany 1947/1948, Director: Rolf Meyer), which, as the title already reveals, sees higher powers at rule in the misery of the post-war era and attracted 3.2 million visitors. The high number of visitors by today’s standards that these films achieved is relativized by the results of Rank’s, for example of the Stewart Granger vehicle “The Magic Bow” (GB 1946, German distribution title “Paganini”), which had more than 10 million visitors. Not to mention real big US titles for which exact figures are missing. Cf. Pleyer, *Deutscher Nachkriegsfilm* (see note 16), pp. 155–156.

cinema – a popular cinema close to the changing interests of the audience’s majority. Not only the visitors were overwhelmed by the first West-German color film after 1945, the *Heimatfilm* “Schwarzwaldmädel” in 1950, but also, in a negative sense, the critics and later film historians who despised exactly this popular cinema, recognizing it as filmic results of a determined escapism and the typical refusal of the West German society to deal with the past.

For about 40 years this critical attitude, manifesting itself in numerous articles, essays, books, has been perpetuated to the point of complete boredom. Not only was popular cinema harshly condemned, but the other one, the harder, and the more realistic or experimental West-German cinema happened to be neglected or ignored, may it be out of political calculation or simple unawareness. As a result a widely declined or disregarded cultural territory in all its aspects is still worth to be (re-)discovered till this day.²⁵ But of course it’s true, that after 1945 the “demanding” film remained a risk (at least in times without secure film funding, at present 330 m. Euro per year in Germany). Thus in the first 15 years of FRG, this kind of films had to prevail caution in naming and showing the past or the current misery of unemployment, housing shortage, the problems with the integration of millions of German refugees from the East, the mass destruction of families. Melodramas warily referred to combative women, their unexpectedly returning war-disabled men, to all those, in reality, existing private triangles; ‘problem films’ implied the massive social and emotional neglect of children and adolescents; crime movies themed the omnipresent forms of pushing, corruption and violence; even harmless music films showed a German youth breaking with traditions and preferring US-American jazz and rock culture; the “refugee question” and unprocessed experiences of loss emerged in *Heimatfilmen*; the extremely ambivalent relationship to military resistance against the Nazi regime re-appeared in “officers’ films” etc. With all these conflicts contemporary commercial cinema has been dealing with, albeit frequently through blanks, allusions, improper speech – and always reconciling openly revealed contradictions in the end.²⁶

25 The discoveries that are possible in the field, including the diversity of West German post-war genres and their differing interpretations as well as the analyses of an extremely lively film culture, were carried out in 2016 on behalf of the Locarno Film Festival which dedicated its retrospective and the accompanying catalogue to the German post-war cinema. The retrospective, curated and tailored by Olaf Möller to the special needs of each station, got an extraordinary successful tour through Europe and the USA. Cf. Dillmann/Möller (Eds.), *Beloved* (see note 10).

26 The assessment that the 1950s in general were “fundamentally contradictory” in an extraordinarily strong modernization push is becoming more and more accepted. For Stephen Lowry it is also valid for the cinema whose stars he analyses. Cf. Stephen Lowry, *Lieber hausgemacht als Hollywood? Stars im westdeutschen Nachkriegskino*, in: Bastian Blachut/Imme Klages/Sebastian

10 Audience and Cinema Culture

It was essential for the entire film sector to know the moods and preferences of the audience and to gain knowledge about its increasing diversification. The German film distribution sector had financially benefited most from the largely risk-free business with the Nazi film heritage. Secured by their reserve funds the distributors were capable throughout the '50s to function as pre-financiers for the weakened producers by renting non-existent films to the cinemas in which the cinemas only agreed if the star names and genres promised reliable revenues, i. e. if the audience very probably wanted to see the film. This bet on the future preferences of the spectators essentially determined production decisions, but it also short-circuited social discourses, the reality of life, audience expectations and film production.

While opinion research institutes first determined and analyzed the composition of the spectatorship in the mid-1950s, some cinema owners had already decided at the beginning of 1950 to exchange experiences internally, providing information on visitor reactions twice a week via the "Film Special Service" in Heidelberg.²⁷ In the internal exchange, the anonymous cinema owners did not have to mince their words: which old

Kuhn (Eds.), *Reflexionen des beschädigten Lebens? Nachkriegskino in Deutschland zwischen 1945 und 1962*, Stuttgart 2015, p. 240.

27 Film-Sonderdienst (Special film service), edited by W.H. Ott, a "confidential exchange of experience between film theatres", Heidelberg, started on 2. 1. 1950 and was published every Monday and Thursday. Also called "Ott's Dienst" ("service"). This obviously rarely preserved series is archived and can be examined at the text archive of Deutsches Filminstitut und Filmmuseum, Frankfurt a. M. Some examples: Since reprises played an important role in the programming of German cinemas, they also did so in the exchange of information: About "Es war eine rauschende Ballnacht", the 1939 Zarah Leander vehicle (director Carl Froelich), a cinema owner (West German middle town) had played the film for seven days with an occupancy of 70 % and stated: "endlich wieder ein gutes Geschäft. Allen Kollegen zu empfehlen." (transl.: finally a good deal again. Recommend to all colleagues; Special film service, no. 2, 9. 1. 1950). On the other hand, "Mädchen in Uniform" (director Leontine Sagan, D 1931), one of the famous films of the Weimar Republic, did not work well at all in a southern German country town with 300 cinema seats in two screenings: "Neue Generation hat hierfür kein Verständnis mehr" (transl.: "New Generation no longer has understanding for this"; Film Special Service 14 [1950]) while Richard Eichberg's remake "Der Tiger von Eschnapur / Das indische Grabmal" (D 1937/1938) successfully filled the halls in numerous small towns (cf. Film-Sonderdienst 9 [1950] and 10 [1950]). The outstanding successes of the year in all forms of cinema were the new German productions "Nachtwache" (FRG 1949, director Harald Braun) and "Schwarzwaldmädel" (FRG 1950, director Hans Deppe) as well as the US-reprise "Gilda" (USA 1946, director Charles Vidor) and the current "The Third Man" (GB 1949, director Carol Reed). Concerning the latter and its huge success cf. Anne-Marie Scholz, *From Fidelity to History. Film Adaptations as Cultural Events in the Twentieth Century. Transatlantic perspectives*, New York-Oxford 2016, p. 29.

Ufa stars in the reprises still or no longer attracted the audience, how spectators reacted to familiar genres or unfamiliar themes from Hollywood, how they judged color films from Great Britain, the USA or the Nazi era, which Hollywood customs frightened audience, whether a film attracted older people, women, the youth, the uneducated, intellectuals, “interested circles” etc. In northern, western or southern Germany, in villages, small towns or big cities, cinemas with 240 or 2500 seats cabled what the copy quality looked like, whether the dubbing was good, how many days a film had been shown, with how many screenings and in what capacity – all this vital information, recommendations or warnings were passed on in telegram style within the cinemas involved.

In the mid-1950s the wishes and demands of the audience represented a market factor more powerful than ever. The main visitor group of 16- to 29-year-olds, who had been young children and youth at the end of the war, went to cinema almost every week. Together with the second most important group, the 30-to-44-year-old urban upward climbers, they proved to be more curious and knowledgeable about films, more open and internationally orientated than previous audiences, while accordingly the theaters offered a wider range of all kinds of cinematic works than before (or ever after). Although the US cinema dominated West German screens by titles, the decisive business volume proved that the domestic production surpassed the Hollywood competition by a rate of about 50:30%.²⁸ And Italian, French, English, and Swedish films also achieved market shares of about 20% in the second half of the '50s – European films that were different, possibly more free-flowing, more exciting, more challenging in their approach to genre conventions and yet nonetheless familiar. Based on the annual results of selected cinemas in several key West German cities between 1950 and 1956, some of the most successful foreign films were “The Third Man” (GB 1949), “Rebecca” (USA 1940), “Don Camillo” (IT/FR 1952), “Hon Dansade en Sommar” (SE 1951, “One Summer of Happiness”), “From here to Eternity” (USA 1953), “On the Waterfront” (USA 1954), “Du Rififi chez les Hommes” (FR 1955, “Rififi”) and “East of Eden” (USA 1955).²⁹ Even when domestic productions as a whole lay far ahead in the public’s favor, this international cinema was a wide-ranging, manifold school of viewing.

28 Cf. Lowry, *Lieber hausgemacht* (see note 27), p. 234, note 1, with the figures Irmela Schneider had collected.

29 Cf. *Filmblätter*, Fachorgan der deutschen Filmwirtschaft, Berlin, since 1950 organized the so called “Filmrennen” (“film race”) at the end of each year, asking which film in the cinemas of selected cities (Berlin, Düsseldorf, Frankfurt a. M., Hamburg, Hannover, Köln, München, Stuttgart) had been most frequently scheduled. The magazine can be consulted in the text archive of the Deutsches Filminstitut und Filmmuseum, Frankfurt a. M.

This internationality, which was never attained again in Europe and is unattainable through EU funding today, conversely also showed interest in the West German “sophisticated entertainment film”. With its customized roles and dialogues, the excellent camera work, its famous close-ups and ample space for acting out moods and emotions in drama, melodrama and the war film, it was not only popular with the domestic audience. West German films could also be exported.

Shortly after, cinema lost its dominant rank in the leisure behavior of the masses in Europe and the US. Accordingly, the Federal Government trusted on television as the future propaganda agent in the media. Plans to install a governmental second TV program (“Adenauer television”) were banned in 1961 by the Federal Constitutional Court. The 1950s were over, indeed.