The Continuities of an East German Heimat: Gender and Technological Progress in Du bist min. Ein deutsches Tagebuch.

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Schöne deutsche Heimat— wir sind dazu aufgerufen, sie wieder zu entdecken und sie uns ganz eigen zu machen...

—Johannes R. Becher

Post-war studies of German Heimat (homeland) first focused on the manner in which the National Socialists co-opted and transformed this existing notion to fit their hyperreactionary myth of German nationalism. In the eighties and nineties, scholarship began to analyze how the desire for Heimat had been transformed in post-war West Germany, and primarily dealt with the Heimat films of the 1950s and Edgar Reitz’s well-known mini-series *Heimat* (1984). While recent interest in theories of memory has led to renewed assessments of the Heimat concept, fewer scholars have looked at these fantasies in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). This lapse is due to the presumption that GDR ideology left no room for a discourse on Heimat. However, all manifestations of ideology are embedded in the culture in which they appear and necessarily redirect existing metaphors to new ends. Texts produced in East Germany were cultural as much as they were ideological. Thus, the Heimat discourse did not disappear. As the quotation above suggests, it was reappropriated in a variety of ways, both officially and unofficially, to fit the contemporary needs of the GDR’s population.

The studies that do exist on GDR Heimat outline the ways in which the country’s Socialist Unity Party (SED) officially engaged with the inherited discourse and redirected it. A continual tension existed between what historian Alon Confino best describes as “the two faces of the East German Heimat idea” (110). One face represented the more generic, empty symbol of the security and beauty of home and natural landscape that drew upon past German representations of a timeless Heimat. The second, pointedly ideological, historicized the new Heimat as socialist, determined by class and by the workers’ ownership of the means of production. Confino argues that East Germany pursued this two-pronged strategy until the socialist dimension collapsed in 1989.

An additional feature of these two faces becomes apparent when looking at the portrayal of Heimat from the perspective of gender. Since the inception of modernism, Heimat had been associated with the hearth and the home, traditionally female, domestic spaces. Heimat was something to be protected and fought for. The fatherland represented that which was political or governmental, a traditionally male, public space. As a “feminine” realm, Heimat coexisted with the fatherland in gendered symmetry (Confino 49). Yet the
fatherland had failed; Allied forces had dismantled and divided it. There were now two, where there had been one. In East Germany, usage of the term “fatherland” was unfeasible due to its fascist connotations. The two faces of Heimat in East Germany took the place of the equilibrium between Heimat and fatherland. In the first, women play traditional roles. In the second, socialist Heimat, women take on the role of the socialist personality. This muscular female peasant/worker, who populated GDR cultural production, fought and sacrificed for socialism. She was modeled on the male prototype that occupied the public sphere. In order to become political, and specifically socialist, in East Germany, women had to take on the characteristics of their male counterparts.

The conservative continuity of this dual approach to Heimat is evidenced in the film Dubist min. Ein deutsches Tagebuch (1969), the project of Annalie and Andrew Thorndike. Perhaps the most grandiose film project of the East German film studios, Du bist min was to become a contested site for the official definition of Heimat. That it would do so becomes clear given the original names for the film: Die Deutschen and Dasdeutsche Wunder. The Studio for Documentary Film initially slated it as the 70mm German sequel to the Thorndikes’ epic propaganda film Das russische Wunder (1963). The title made direct reference to the West German Economic Miracle. Much as Das russische Wunder perpetuated the myth of a Russian “socialist homeland,” the Thorndikes proposed to create a film that established an identification with a “socialist Heimat” in the East German viewer. It would reaffirm notions of East German identity in a more politically isolated, but stable country after the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. The final version of Dubist min also tried to reconcile the contradictions between the traditional, timeless concept of Heimat and the ideologically driven, future-oriented communist vision by stressing the element they had in common: patriarchy.

Du bist min presents East German Heimat as a woman's diary, an unusual form for a film at that time. Annalie Thorndike (1925– ) wrote the screenplay. East Germany had very few women in influential roles in the film industry, so her position takes on special interest. Since the Thorndikes are best known for their documentary propaganda films of the fifties, one would expect a film full of male proletarian heroes. While Du bist min certainly is that in many ways, it also includes numerous images of female workers. Thorndike also chose the Minnesang song “Du bist min,” which was written by a woman, as the title of her film. The voice of a female narrator reads the poem and relates her own personal experiences and resulting love for her new East German Heimat. Contemporary fiction, such as Christa Wolf's Nachdenken über Christa T. (1968) and Irmtraud Morgner’s Hochzeit in Konstantinopel (1968) and later her Trabadora Beatriz (1974), had experimented with women's personal narrative. These authors questioned the slow pace of women’s emancipation in East Germany and sought to establish a feminist socialist voice.

Yet, while Thorndike’s film illustrates the contribution of women to the reconstruction of East Germany, hers is not a feminist film that questions socialism. Rather, it seeks to add women’s stories to the official history, while remaining solidly within the dual Heimat discourse and the established discursive “codes” of socialist realism (Bathrick 19). Despite promises of female emancipation in Marxism-Leninism, the film ultimately fails to question adopted patriarchal continuities with the past. Instead, the personal narrative serves more as the authentic, objective voice of a disembodied woman who is placed outside of history, and retains the comfort of home and the beauty of nature found in past conceptions of German Heimat. The women remain in rural or small town settings,
and work in the domestic sphere or in traditional, non-mechanized industries. At the same time, the new socialist Heimat of the future, the political landscape that is being fought for through industrial and technological advances, remains masculine both in the film’s content and form.

I

Film scholars remain divided in their analyses of the East German Heimat film. This term has been borrowed from studies of West German cinema and applied to the productions of the Deutsche Filmaktiengesellschaft (DEFA). Claudia Beindorf writes that the closest that DEFA came to the West German genre was Konrad Wolf’s feature film Einmal ist keinmal (1955). In her opinion, this film failed to reconcile historical materialism with the characteristics of the West German Heimatfilm—the opposition between city and country, the conflict between new and old, the modern endangering of Heimat, and its ability to save itself by drawing upon its unalienated roots and traditions.

In their excellent theoretical study of Heimat, Elizabeth Boa and Rachel Palfreyman describe the challenges of articulating East Germany’s own notion of Heimat. They cite the official “need to show the GDR as open to the future, as a place to work on to turn into Heimat that had to be balanced with the GDR as an already homely place to stay in” (134). Both point to the necessity of creating a homeland vision that appealed to all generations. Finally, Boa and Palfreyman (like Beindorf) underscore the need to reconcile the Marxist view that modernization led to the alienation of labor, with its understanding that modernization would lead to communism and the creation of an urban working-class Heimat (134). This combination made a socialist version of the West German Heimatfilm almost impossible in their opinion.

Yet, GDR filmmakers did attempt to engage and redirect the complex articulations of German Heimat, which had been most recently appropriated by National Socialism. Johannes von Moltke argues that film scholars must pay attention to the “relationship between the two traditions” of Heimat in East and West (172). Recently, Thomas Lindenberger, Stefan Soldovieri, and Moltke acknowledged the early integration of a Heimat discourse in select DEFA films of the fifties, particularly those set in rural areas. Both Harry Blunk and Anette Battenberg et al. also identify, respectively, a number of films that they classify as East German Heimat films. Battenberg provides an alternate definition of the East German Heimat film based on Günter Lange’s 1973 GDR publication Heimat—Realität und Aufgabe. She finds that this genre emphasizes the importance of regionalism and a “specific milieu” within the “socialist Fatherland.” It is characterized by an “unmediated, productive debate... about this living space [Lebensraum],” which does not leave the main protagonist alienated, but rather resolved to work towards the communist utopia (157). Both this article and Blunk’s focus primarily on the “Berlin films” and the creation of an urban Heimat for young worker-protagonists of the next generation.2

By contrast, Du bist min is very much cemented in the discourse of the generation that founded East Germany. The two faces of GDR Heimat are apparent in the contradiction between new and old, modern and traditional. Much like in the Western Heimat film, traditional gender roles provide some resolution to this tension. In Dubist min, the new industrial spaces are masculine and the existing small town or rural areas are feminine.
(The cityscape hardly appears in the film). In addition, Du bist min is very much about the integration of refugees (Umsiedler) in East Germany, a theme also often found in West German Heimat film. A German émigré from Poland, the narrator has now declared East Germany to be her new, enduring home. Based heavily on Annelie Thorndike’s own biography, the plot of the film contains recollections of the narrator’s life since 1945, ostensibly from her diary. These memories do not proceed in chronological order, but rather in a series of flashbacks, which intersperse a travel narrative with a recitation of East German political, social, and economic achievements. This modern form leaves the narrator’s pivotal socialist conversion experience to the end.

Although produced after the construction of the Berlin Wall, the film contains many of the elements typical of earlier East German anti-fascist film. In this way, it establishes East Germany as the legitimate inheritor of the role of Heimat, albeit a Heimat that has cast off Hitler in favor of Marx and Lenin. For instance, the narrator travels to Hameln and Kiel in the film. While there, she points to the continuing plight of the worker in West German capitalism and ties Germany’s National Socialist past with accusations of continued Western revanchism. Hameln’s fairy-tale like setting is laid bare by close-up shots of public wall plaques hung by ethnic Germans to commemorate their homelands in Pomerania, the Sudetenland, and Silesia. The film makes reference to the Pied Piper of Hameln as it discovers the patriarchal, feudalist “rats” on the city council. In Kiel, the film documents a convention of ethnic German refugees (a “Pommerntreffen” in the Ostseehalle). The film also rejects any vision of a greater Germany lingering among displaced Germans in East Germany, when the narrator travels back to her homeland in the now-Polish town of Stargard.

The last portion of the film has characteristics of an Aufbaufilm. This type of film, made in the late forties and early fifties, encouraged all viewers to convert to communism and contribute individually to the collective goal of a future socialist Germany. The film presents an unusual example of a socialist teacher-heroine of the first generation. In Du bist min, the narrator recollects how she came of age at the end of the war. Her fond memories of her former home are redirected in her efforts as a new teacher who helped to reopen a regional school, which functioned as a socialist model that served rural children. Here, the film presents a rural variation of the trope of the Trümmerfrau, since the narrator must clean up the school first. Any further private, subjective identification with this experience becomes public and objective as she recounts her meeting with a Russian soldier, Vassily. He emphasizes, “the Germans must rebuild their own country.” The narrator relates this personal encounter with the handsome face of a masculine Russia as the penultimate step in her decision to dedicate herself to socialism. The scene counteracted the more common, unspoken association with rape by occupying Red Army soldiers. The Russians had also driven her from her homeland. Yet, in the film, Russia is the friend and the West is the enemy. Indeed, the film intimates a positive sexual experience between the two as Germany and Russia.

Despite the socialist heroine, the anti-fascist elements of Du bist min are primarily associated with its representation of masculinity. This is key to understanding the film’s dual portrayal of Heimat. The strong, male worker, creator of history in the present and future, is juxtaposed with the traditional work of women and their continuity with a mythical, pre-modern past. The communist movement had long asked its female activists to
work for communism—at first, under the assumption that emancipation would automatically come with the revolution. Women would therefore “enter history” (von der Emde 3). As Gisela Bahr writes, East German officials believed women’s emancipation to “be an accomplished fact” (125). With reforms in the sixties that provided childcare, reduced working hours, and child-rearing stipends, it was assumed that women would reconcile the roles of mother and worker without issue (126). Yet, to enter history means to function as historical subject. The cultural portrayal of the East German woman remained that of an offshoot of the male socialist personality. The female version was an urban, working super woman and mother who helped to rebuild the country, but also to rear future communists. In East German fiction, degrees of emancipation were often used as markers with which to measure progress on the path to utopia.4

This film includes no children, no female socialist personalities, and its mothers are inherently tied to the past and the notion of ancestry. Du bist min first introduces this concept with a scene near the beginning of the film where the narrator writes letters of congratulations to Walter Ulbricht and other top party officials on the occasion of the GDR's twentieth birthday in 1969. The camera shows the perspective of the writer at her desk at the window looking through lacy curtains at a snowy landscape outside. Rather than epitomize the working class movement, this seemingly bourgeois scene evokes the safe, warm, cozy feeling of hearth and family. Indeed, the letters resemble motherly approbations. The political sphere, traditionally equated with the “fatherland,” is clearly masculine.

Yet, the above scene begins the film. It opens with the Minnesang poem “Dubist min,” from which it takes its name. Continuity with the traditions of the distant past in Thuringia are established by relating a fairy-tale courtship between a man and a beautiful woman on the river Saale. (There are no princes in socialism). Pictures from the Middle Ages accompany the story. Then a male voice sings:

Du bist min, ich bin din
des solt du gewis sin
du bist beslozen
in minem herzen,
verlorn ist das sluzzelin:
du muost immer drinne sin.5

Consistent with the SED’s efforts to encourage Heimat tourism in the sixties, the film continues as a travelogue.6 The first aerial shots, reminiscent of the opening helicopter shots of Salzburg in Robert Wise’s The Sound of Music (1965), sweep romantically up the Baltic coast of the island of Usedom.7 The camera then focuses in on a woman on the beach, who represents the narrator expressing nostalgia for her “beloved” island. Here, the female narrator recites “Du bist min.”8

This poem is unusual for a Minnesang composition in that it was written by a woman of high rank, perhaps in service to the church, who refused the advances of her clergyman teacher.9 However, in the film, it is first portrayed in the reverse: a man’s love for a woman. The poem also functions as the overarching theme of Thorndike’s diary and of the film. In this regard, the love object is not a person, but rather the love lost and gained in the struggle with a Heimat in transition. First, the female narrator talks of a past love that will be remembered. This aspect refers to her love of her pre-war Heimat, now Poland,
from which she was expelled. It also expresses her love of her new Heimat. Here we have a woman talking to and of her Heimat via the song “Du bist min,” rather than the traditional man embracing his feminine Heimat. This alone had the potential to rupture existing notions of Heimat, since it threatened to separate the gendered object from that of the natural, regional, rural landscape.10

Ironically, it was the narrator, Christine von Santen, who garnered the most criticism in East German film reviews. Repeatedly, critics identified the film’s only weakness to be her voice. “Ihre oft ins Sentimentale abrutschende Erzählarth steht im merkwürdigen Gegensatz zur modernen Filmtechnik” (Kasselt 5). The same review criticizes Annelie Thorndike’s script for failing to avoid the dangers of subjectivity. Despite what could be called the film’s communal subjective tone, multiple reviewers believed that the diary form of personal narrative threatened to destabilize the objective vision of the communist individual within socialism.11

This differs, for example, from Morgner’s combination of fantastic elements with Minnesang in her Trobadora Beatriz; Thorndike does not rupture the existing institutional discourse. The narrator remains the same throughout the film, and relates her own personal experience. Unlike socialist feminists like Wolf and Morgner, Thorndike remains the female socialist of the earlier generation who places revolution and socialism before emancipation. In the end, Thorndike’s personal narrative is one that merely adds a socialist woman’s traditional experience to the existing official, socialist-realist historical narrative.

Despite the personal nature of the material, the narrator’s voice often functions as the objective communist “we” rather than the subjective “I.” This technique simultaneously lends the film a sense of “authenticity” and “disindividualization” (Blickle 82). Nor is this subjective voice anything new to the Heimat tradition. Confino describes the tone of Heimat books (Heimatbücher) at the turn of the twentieth century as “personal and direct,” even “sentimental and gushy” (40–41). Moreover, the opening scene equates woman with nature. The helicopter shots focus on a female figure on the beach looking out to sea. At first, it is not clear that this is the narrator. There is no close-up to establish her as individual. The camera records the object below. Consequently, the female figure remains associated with her natural surroundings. The collapsing of these two characters continues as the narrator reads with a disembodied voice throughout the film’s other landscape shots, including those of Burgk Castle in Thuringia and a water skier on the neighboring lake. Later in the film, we see an aerial shot of Moritzburg Hunting Castle outside of Dresden. At times, it seems the countryside is speaking with a feminine voice. A slippage occurs here between this voice declaring love to the Heimat and it speaking as Heimat. Again, as Confino states above, this is typical of the Heimat tradition, in which women populated the Heimat and also completed the trinity—Heimat, wife, and child (49). In the film, the travelogue definition of East German homeland establishes it as a utopian natural landscape, a place that is at once an ideal and no place, one without history. The narrator’s love of her new home and its landscape transcends historical time, much like the camera’s all-encompassing view.12

The emphasis on the natural contrasts with both the urban Heimat of the Berlin films and the predominance of human effort and the social in policy statements of the time. In 1955, Fritz Lange, the Minister of Culture, stressed that nature is important in a communist Heimat, but the individual stands at the center and changes nature through
work (Riesenberger 327). Further K. Czoksummarizedten years of heated discussions regarding Heimatin 1962:

—Heimat wird nicht als der natürliche, sondern vor allem als der soziale Lebensbereich verstanden; sie muß nicht identisch mit dem Geburtsort sein; [...]  
—Heimat ist nicht passiv, sondern aktiv; sie äußert sich “in der Mitarbeit beim Aufbau des Sozialismus der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik und in der Bereitschaft, unseren Arbeiter- und Bauern-Staat zu verteidigen.” (quoted in Riesenberger 328)

Czok effectively disassociates Heimat from the individual’s identification with natural space and replaces it with human/socialist interaction. But the portrayal of nature contributes to a specific strategy in Dubist min. With the West inaccessible after 1961, these images supplant traditional German Heimat iconography with that of GDR iconography. “Father” Rhine, the Lorelei, the alpine regions and castles, are replaced with the GDR’s own castles, mountainous regions, and the Baltic. Bach and Beethoven play in the background. A directive from 1956 stated that a “narrower” or “broader” Heimat was not the issue, but rather “our Heimat is the German Democratic Republic” (Riesenberger 328). The vision of Heimat is not yet the regional one that would be underscored by Günter Lange in 1973 or that Blunk addresses in his discussion of the use of “advertising spots” in Weil ich dich liebe (1970) to promote the “Mecklenburg experience” (211). Blunk does focus on the attempt to solidify “the concept of Heimat-GDR as a natural paradise” in that film. Du bist min advertises the entire GDR, and, importantly, identification with a relocated, natural beauty.

The ahistorical notion of Heimat is emphasized in the film’s portrayal of Volkstümlichkeit. Here it is important to highlight the film’s reconciliation of the past with the future. The film’s content focuses on combining the notion of a place to work on and also to live in that Boa and Palfreyman describe. The diary entries present reconstruction and anti-fascist narratives along with examples of an East German industrial miracle containing typical illustrations of the male-dominated brown coal industry and power plants: Schwarze Pumpe, EKO in Eisenhüttenstadt, etc. (Annelie Thorndike, “Storyboard” 80). In addition, the film functions much as the Heimatkundemuseen, or local homeland museums expanded under the National Socialists, which the Soviet administration chose to keep open in 1945 in order to provide for the foundations of a Marxist-Leninist national history (Riesenberger 321). Rather than the romanticized and kitschy notion of German nobility, displayed in so many National Socialist entertainment films of the thirties and forties, the film establishes continuity with past generations through ideal images of traditional, working women. Instead of Germania, we meet the fish cleaner Mother Labahn of Usedom. In another scene, we see the cake bakers of Mackenrode; we also watch tobacco women processing tobacco by hand. All represent the artisans and workers common to a socialist historical narrative, but they represent non-mechanized, female labor. Certainly, the male worker, scientist, and fisherman are all present, but so are many women carrying on rural and local traditions of labor. In addition, maternal genealogy provides a firm rootedness with an ancestral past. According to the narrator, Mother Labahn comes from a long, long line of Labahns. The narrator suggests that Mother Labahn could be her mother, or her grandmother, or her great grandmother.

The narrator having already lodged the father figures of the country or new “Fatherland” firmly in the progressive present and future via her congratulatory letters,
Mother Labahn now becomes the mother of the socialist homeland. And despite promises of emancipation, the film’s women remain in traditional roles both at work and in the home. In this way, they assuage the alienation of men in a socialist modernity by remaining outside of (urban) history. These women do not work in factories, like the women who challenge the space of the male worker. Contrasted with the tensions of the urban Heimat, East German rural areas were feminized and functioned as an “idealized premodern world” much like they did in the 1880s (Blickle 90). In addition, both Boa and Palfreyman and Confino discuss the establishment of the Heimatfront (home front) during World War I. This term referred specifically to the location of safety back home occupied by the wife or mother as opposed to the “Fatherland for which men fight and die in foreign fields” (Boa and Palfreyman 3). Fatherland and maternal Heimat united to fight against both internal and external aggressors. It is not a stretch to associate pieces of this film’s vision with an earlier coupling of “mother, nature, and Heimat” that the National Socialists appropriated and made a central piece of their propaganda (93). In East Germany, the enemy was redefined as capitalism and the socialist Heimat was defined by class. *Dubistmin* promises the best of a socialist future and of a nostalgic past reconciled through the retention of traditional gender roles.

II

*Dubist min* is also interesting from the perspective of its place in 70 mm film history. 70 mm film refers to the width of the film stock, which produced a higher picture quality than 35 mm film. In the context of the Cold War, it was essential for East Germany to prove that it was making quicker advances than its West German neighbor. East Germany’s goal in the sixties to become the third country to develop its own independent 70mm film industry reflected Walter Ulbricht’s belief that the small communist nation could attain world-class status. Such high profile films would also help earn badly needed western currency. Both Ulbricht and Albert Wilkening, the technical director at DEFA in the *Studio für Spielfilme*, showed interest as early as 1956 (Vonau 425–29). By the time the project ended, a total of ten full-length DEFA films had appeared in 70mm, including *Hauptmann Florian von der Mühle* (Dir. Werner Wallroth, starring Manfred Krug, 1968), *Goya* (Dir. Konrad Wolf, 1971), *K.L.K. an P.T.X.—Die Rote Kapelle* (Dir. Horst Brandt, 1971), followed by the two science-fiction films *Signale* (Dir. Gottfried Kolditz, 1971) and *Eolomea* (Dir. Hermann Zschoche, 1972), and, lastly, *Orpheus in der Unterwelt* (Dir. Horst Bonnet, 1974).

Another key individual in the development of the GDR 70mm film industry was the German director Andrew Thorndike (1905–1979). Film scholar Günter Jordan writes that Thorndike was instrumental as a director in the fifties in bringing the ideology of the SED to the large screen (31). He is best known, together with screenwriter Annelie Thorndike, for their monumental, anti-fascist documentaries: *Du und mancher Kamerad* (1956), *Wilhelm Pieck —Das Leben unseres Präsidenten* (1951) and *Das russische Wunder I and II* (1963). Andrew Thorndike was instrumental in coordinating the efforts to bring 70mm to East Germany.

Thorndike framed the initial need for the development of a 70mm film industry in East Germany in terms of his plan to film *Das deutsche Wunder* (i.e., *Du bist min*). In 1963, Andrew Thorndike received permission from the Ministry of Culture to pursue the development of 70mm film technology in East Germany (“70-mm-Verfahren 1”). In a letter,
GDR premier Walter Ulbricht expressed great interest in the film and requested that he be consulted throughout its production (“Letter” 1). This direct intervention was necessary due to the enormous cost of the project and its subject matter. Because of Thorndike’s accomplishments as a director and the centrality of film to East German cultural production, he was given access to Russian experiments in 70mm film in the early sixties and worked with MOSKINAP, the Moscow Plant of Film Production Equipment (1). Under the auspices of the Gruppe Thorndike, the Thorndikes received approval and funding for their project, which included the acquisition of Soviet and American 70mm technology, the construction of an East German 70mm camera (the DEFA Reflex), and the production of ORWO color 70mm film material (Vonau 423–39). The initial presentation of this project to the East German public in 1965 emphasized its “experimental” nature. While this term indicated reluctance by cultural officials to commit to a particular policy decision, it also highlights an innovative activity that grouped East Germany with world leaders in this area. While the film’s content emphasizes continuity with the past, the film’s form clearly represents a masculine, socialist, technological future. Drawing upon Germany’s identity as a leader in science and technology, the film’s 70mm format highlights the communist linking of proletarian utopia with progress. Thorndike also showed early interest in the technology of 70mm film as a way for the medium to survive the growing competition from (Western) television and to remain visually interesting to the viewer (Reinert 1). Similar arguments had been made in the United States with 70mm being the successor to Cinema Scope, Cinerama, and other wide-screen formats. Once the groundwork was laid for the GDR’s 70mm industry, the already extant Gruppe Thorndike became Gruppe 67 in 1966. This film collective was devoted to making the Thorndikes’ own 70mm film for the Studio for Documentary Film. Work did not progress quickly and the group experienced a number of political, economic, and technical difficulties. Archival material suggests that the adoption of 70mm film continued to be a long and expensive project. There were also plans to have a 70mm theater in every administrative district (MM. “Horizont”). In 1969, Du bist min appeared in a limited number of theaters. Michael Englberger, Hans Joachim Funk, and Manfred Krause actually directed the film with the Thorndikes serving as overall artistic directors. The film went on to win the Special Jury Prize at the Moscow Film Festival in 1969 (Mertens).

III

While Andrew Thorndike was busy developing 70mm technology, Annelie Thorndike was working on the screenplay. The initial draft proposed in 1965 was an effort to recraft memories of the past to create and legitimize the myth of the new socialist Heimat. There writing of history was not new to Germany or East Germany, which had been doing it since the creation of the Soviet Occupational Zone in 1945. The GDR continually revised this process with each political freeze and thaw. The initial screenplay of Du bist min provided a sweeping view of German history from a socialist point of view, beginning with what Annelie Thorndike saw to be the barbarism of Tacitus’ Germania and the Hermann legend, to satirizing what she called the “Kaiser cult” around the turn of the century (Annelie Thorndike, “Brief an Genosse Hager 11–13.”) Interestingly, this strategy did not mirror the treatment of history in the Thorndikes’ preceding film Dasrussische Wunder, which began with the Russian revolution. Instead, Thorndike’s screenplay
initially started with the dawn of German culture and continued through the present and implied future. The majority of this historical narrative did not appear in the final version of the film. What is so fascinating about Annelie Thorndike’s initial screenplay drafts is that they still envisioned the German Heimat to include West and East Germany together with the exclusion of the now forbidden former East Prussia. Studies in German literature and film note a general “turn inwards” after the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, which solidified not only political but also creative borders. However, Thorndike continued to articulate the German Heimat with the familiar pre-wall dream of unification and a German-wide socialist revolution. This is borne out by the fact that the screenplay included a number of scenes not only from East Germany but also from West Germany. The main protagonist in this screenplay was to travel to Hamburg, the Ruhr Valley, Hameln, Kiel, down the Rhine and to Munich for the Oktoberfest (Annelie Thorndike, “Storyboard” 22–50). Great effort was put into gaining the necessary permits to film in the West, one that was met with very limited success. The majority of those scenes that remained in the film used stock footage.

Interestingly, while early screenplay drafts targeted the “imperialism” of the West, they simultaneously portrayed the portions of the West that belonged to the traditional Heimat myth positively. A whole section that was later cut celebrated the Lorelei and the beauty of the Rhine (Annelie Thorndike, “Die Deutschen” 3). Phrases, such as “one must see the Hofbrauhaus in Munich,” and a sentence that praised how quickly the West Germans had rebuilt acknowledged the achievements of the “other” Germans. The helicopter shots of Hameln that remained in the film portrayed its natural, idyllic, German beauty. In Thorndike’s fairy tale version, the pied piper brings the revolution to Hameln, leads the imperialist “others” out of the city, and leaves its socialist inhabitants in peace. The tension between the traditional, timeless pan-German Heimat and the reality of a divided Germany in the various screenplay drafts proved to be politically insurmountable. A letter from J. Streisand in 1965 informed the Thorndikes that their film needed extensive rewriting. In the three-page letter, Streisand emphasizes

Wenn man zeigen will, wie die Vergangenheit unserer Nation heute in den beiden deutschen Staaten fortwirkt, sollte man nicht von einzelnen Äußerungen, die in diesem oder jenem Jahrhundert über Deutschland und die Deutschen gemacht worden sind, ausgehen, sondern vom objektiven Fortwirken der positiven und reaktionären Traditionen der Vergangenheit unter den unterschiedlichsten gesellschaftlichen Verhältnissen bei uns und in Westdeutschland.... In einer bestimmten Phase pflegt jeweils eine bestimmte Klasse die Nation zu representieren und zu führen, daß es ihr auch gelingt in dieser Phase den Charakter der ganzen Nation zu beeinflussen und auszudrücken. (1)

Already, Thorndike’s reworking of German history did not comply with the officially sanctioned version of the German past. The timing of this communiqué is hardly surprisingly in light of the turbulent Eleventh Plenum of the Central Committee of the SED in December 1965, in which DEFA feature films from an entire production year were banned and the film production process was restructured. The second page of the three-page letter outlines exactly how pre-1949 socialist history should be written, creating guidelines for Thorndike to follow. Otherwise, there was little in the way of criticism until
1968. In fact, in 1967, after personal approval by Ulbricht, the Thorndikes were allowed to travel to the West to shoot some limited footage that appears in the final version of the film (Andrew Thorndike, “Letter” 1; Vonau432). Unfortunately, little other written documentation exists on the actual feedback from cultural officials. Several of Thorndike’s revised screenplays are available in the national archive, so it is possible to see how her portrayal of a socialist homeland changed over time as a result of this feedback. Vonau suggests that the fallout from the Prague Spring caused major revisions in a film that was already finished by the summer of 1968. This statement would explain the substantial changes made at Kurt Hager’s behest between the summer of 1968 and 1969, when a radically re-edited version emerged. The Thorndikes then reduced their two-part film to the more restricted homage to the new East German Heimat (Vonau 432). For instance, the twenty-minute sequence of the narrator writing at her desk was added at this time and praised several speakers at the recent seventh party congress of the SED in 1967.

In the final version, the desire to return to a united socialist “Heimat” is displaced by the formation of a new identity that corresponds with borders of East Germany as cemented by the Berlin Wall. The visual beauty that was Germany was reduced to that of East Germany, except for the shots of Hameln and Kiel. It is likely that these scenes remained due to their examples of Western imperialism. Certainly any alternate vision of a united Germany after the wall had been built was impossible within an orthodox ideology that refused to acknowledge any positive view of the “class enemy.” The planned attractive aerial shots of the western cities, rural landscape, and national landmarks had become unusable when GDR maps showed no detail of the “non-socialist world.” Interestingly, allusions to “proletarian internationalism,” which was thought to eventually dissolve the German Heimat, also disappeared from the screenplay. For example, the story of Peter from Rostock, a sailor who tried to win communist supporters in South America, was cut (Thorndike, “Die Deutschen. Gliederungsliste” 4). Finally, the addition of the conversion scene with the Russian soldier in later versions reinforced Soviet-German friendship and East Germany’s responsibility for its own homeland. However, what changed was the vision of the past and aspects of the revolutionary future, not Thorndike’s overall portrayal of women in East Germany. In the various reviews of Du bist min, which was released in time for the GDR’s twentieth birthday, the Thorndikes describe the film to be their “declaration of love” for the homeland East Germany (Funke 14). The Thorndikes would produce one more 70mm film, the 23-minute documentary Lenin in 1970, on the occasion of his 100th birthday (Vonau 433). Political support for 70mm film waned when Erich Honecker replaced Ulbricht in 1971. By 1974, it was considered to be too expensive and 70mm film production in East Germany ceased (Vonau 439).

Resurrecting this film brings new perspective on constructions of Germanness in the sixties. A gendering of the Heimat discourse helps us to better understand how past constructions of Heimat continued in East Germany and even helped to restrict progress towards true emancipation for women. This paper also approaches GDR gender studies from a new angle, one that was at a tangent to the rumblings of an unofficial, socialist feminist movement, which would blossom in full force in the seventies. The film did not seek to challenge official discourse outright or generate space to question or discuss East Germany’s “master plot” or code. It was created, after all, for the official celebration of East Germany’s twentieth birthday, and as a showpiece of GDR’s 70mm film industry. Still, the GDR’s hegemonic code did not remain static and consisted of the very discursive
contributions like *Du bist min*, which shifted and reshaped it over time. An open-minded writer might say that Annelie Thorndike was searching for a way to include women’s contributions in the foundational myth of East Germany. Yet Thorndike was unable or unwilling to think beyond her customary coded speech and imagery. Christa Wolf, Irmtraud Morgner, and other feminist socialists were to be the ones to rewrite the code from within.\(^\text{19}\)^

**Notes**

1. Annelie Thorndike did not consent to an interview for this article, citing her bad experience with interviews from the recent past, and her desire to leave her past behind.


3. The scene is an adaptation of the Soviet socialist conversion trope: “I have seen Stalin” or “I met Lenin.”

4. See Alice Jardine’s *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity* (34) and also my “Gender, Utopia, and Ostalgia.”

5. See Annelie Thorndike, “Du bist min” 7. In her notes, Annalie Thorndike also emphasized with this poem that being away from Germany is like being away from a lover. See Thorndike, “Storyboard” 22. This comment echoes past notions of woman (Germania) being married to the German Vaterland.

6. Alon Confino writes of the attempt to create a GDR Heimat identity via a competition entitled “We love our socialist Heimat” organized by the Committee for Tourism and Traveling (Komitee für Touristik und Wandern) in 1964 (109).

7. I would like to thank Rick McCormick for pointing out the reference to *The Sound of Music*.

8. In addition to the *Minnesang* poem “Du bist min,” the film also uses several Goethe poems and a selection from Johannes Becher’s *Schöne deutsche Heimat* to underscore the legitimacy of East German Heimat.

9. Seidel and Schophaus, *Einführung in das Mittelhochdeutsche* 24. The film does not even acknowledge or seem aware of the special history of this *Minnesang* poem.

10. East German author Irmtraud Morgner also employed songs attributed to the female troubadour Comptessa de Dia to create her main protagonist in the *Life and Adventures of Trobadora Beatrice* (1974). Through her female troubadour heroine, Morgner questions the status of women as the object of male desire both in the medieval institution of *minne* and in later concepts of romantic love. Her use of the fantastic to tell Beatrice’s tales does not write women into a grand historical narrative, but rather makes “historical contradictions visible” (von der Emde 90, 100–01).


12. On the portrayal of women in West German Heimat film, see Heide Fehrenbach 148–67 and Jürgen Trimborn.
For a detailed technical history of 70mm film in East Germany see Ingolf Vonau. Vonau has also been able to speak with Annelie Thorndike several times about the Thorndikes’ 70mm film project.

Krushchev had announced support of a “two-state” policy as early as 1955.

For more information, see Kramer and Soldovieri, “Censorship.” Note also that while *Du bist min* was allowed to continue with supervised changes, an experimental, feminist novel like Irmtraud Morgner’s *Rumba auf einen Herbst* was banned in 1965 and never published in East Germany. Its main focus was the criticism of continued, traditional gender roles. See von der Emde 9–12, 24.

Vonau. See also a letter from Hans Funk, the production head of Gruppe 67, to its members attesting to a “complete rethinking” of the film that resulted from this meeting (“DEFA” 1).

There were several drafts made in January of 1969. See Annelie Thorndike, “Du bist min. Änderungen” 1–3. These are proposed changes. See also “Szenarium ‘Du bist min.’” These changes came after a meeting with Kurt Hager, the Thorndikes and other personnel.

Irmtraud Morgner herself felt that the GDR was her “father-land” but not “her” country. Heimat meant something else altogether (Schwarzer 32). But that discussion belongs to a different article.

**Works Cited**


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