It is hard to believe at the time of this writing in December 2007 that the fall of the Berlin Wall lies nearly two decades back. If you teach at the college level as I do, you must remind yourself that today’s undergraduates do not remember the amazement, the excitement, and the optimism of this historic event. For most of them it is the kind of history one reads about in books. They are too young to remember it. A recent Spiegel issue dedicated its title story to the «Generation Wende,» because the first baby born after the fall of the Wall turned 18 years old in October of 2007.¹ The complexity of unification and the process of coming to terms with the GDR have left their mark on film history, with a response that is still emerging. The search for «the definitive» Wendefilm and Wenderoman has continued in vain. Among the various cinematic treatments, several German productions that reckon with the end of the GDR from an East German perspective have received substantial acclaim even beyond the German market, among them Goodbye, Lenin! (2003) and the 2007 Best Foreign Film Oscar winner Das Leben der Anderen. German film expert Ralf Schenk suggests in an essay for Filmportal.de that it is more likely that a number of different films will present parts of a unification story, which taken together contribute to the rendering of a more complete picture over time.²

The analysis that follows treats three films from the early end of the spectrum of filmic reactions to the end of the GDR: Andreas Dresen’s Stilles Land, Peter Kahane’s Cosimas Lexikon, and Andreas Kleinert’s Verlorene Landschaft. All three present elements of a uniquely East German experience of the early 1990s and contribute to the process of coming to terms with German unification. My analysis of these films in the context of their creation indicates that they present images of resistance, of (self-) estrangement, and of reorientation. All three films discussed in this paper were shown in cinemas in 1992. They are treated here in chronological order of the phases of East
German experience they present. *Stilles Land* describes the resignation and later the hope of East Germans in a small town before and during the fall of the Wall. *Cosimas Lexikon* takes up property issues and questions of community in the immediate post-Wall period in Berlin. *Verlorene Landschaft* tells the story of one man’s reconciliation with the past, in a narrative framed by an unspecified time after the end of the GDR. Its location is near the German-German border, a choice symbolic of the experiences of division and reunification it treats.

Before moving to a discussion of the films themselves, I find it essential to make a few remarks about how the period of upheaval in the wake of the fall of the Wall and ensuing German unification affected both film production and reception, particularly for directors from the former East Germany. Filmmaking became complicated for East German directors for a number of reasons. First, film funding mechanisms in the former East changed from the planned production apparatus of the DEFA studios to a film subsidy system as existed in the former West. This shift added new tasks to the job of directors who, in addition to providing the creative mind behind the film, now also had to apply for funding from various sources, identify a production company, win over a distributor, etc. This required that East German directors learn an entirely different culture of funding to which their West German competitors were already accustomed. Second, East German directors were confronted with the challenge of making films for a society undergoing radical change (hence the title of this article). In other words, how could one keep up with the rapid developments from the late 1980s to the early 1990s – and how could one know what life would be like tomorrow? How could one even have a reliable sense of what would be relevant by the time the film reached cinemas? The difficulty of making films relevant for audiences was further exacerbated by a plain disinterest in East German experience, even on the part of East German viewers themselves. After forty years of limited access to the material culture and media of the West, many East Germans had a strong Nachholbedarf – a desire to catch up – and thus the interest in American and in West German productions increased. At the same time, overall cinema ticket sales in the entirety of Germany experienced a record drop in 1992 (for the period 1967 to 2000), likely in part because cable television was introduced the same year. A number of cinematic treasures by East German directors were hardly heard of – were not shown, not reviewed, and not distributed. One could say of such films, «sie sind ins Wendeloch gefallen» – they disappeared into the gap or abyss created by unification.

These circumstances were most acute for those East German directors of roughly the birth year 1949 – as old as the GDR itself – and who, as the 1980s
passed, were still trying to achieve the status of DEFA director, a process slowed by the requirement of multiple debuts imposed on them by the studio direction. The experience of this so-called Nachwuchsgeneration is documented in interviews, correspondence, essays and film evaluations selected for publication in Dietmar Hochmuth’s 1993 volume DEFA NOVA – nach wie vor? Versuch einer Spurensicherung. Interviewed for the volume by Hochmuth in 1993, Peter Kahane described the challenge of filmmaking in the transition phase as follows: «Ich habe noch nie in meinem Leben zuvor erlebt, daß mein Verstand mich so hilflos gelassen hat, – die Erlebnisse, die ich in den Jahren ’87, ’88, ’89, ’90 hatte, waren einfach so massiv, vor allen Dingen ’89, daß ich kaum hinterhergekommen bin, sie intellektuell und emotional zu verarbeiten.» Jörg Foth, who made the film Letztes aus der DaDaeR (1990), underscored the almost insurmountable difficulties for his generation – on the one hand the stifled creativity due to the immense amount of waiting required of this generation during the 1980s – «das Nichtstun ist eben der Härtetest für unsere Generation» Foth wrote – and then the rapid shift to a completely new film production system at age forty, a double burden, as he called it. Of the some dozen future feature film directors who trained at the Academy for Film and Television «Konrad Wolf» in the 1980s, only a few still make movies today, perhaps most productive among them is Peter Kahane (b. 1949). It is the very last generation of Academy graduates who have made the transition to filmmaking in a unified Germany most successfully. Besides Andreas Dresen (b. 1963), Andreas Kleinert (b. 1962) also has a lengthy filmography to his credit. Strictly speaking, Dresen and Kleinert trained in East Germany but finished film school after the fall of the Wall and debuted in the very early 1990s. They made their student films during a period of liberalization at the Academy that began in the late 1980s with the rectorship of Lothar Bisky. Dresen and Kleinert thus constitute a later generation than the ‹last› or ‹lost› generation of filmmakers from the GDR, from which Kahane comes.

Although he is perhaps best known for his feature films, Dresen’s lengthy creative résumé reveals that he has also made short films, documentaries, film segments for insertion into operas, TV movies, and childrens’ films. He has also directed five theater productions and one opera. Stilles Land (1992) was his first feature length film. The work in various genres has been productive for Dresen. It is evident that he has allowed activity in one genre to inspire another. During months of intensive work on the documentary film Kuckuckskinder (1994), he met individuals who became the models for the characters in his later feature film Nachtgestalten, completed in 1998. Documentary film training was an essential part of the education of all feature film directors...
in the former East Germany and influenced his later experimentation. The documentary character of some of Dresen’s feature films adds authenticity, immediacy and uncomfortable edginess that can be thrilling to watch. Independently of the Danish DOGMA movement that began in the mid-1990s, Dresen experimented with progressively improvisational methods, so that although the cast of Nachtgestalten worked from a script, several scenes resulted from asking the actors to develop dialogue and action based on the characters and a given situation. Die Polizistin that followed in 2000 expands on these methods, and Halbe Treppe (2001) used no script at all. Stark colors and a grittiness in the film quality of Nachtgestalten and Die Polizistin show that Dresen is not afraid to put his aesthetic signature on his films. Dresen’s experimentation with genres continued with the widely acclaimed documentary and Berlinale prizewinner Herr Wichmann von der CDU (2003) and the feature Sommer vorm Balkon (2006), based on a screenplay by Wolfgang Kohlhaase. After a time away from cinema to direct theater productions in Berlin and in Basel in 2006, Dresen made two films in 2007, Whisky mit Vodka and Wolke Neun, both of which are expected to premiere some time in 2008.

Stilles Land is one of three movies Dresen has made with specifically East German themes, the other two being Das andere Leben des Herrn Kreins (1994) and Raus aus der Haut (1997). The press reviews of Stilles Land in the year of its issue warrant a closer look because they give a sense of the interest in filmic treatment of East German experience so soon after the end of the GDR. An article appearing in the Berliner Zeitung in the summer of 1992 called Dresen, then recently graduated from the Academy for Film and Television «Konrad Wolf,» «einer der talentestierten deutschen Nachwuchsregisseure.» The article praised Dresen for Stilles Land, his first feature length production, and described it as «die große Entdeckung» at the Film Festival in Schwerin. The film ran as the only German film selected for competition at the International Film Festival at Karlovy Vary (Karlobsbad) and later won the Hessian Film Prize and the German Film Critics’ Prize. It showed at festivals in Cologne and Hamburg, and finally opened in cinemas on October 8, 1992. Of the nearly twenty reviews of Stilles Land that appeared in the press that year, the majority assess the film positively, and point out the challenges presented by the subject matter. Writing for the Tagesspiegel early in 1992, Gisela Lieven praised Dresen’s undertaking so soon after the end of the GDR by saying, «er stellt sich mit seinem Ost-West-Thema der deutschen Situation, auch wenn manch einer davon nichts mehr wissen möchte.» Dresen’s film was also viewed positively because it did not paint the East German past in black and white strokes. Paul Lennart asserted in the Tagesspiegel later in 1992 that the film countered the tendency to think in narrow categories. The
article quotes Dresen in reference to many portrayals of East German experience of that time: «Entweder war die DDR ein einziger Stasi-Knast, oder die Menschen erzählen in larmoyant-wehmütigem Ton von der guten alten Zeit.» While the Western press showed general appreciation for the sensitive and differentiated treatment of this part of German history, the press of the former East went further. A number of reviews were euphoric about Stilles Land, and about the opportunity to see a thoughtful treatment of East German experience on the big screen. Writing for Neues Deutschland, Horst Knietzsch focused on the authentic portrayal of East German perspectives: «Fragt dich einer in zehn Jahren, wie das so war im Osten Deutschlands, damals im Herbst 1989, sieh zu, dass du irgendwo mit ihm den Film Stilles Land sehen kannst. […] Jeder Zuschauer aus dem Osten Deutschlands wird in diesem Film ein Stück Eigenes entdecken können. Lautes Rufen: «So war ich nicht,» hilft wenig.» Similarly, the Ostsee-Zeitung found in the film «die schwierige Wandlung zur Mündigkeit aufgezeigt, mit Ironie und Betroffenheit und manchmal auch mit Überzeichnung.» Only a few reviews assessed the film negatively, the most condemning of which were two that appeared in July and October 1992, respectively, in the Neue Zeit, the successor paper to the central organ of the CDU in the GDR, defunct as of 1994. Despite the overall positive press, the film has to date been seen by just 15,000 viewers. However, a 2007 double DVD issue of the film along with early shorts by Dresen attests to its lasting value for cinema history, and suggests that in 1992 the time was not yet ripe for such a complex treatment of East German experience. Dresen’s reputation as an outstanding German filmmaker continues today. On December 14, 2007, at a small service that took place at his alma mater, he was awarded the Bundesverdienstkreuz (Federal Cross of Merit) in recognition of his creative work and his service.

In Stilles Land, Dresen presents themes of resistance, (self-) estrangement and reorientation. As the film opens, Dresen carefully establishes a microcosm of the GDR in a theater in the town of Anklam. Members of the theater ensemble there are tired, frustrated, resigned and even cynical about their artistic work and their abilities to reach an audience. Resources are limited, and the facilities are in need of new investment. Nothing works as it should. Actors do not make it to rehearsal on time because an alarm is broken or there is no hot water. Such excuses are symptomatic of the lowered expectations the cast has of rehearsals, should they actually take place as announced. A large sign posted on the theater manager’s office wall reads «Und find’ ich gleich nicht alles wie es sein soll, ich freue mich, wenn es erträglich ist.» It is hardly necessary to state that the actors have become jaded about the leadership of their theater manager, Walz. They have learned to tolerate circum-
stances that are far from ideal, but they are not happy about it. A sense that change is brewing under the surface adds to the already strained atmosphere, as news has reached even this remote town about the East German citizens leaving via Hungary. It is fall 1989. Enter Kai Finke, a young, energetic director who resists the leaden passivity of the ensemble. In his youthful naiveté he – perhaps like Dresen himself – is willing to make neither aesthetic nor political compromises. He has fresh ideas for directing a piece that reflects the times. His plan: to stage Waiting for Godot – although he can hardly answer the questions from his ensemble about whether the hopelessness in the piece is found in the heads of its characters or in the prevailing conditions. He works to overcome the ingrained stubbornness of the ensemble and to respond to political developments elsewhere in the land. Protest letters posted to the Wandzeitung are mysteriously removed and reposted. Manager Walz does not mail the protest letter from the ensemble until the political consequences no longer threaten his position. Kai finds himself challenged in his artistic adaptation of the drama. Due to the changing times, he overhauls his design for the staging not once, but twice in an effort to keep up. He is confronted with the difficulty of making art in a time of political upheaval. Despite his best efforts, his production becomes inadvertently historical. The Wall falls just a few days before the premiere, and though his production is highly up-to-date, it is no longer of interest to audiences. The action is happening outside the theater, far away in Berlin, and the hoped-for audience is absent. Although his production is lost on viewers, the end of the film finds Kai choosing a new orientation. He remains at the theater in Anklam – instead of abandoning it – with an optimistic view of the landscape and creative visions for the potential of the theater. He has by no means given up. What was an end to the GDR is for him the continuation of a dream, even if it is a step into the unknown. His commitment remains firm as he dedicates himself to remaining in Anklam and directing theater there. This is just one of many ways in which the film presents a story similar to Dresen’s own. His 1989 essay Warum ich immer noch hier bin, reprinted in Hochmuth’s DEFA NOVA volume, presents and defends his commitment to stay put and create relevant film art, in a time when many were choosing to leave the former East Germany.

Peter Kahane will be familiar to some because of his bitter reckoning with cultural politics in the GDR, Die Architekten (1990) – sometimes called the last DEFA film, and sometimes called the first film completed after the fall of the Wall. Die Architekten presents an interesting case because the script was approved and filming began immediately before the fall of the Wall, but
the project was completed afterwards, so that it was indeed one of the first films no longer subject to the censorship of its predecessors. After the Wall fell, changes were made to the script that would not have previously been allowed. In recent years, it has been widely shown and effectively marketed by Icestorm, although its reception suffered at the time it premiered in the summer of 1990 because its target audience was thoroughly distracted by the process of unification. *Die Architekten* became inadvertently historical during its completion, because the GDR it portrayed no longer existed by the time it was finished.

Born in 1949 and involved in filmmaking as an intern, student and director in Babelsberg since 1973, Kahane already had a number of credits to his name when unification occurred. Among these are *Weiberwirtschaft* (1984), an endearing 50-minute film in chamber-play-style which deals with gender issues. His 1985 road movie *Ete und Ali* is available in the US and Germany on DVD. After making *Die Architekten* and *Cosimas Lexikon*, Kahane went on to direct the 1999 feature *Bis zum Horizont und weiter*, a kind of East German road movie with some similarities to *Thelma and Louise*. From the mid-1990s onwards he directed or wrote screenplays for the detective film series starring Wolfgang Stumph, *Stubbe – von Fall zu Fall* and for *Polizeiruf 110*. With the exception of the tragedy *Die Architekten*, which illustrates the impossibility of continuing a system that stifled the creativity of its best minds, Kahane’s films often do not fit genre definitions precisely. *Cosimas Lexikon* is one of those, combining melancholic, comedic and tragic elements as it portrays the high hopes and human limitations of a community that tries to solve a problem. As of this writing in late 2007, his most recent productions were *Liebeslieder* and *Die rote Zora*.

Kahane was fortunate enough to find in the West Berlin production company Rialto-Film an enthusiastic partner. Company head Susan Nielebock supported the project and Kahane made his film in the *Scheunenviertel* (Jewish Quarter) neighborhood of the Berlin Mitte district in just 34 days – compared to the 55 days he might have been allowed for the same film in the former DEFA studios. *Cosimas Lexikon* started in cinemas on April 9, 1992, with what the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* called a respectable 25 copies – for a German director. A number of reviews appeared, primarily in the press of the former East. With the exception of a damning assessment from *Neues Deutschland*, the reviews and interviews indicated an openness and enthusiasm for the film, while noting its contemporary nature, its exploration of recent issues for easterners in particular, and its east-west cast. The latter was apparently a source of conflict during the filming, and may be indicative of the social and cultural divide between east and west at the time.
Cosimas Lexikon stars the West German TV actress Iris Berben as Cosima, a woman who has withdrawn from life to write a lexicon in the quiet of her apartment during the immediate post-unification period. Cosima is an attractive woman approaching middle age. She lives in a run-down apartment building in the former East among a motley crew of apartment dwellers who – as the film opens – are brought together by indications that their building is to be renovated. The other dwellers of her building – with whom she has had little to do until then – call upon Cosima’s rhetorical skills to help them resist the impending renovations in written form. They fear that after the building receives structural and cosmetic updates, rents will no longer be affordable and many will be forced to move away. Before Cosima can do her work, the building’s owner must be located. This unlikely band of collaborators teams up to locate the «Penner,» a homeless man named Klaus Borgmann played by Ralf Richter, who is apparently the absentee landlord of their building and who has been tempted into a sustained alcoholic fog by regular high-proof gifts from his conniving brother. The residents of the apartment building first lock him in their cellar until they decide how to proceed. This scene is not without an air of violence, as several male residents subdue Klaus physically. Desperation and fear of change on the part of the residents lead some of them to suggest that they soundproof the cellar and leave the landlord there. He is manhandled. The hard-line behavior of some of the residents is suggestive of the forceful tactics of the Stasi, the State Security Police of the former GDR. It is the eloquent writer Cosima who emerges from her withdrawn state and suggests a course of action for the group: they should work together to make Klaus into the landlord they desire to have. In allusion to the myth that is the basis for George Bernard Shaw’s drama Pygmalion (1912) and the popular film adaptation My Fair Lady (1956), the residents form a collective for the purpose of making over and retraining their landlord. They create a kind of new society with a collective array of talents. Some are strong, others intellectual. Some have mechanical or persuasive skills, and some the right connections. Together they work to transform Klaus in appearance and behavior into a businessman who can outsmart his brother’s attempts to sell the building in his name. They collaborate to educate and to shape a new capitalist hero, in the hopes that he will do the right thing for them.

Though still captive in his own building, Klaus gets a bath, haircut, dental work, new clothes, as well as training in pronunciation, music appreciation and even in dining etiquette at a formal dinner staged in the gray and peeling courtyard. Despite substantial initial resistance and some backsliding into his alcoholic ways, Klaus exceeds their expectations, becoming not just a capitalist, but a tricky one who outsmarts his would-be deceivers and surprises his
trainers by showing up for the critical business transaction in the cowboy garb of a Texas-style businessman and speaking with an American accent. Indeed, the western motif appears throughout the film – in Klaus’ desire for a tacky singer in a western bar, from which he is repeatedly ejected until he finally dresses properly, in the climactic business exchange, and in the final backdrop – a kitschy western landscape into which Cosima disappears in her minivan in the final shot.

Kahane seems to want to impress upon his viewers the tragic news that the West has come to the East, and that its presence is undeniable. Further, the transformation of Klaus cannot lead to a win-win situation for Cosima and her neighbors, because it is not possible to create a «good» capitalist. The end result will necessarily be a monster like that created by Dr. Frankenstein, because if the residents are successful with their experiment, they will also lose control of it. In the conclusion of the film, Klaus reaches his personal goal of outsmarting his brother, but sells the house nevertheless to the top bidder and disappears, leaving the residents of the apartment building to be evicted for renovations by its new absentee owner. The penultimate shot shows Cosima, who stands alone in the courtyard and has an imaginary encounter with the original owner of the building, a gentle Jewish man who lost his property when the Nazis rose to power. It is apparently her dream that the building be returned to its original owner.

*Cosimas Lexikon* is about the experience of change and the hope for alternatives after German unification. Resistance to change unites the residents of Cosima’s building, who were merely a collection of individuals before embarking upon their Pygmalion project. They are brought together by a common desire to change their landlord from a homeless alcoholic to a successful businessman. They hope that if their landlord can regain control of his building, their existence can be maintained without change. They may have imbued their landlord with many improvements to his appearance and behavior, but they cannot instill in him with a heart that prevails over the profit motive. But they fail to realize the principle familiar to every child who plays *Monopoly*: the property will be worth more to its owner if upgraded. Instead, they seem to have hoped for a kind of third way – capitalism with a human face – the best of capitalism and socialism. The group disbands in anger, dreams dashed and resentful that their utopia could not be realized. Each packs his worldly belongings and departs in a different direction. Their project can be seen as a metaphor for the socialist experiment in East Germany. The exaggeratedly bright Western sunset into which Cosima disappears at the end might be interpreted as the bright lights and superficial appeal of capitalism. *Cosimas Lexikon* presents a variety of experiences and dreams from the immediate
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postunification period. As such, it gives an accurate if somewhat mixed message about East German experience of the time.

Andreas Kleinert and Andreas Dresen both studied at the Academy for Film and Television in the second half of the 1980s. Kleinert completed his studies with the prizewinning diploma film *Leb wohl, Joseph* in 1989. In 1992 he made *Verlorene Landschaft* and in 1995 *Neben der Zeit*, followed by *Im Namen der Unschuld* in 1997. A substantial number of productions for television followed, among them the seven part series *Klemperer – Ein Leben in Deutschland* in 1999 and a number of *Schimanski* and *Polizeiruf 110* episodes. Kleinert is perhaps best known among German Studies scholars in the United States for his 1999 black-and-white feature film *Wege in die Nacht*, a dark urban narrative starring the theater actor Hilmar Thate. *Wege in die Nacht* enjoyed many showings at festivals in 1999 and 2000, was featured at the *Berlinale* in 2000, is currently listed for distribution with Ö-Film and was issued on video with Filmgalerie 451. Much of Kleinert’s directing and scriptwriting work since then has been for television, and a majority of his films are either based on historical narratives or on scripts written by the director himself. Many of his films in the 1990s are set in the former East Germany, and yet offer a «placelessness» that lends universality to their content. This is true of *Verlorene Landschaft* as well, his first full length feature film made after graduation, which the newspaper *Junge Welt* described in 1992 as «den bis heute wohl wesentlichsten Nachwende-film.» It showed at San Sebastian in 1992 and won a prize at the Film Festival in Schwerin, as well as the Adolf Grimme Prize in Silver for Script and Directing in 1993. It is not available commercially, but can be borrowed for noncommercial showings.

The framed narrative of *Verlorene Landschaft* begins with a politician who receives a phone message that his parents have died and that he should return home to help bury them. Despite his wife’s objections, saying «die Zeit hast du nicht» and «das mit dem Haus kann man später regeln,» the man decides to take a week away from work to take care of things. The story that unfolds during the next 106 minutes shows him being chauffeured in his large black car to a run-down village in the former East Germany, where he checks into a hotel with a crumbling, grey facade. He then visits his boyhood home nearby to discover that his parents are not deceased after all, but had placed the call or had it placed so that he would finally return home to visit. In the scenes that follow, the man revisits the years growing up there through flashbacks, interspersed with present-day conversations and encounters with his aging parents. After several days and many flashbacks, the man becomes more comfortable in his childhood home, and moves from the hotel back into his
own bedroom at his parents’ home. However, the man’s one-week visit to his parents’ home ends with their death, apparently a suicide designed to coincide with the last day of his week-long visit. Parents and son have come closer to one another in their time together. The man reaches a point – if not of reconciliation – at least of greater understanding and acceptance of his parents. The final scene closes the frame again as he returns to the sterile «glass house» where he lives as an adult, a home in obvious contrast to the rustic farmhouse of his origins.

Like the other films treated in this paper, *Verlorene Landschaft* presents themes of resistance, (self-) estrangement, and reorientation. Resistance is foremost among these and evident in both narrative levels and in the experience of both generations whose stories are told. The film opens with scenes that clearly define the generation from which the protagonist emerges. Among the ruins of a war-torn Germany, a young couple makes love desperately as air raid sirens scream and bombs fall around them. The lovemaking itself – feverish and even violent – seems an affirmation of life directed against the destruction all around them. What begins in resistance to a war-ravaged Germany continues in resistance as the couple builds a life for themselves and their small son in a farmhouse in the woods, around which they erect a high wall to shut out the rest of the world. The farm lies on property near a river on the East German side of the border that divides postwar Germany. They hope to establish a utopia undisturbed by the political developments around them. They reject a system imposed from outside by the state, preferring instead to create their own society of three persons cut off from the outside. To maintain their isolation, they keep their growing son ignorant of the outside world. As long as he is small and needy, and happily submits to the will of his parents, theirs is a harmonious community. As he grows older, they censor what he reads, twist the truth about the geography beyond the farm’s borders, and deny him the freedom to travel so that their hermetically sealed system continues to function. This approach presents clear parallels to the former East Germany. Also like East Germany, the tiny unit of three is not economically self-sustaining. The parents’ subsequent employment inside their home as telephone switchboard operators both proves they cannot exist as separate from the outside world and exposes their son to its undeniable existence. The boy finally runs away and discovers playmates in the woods beyond the walls of the family compound. He is torn on the one hand by his loyalty to his parents and on the other by his resentment that he is being kept ignorant and has become dependent. The boy returns from his adventures, and his father promises not to lock the gate, but extracts from him an agreement not to leave. In response to the boy’s claim that those outside the compound refer to the small
family as «Staatsfeinde,» the father tells his son, «jeder vernünftige Mensch ist ein Staatsfeind.» When state authorities arrest and imprison the father for the failure to send his son to school, the boy and his mother remain in the home, living an incestuously symbiotic relationship that is interrupted by the return of the father roughly 10 years later, when the small boy has clearly become a young man. His spot in the maternal bed now reclaimed by the father, the young man runs away for good. His final resistance to his parents takes several forms. First, he escapes across the river to West Germany and begins a new life. Second, he cuts himself off from his parents and his past completely, claiming that he is an orphan from the East. Finally, as the grown man of the narrative frame, he chooses the career of politician—a decision likely distasteful to his parents, given their complete rejection of political and social organization. In the years that follow his departure from home, he is seen embracing the material trappings of capitalism. The film concludes with a scene in which the politician watches videos of his own campaign speeches, fast-forwarding and repeating phrases to create a mélange that appears ridiculous due to the repetitiveness and emptiness of the slogans. In the past he has said in speeches, among other things, «wir müssen nicht nur staatliche Grenzen abschaffen, sondern auch innere Grenzen ...» The final scene shows the politician on the floor of his living room laughing hysterically at his own image on television. His reaction in this final scene indicates that he recognizes his own hypocrisy and rejects it. None of the extremes in the film offer workable situations: neither the isolation chosen by his parents (the self-isolation of East Germany), nor his complete rejection of his origins (ignorance of history). In the end of the film, the politician must confess that his life is based on lies, and has thus lost its meaning. A middle way—and an earlier reconciliation with his parents and with his past—would have led to a more authentic life in the present. The open ending of the film suggests that the politician has learned from his journey, and will make changes in his life.

The East German experience of the fall of the Wall and/or of unification lies at the heart of the conflict in each film treated above. The protagonist in each film resists the circumstances presented him or her, and must find his or her way on new territory. All three films illustrate a country in flux, with protagonists who have a limited ability to influence their environment. What the protagonists share is an engagement with the very specific problems of the early phase of German unification. In Stilles Land it is the challenge of making art in East Germany, and the artist’s choice to continue making art in the same location even after the fall of the Wall. In Cosimas Lexikon questions of place and ownership stand in for the search for a workable societal and eco-
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In the film’s end, the protagonist embraces the opportunities presented by the end of an era. In *Verlorene Landschaft*, a critical examination of place and of history leads the protagonist to reject abrupt divisions and seek continuities on the personal level as metaphor for the needs of the reunified nation. All three films, despite sometimes dreary East German settings, offer an optimism and a forward-looking attitude. Unlike *Das Leben der Anderen*, with its historical angle on the *Stasi* chapter of East German history, or *Goodbye, Lenin!* with its fantastical idea of recreating a happier GDR than actually existed, these films document aspects of a transitional phase in which so much was possible. They place the choices and struggles of ordinary individuals at the center of events as a way of telling parts of the history of German unification.

Notes

3. DEFA stands for *Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft*, the state-run film studios of the German Democratic Republic, located in Potsdam-Babelsberg.
4. Ticket sales experienced a record drop of 11.7% for all of Germany (12.6% in the former West, 5.1% in the former East), according to the FFA (German Federal Film Board). See http://www.filmfoerderungsanstalt.de/downloads/marktdaten/3_Besucher_Umsatz_Preise/3.2_bundesw_alteundneue_BL/Uebersicht_67_bis_01.pdf (accessed December 21, 2007). Cable television was introduced the same year, according to the *Spitzenorganisation der deutschen Filmwirtschaft* at http://www.spio.de/media_content/610.pdf (accessed December 21, 2007).
5. Discovering these will require talking with eyewitnesses and exploring archives as well as the collections of Progress, which assumed ownership of the DEFA film inventory. A personal favorite of mine that met this fate is Evelyn Schmidt’s feminist comedy *Der Hut*, from the year 1990, now in the collection of Progress Filmverleih.
6. Often called the «Last» or «Lost» generation, the term *Nachwuchsgeneration* is virtually a misnomer, as many of these directors were in the their mid to late 30s and still attempting to reach directorial maturity, a long and frustrating process impeded by East German cultural politics of the 1980s. For more about the political engagement that defines this generation see my «Revolution in the Studio? The DEFA’s Fourth Generation of Film Directors and their Reform Efforts in the Last Decade of the GDR,» *Film History: An International Journal* 15 (2003): 444–64.
Lothar Bisky recounts his reform efforts at the Academy in chapter 7 of his autobiography *So viele Träume* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2005).

I treat all of Dresen’s films in greater depth in a monograph in progress.

For more information, see the official homepages at http://www.herrwichmann.de/ and http://www.sommervorbalkon.de/ (accessed December 21, 2007).

(Dpa.) «Stilles Land in Karlsbad,» *Berliner Zeitung* July 9, 1992: 33.


The daily newspaper *Neues Deutschland* was the former official party organ of the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (Socialist Unity Party, or SED) of the GDR, and as such represented the point of view of the party. After unification, it was run by a LLC, with primary ownership in the hands of the Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus (Party of Democratic Socialism, or PDS), the successor party to the SED. With a current readership of 150,000, it is the single most widely read daily paper in the states of the former East Germany. http://www.neues-deutschland.de/kontakt/9 (accessed December 19, 2007).


See http://www.icestorm.de/ for information on Icestorm Entertainment GmbH, which was founded in 1997 and controls the rights to market the entirety of films produced by the DEFA. Icestorm International, Inc., was founded in 1998 and works closely with the DEFA Film Library at the University of Massachusetts to reach US-American markets. See http://www.umass.edu/defa/.

For a treatment of three such films that were in progress in the immediate Wende period, see my «Ich wollte ewig einen richtigen Film machen! Und als es soweit war, konnte ich’s nicht!: The End Phase of the GDR in three films by DEFA Nachwuchsregisseure,» *German Studies Review* 26 (2003): 315–32.


In a conversation with me in Berlin on November 12, 2007, Kahane noted, «Es gab große Auseinandersetzungen unter den Kollegen aus dem Osten und dem Westen. Es ging auch um mich. Sehr ernst und sehr bitter.»
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29 Internet Movie Database offers a fairly comprehensive listing: http://german.imdb.com/name/nm0459080/ (accessed December 12, 2007).
31 Available on loan through the Goethe Institute or through the Film Museum Berlin – Deutsche Kinemathek.
32 I wish to thank Jackie Collins, Brooke Shafar and Paul Werner Wagner for their helpful comments in the preparation of this manuscript for publication.