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SCREENING DISSENT: THE UPRISING OF 17 JUNE 1953 IN EAST GERMAN FILM

Richard Millington 

On 17 June 1953, hundreds of thousands of East German citizens took part in the first major uprising in the Eastern Bloc. Across the country, demonstrators demanded the removal of the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) regime, as well as better living and working conditions. Their protests ended under the tracks of Soviet tanks. No sooner had the dust settled, than the SED began to attempt to shape citizens perceptions of the unrest and limit the information about it accessible to them. Thus, the 1953 uprising entered the East German history books as a brief account of a 'failed fascist putsch', inspired by 'hooligans, former Nazis and CIA agents'. Given the politically sensitive nature of the subject, one might expect filmmakers to have been forbidden from addressing what was the biggest show of dissent in East German history before 1989. Dramatised scenes of the unrest did appear, however, in two films and one television mini-series in East Germany. This article examines the scenes of the uprising in these productions closely. It shows that, while filmmakers were permitted to depict the uprising, they could only do so in very vague terms. Moreover, evidence suggests that motion picture depictions of the unrest were censored much more harshly than those that appeared in literary productions. Despite its desire to take control of the narrative of 17 June 1953, screening such dissent was apparently almost unpalatable for the SED regime.

Introduction

Cinema and television were hugely popular sources of entertainment in East Germany. In 1960 alone, East German cinemas staged 2.5 million film screenings and recorded almost 238 million visitors at a time when the population numbered just over 17 million. Despite the fact that the number of recorded cinemagoers steadily dropped, official figures still reveal an average of around 50 million cinema

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visits per year in the late 1980s. By comparison, the number of annual theatre visits never surpassed 17 million; music concerts attracted between 6 and 7 million people per year. The drop off in cinema box office receipts can be attributed to the fact that more and more citizens bought televisions and stayed at home for their entertainment; whereas only sixteen percent of households in 1960 boasted a set, this figure had risen to sixty percent in 1970. By 1985, ninety-three percent of East German households could enjoy television schedules made up of news, political, sports and cultural programmes.¹

The popularity of film and television amongst East Germans meant that the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) regime scrutinised and censored the respective production processes of both more harshly than other forms of cultural production.² With the SED's rigorous approach to film and television control in mind, it is surprising that the makers of the films *Schlösser und Katen* (*Castles and Cottages*, 1957) and *Geschichten jener Nacht* (*Stories of that Night*, 1967), and the television drama *Auf der Suche nach Gatt* (*Searching for Gatt*, 1976) were permitted to feature in their productions scenes depicting the uprising of 17 June 1953, the greatest show of popular dissent against the regime in the state's history before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. On that day in 1953, hundreds of thousands of citizens demonstrated across the country and demanded the removal of the SED from power, as well as better living and working conditions. In many places there were also calls for the reunification of Germany. Citizens' protests were, however, short lived; in the early afternoon of 17 June, Soviet tanks and troops arrived to retake control. Protesters' angry words and flying cobblestones were no match for machine gun bullets.³

This article examines the depictions of the uprising of 17 June 1953 that appeared in *Schlösser und Katen* (1957), *Geschichten jener Nacht* (1967), and *Auf der Suche nach Gatt* (1976). It shows that, while filmmakers were permitted to present the protests in their productions, they could only do so in very vague terms. Little information or specific details about the causes, course and aftermath of the uprising appeared and each depiction had to adhere strictly to the SED regime's official version of events. That said, in some instances, filmmakers were not even permitted to include details that had appeared in the Party's account of the unrest. Significantly, comparison of these films with literary portrayals of 1953 published in East Germany shows that cinematic representations of the uprising were subjected to much harsher restrictions than literary ones. Moreover, the evidence suggests that filmmakers knew that they would be subjected to much harsher censorship than their literary counterparts. In their cinematic treatments of novels featuring scenes of 17 June 1953 many significantly pared down the detail of these scenes or omitted them altogether from their productions.

The 'attempted fascist putsch'

The SED did not censor all mention of the uprising of 17 June 1953 in the public sphere. The Party could not simply expunge the events from the state's history; too many of its citizens had experienced the unrest for the regime to deny its occurrence. To do so would have bordered on the ridiculous and the absurd.

Moreover, citizens born after 1953 were able to learn about the uprising through the West German broadcast media, to which the majority had access. Shortly after the unrest, West German politicians declared 17 June a national day of remembrance called the 'Day of German Unity'. They used this annual occasion to make speeches on radio and television in which they lauded the 'People's Uprising' when East Germans had demonstrated for 'freedom and democracy'.⁴ Such broadcasts, as well as historical documentaries produced by West German channels, made generations of East Germans aware of the uprising and annually reminded them of its occurrence, thereby maintaining it in their historical consciousness. Moreover, these programmes prompted annual discussions of the uprising between relatives and trusted friends in East Germany.⁵

Ultimately, however, the Party was compelled to address the matter of the uprising openly because the demonstrations constituted a challenge to the regime's legitimacy: the very workers and peasants whom the SED claimed to represent had risen up and demanded its removal from power. The regime simply had to deal with this deficit in its self-legitimation.⁶ Thus, the Party claimed that the events of 17 June 1953 constituted an 'attempted fascist putsch'; West German and CIA agents had apparently masterminded this bid to 'roll back' East Germany.⁷ This interpretation of the unrest appeared in the East German print media, school textbooks and history books until the demise of the regime in 1989. Moreover, to counter the West German 'external collective memory' of 1953 broadcast annually into the homes of East Germans, the SED attempted to shape and restrict its citizens' awareness of the uprising.⁸ The Party's account of the unrest was brief and lacked detail; it was often only covered in three or four paragraphs in the regime's history books. The official version of events vaguely stated, for example, that protests had occurred in 'East Berlin and a few other cities'. Moreover, the scale of the uprising was consistently downplayed; 'only 272' out of ten thousand localities had seen unrest.⁹ The Party also underreported the involvement of Soviet troops on 17 June 1953. It claimed that armed intervention had not been necessary to quell the protests. Instead, the working class and the vast majority of the East German population, under the leadership of the SED and with the 'support' of Soviet troops, had put an end to the unrest.¹⁰ The nature of the Soviet intervention was simply described as 'determined' and 'essential to protect the achievements of German workers and peasants'.¹¹

Screening the uprising of 17 June 1953

The three productions in which scenes of 17 June 1953 appeared are all historical dramas. *Schlösser und Katen* (1957) recounts a story of intrigue about the biological father of a local girl in the village of Holzendorf in rural Mecklenburg and is set against the background of political change and collectivization in East Germany from 1945 to 1953. *Geschichten jener Nacht* (1967) is a propaganda piece which aims to convince audiences of the necessity of the Berlin Wall. The film comprises four individual 'episodes', each recounting the individual experiences of four members of the East German 'worker's militia' as they secure the East-West Berlin border in the early hours of 13 August 1961 in preparation for the construction of

the Wall. *Auf der Suche nach Gatt* (1976) is a two-part television adaptation of Erik Neutsch's 1973 novel about the private and political lives of miner-turned-journalist Eberhard Gatt from 1949 to the late 1960s.

Though East Germany's state-owned film studio *Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft* (DEFA) was well known for creating its own genre of films that addressed life in contemporary society (*Gegenwartsfilme*), films focusing on historical events also played an essential role in the communication of the regime's message.¹² Works set before and during the Second World War such as the two Ernst Thälmann films *Sohn seiner Klasse* (*Son of his Class*, 1954) and *Führer seiner Klasse* (*Leader of his Class*, 1955), as well as *Nackt unter Wölfen* (*Naked among Wolves*, 1963) and *Ich war neunzehn* (*I was nineteen*, 1968), aimed, for example, to consolidate in the minds of viewers the Party's claim to represent antifascist ideals in the present.¹³ Taking DEFA's record of historical films into account, as well as the fact that cinematic productions are useful tools for promoting affective truths over historical fact, one might have expected numerous motion picture depictions of the uprising of 17 June 1953 to have been produced in East Germany.¹⁴ The fact that only three productions appeared over the forty years of the state's existence suggests two things. First, filmmakers were rather reluctant to take on the subject. Second, as much as the regime recognised the power of historical films in communicating its ideology, when it came to 17 June 1953 there was apparently a fine balancing act between the Party's desire to promote its own version of the events and the consequences of drawing citizens' attention to the uprising. After all, the latter could lead to them questioning their parents or grandparents about the reality of what had happened or even (and perhaps worse) seeking answers from the West German broadcast media.¹⁵

The portrayals of the uprising in these films did not stray from the Party's line of a 'fascist' attempt to overthrow the East German regime. Moreover, the brevity with which the regime's history books dealt with the uprising was reflected in these cinematic depictions. In *Schlösser und Katen* (1957) the events of 17 June 1953 take up only 18 of the film's 195 minutes. The third episode of *Geschichten jener Nacht* (1967), titled 'Materna', recounts the experiences of the bricklayer Materna in the early 1950s. His recollection of the uprising lasts less than two of the 14 minutes in this episode. Eberhard Gatt's experiences of the 1953 uprising take up just under 5 minutes of the 180-minute running time of the television drama *Auf der Suche nach Gatt* (1976).

The earlier the film's production, however, the more explicit its depiction of the unrest as a Western-inspired putsch was. At the root of this development was the fact that the SED mitigated its anti-Western rhetoric in the mid-1960s as it sought international recognition. The Party consequently adopted a more restrained approach to West Germany in its propaganda.¹⁶ Thus, *Schlösser und Katen* (1957), having been made prior to this development, features the most comprehensive portrayal of the uprising as a Western-led attempt to 'roll back' East Germany. The film's depiction of the unrest begins with the return of Ekkehart Bröker from the West. Ekkehart is the son of the former superintendent of the feudal estate on which the village of Holzendorf found itself before the expulsion of the ruling count and countess by the Soviet authorities in 1945. Ekkehart tells his father

(who has remained loyal to his former feudal masters) that 'Day X begins in two hours'. The SED regime employed the term 'Day X' (*Tag X*) to denote the day on which the West supposedly planned to invade East Germany. After the uprising, the phrase became inextricably linked in East German propaganda with the events of 17 June 1953. Interestingly, the original script shows that Ekkehart was to say simply 'The day begins in two hours'. This was thus later altered to further cement in viewers' minds the idea of 17 June 1953 as 'Day X'.¹⁷ After arriving in Holzendorf, Ekkehart directs his father to read a Western newspaper article about the success of the East German economy, thus implying that the West's decision to instigate the uprising is motivated by a desire to prevent the triumph of the SED's project. This claim also featured in the regime's official account of the events.¹⁸ Bröker Sr rushes to the office of Christel Sikura, a refugee from East Prussia who has since become the head of the local collective farm. Once there he tells her about what is about to happen and advises her that she will soon be able to return to her homeland, to which she retorts 'so, you are one of those'. The insinuation here is that Bröker is 'one of those' people who wants to see East Prussia returned to German control, in other words, a 'fascist' revanchist.

In *Geschichten jener Nacht* (1967), however, the charge that the West instigated the uprising is more subtle. No explicit active Western involvement in staging the unrest is depicted; there is no Ekkehart Bröker in this film, coming over from the West to start the ball rolling. Instead, the bricklayer Materna recounts that on 17 June 1953 the radio in the canteen of his building site was tuned to the Western station RIAS which was broadcasting calls for workers to support the strikes in East Berlin.¹⁹ In its account of the unrest, the SED claimed that RIAS' broadcasts about the demonstrations in the East German capital on 16 June 1953 were key to inciting protests across the country the following day.²⁰ Later in the film, Materna recalls that there was a meeting on the building site in the evening and that someone was singing the 'Deutschlandlied' (Germany Song). The insinuation here is ambiguous. The Nazis adopted the first stanza of the 'Deutschlandlied' (beginning 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles') as their national anthem, while West Germany used the third stanza of the same song as its anthem.²¹ There are further hints to West Germany in the clothing that some of the men gathered at the building site are wearing. They are not dressed in traditional East German white workers overalls. Instead, they are wearing t-shirts and sporting slicked-back Western hairstyles. These men are the 'Western provocateurs' of the regime's narrative of the uprising, though the film never explicitly refers to them as such. Nine years later, fashion was the only allusion in *Auf der Suche nach Gatt* (1976) to the alleged Western role in the uprising. Although Gatt's newspaper editor tells him that the 'putsch is being orchestrated', the only hint of the West's alleged involvement is the clothing that the young men ransacking buildings and burning files are wearing. They are dressed in American-style leather jackets and t-shirts with pictures of palm trees on them. These images evoke photographs of 'Western provocateurs' published by the East German media in 1953 which showed young men wearing t-shirts with cowboys on them. More generally, depiction of rioters in American fashion fed into and supplemented the anti-American narrative that ran through much of the regime's anti-Western propaganda.²²

Developments in the Party's narrative of the uprising over time also led to differences in the manner in which these productions portrayed ordinary East Germans' involvement in the unrest. At first, the regime's account reported that Western agents succeeded in duping five percent of the East German population into demonstrating. These citizens apparently quickly realised the error of their ways and returned to work.²³ This detail is reflected in *Schlösser und Katen* (1957) when Bröker Sr conspires with a number of farmers and leads them in a verbal confrontation with local Party representatives in Holzendorf. Once the Party members reveal, however, that Christel Sikura has been murdered, Bröker (Christel's killer) melts away and the farmers disperse as soon as they realise who the murderer is. The unrest in the village comes to an end.

As the uprising moved further and further into the past, however, so the regime's account played down the extent to which citizens participated in the protests. In fact, by 1979, East German history books were claiming that the only people involved were 'counterrevolutionary forces' and 'fascists'. Thus, in *Geschichten jener Nacht* (1967) citizens are not involved in the unrest. A 1966 version of the script had intended that the film would show workers striking on Materna's building site.²⁴ The censor demanded, however, that 'The scene of 17 June 1953 ought to make clear that class-conscious workers withstood the fascist provocation'.²⁵ Though the censor's comment can be clearly linked to developments in the Party's narrative of the uprising, it cannot be discounted that what happened at the eleventh plenary of the SED Central Committee in December 1965 also played a role here. After a period of cultural reform and liberalisation in the early 1960s, SED hard-liners struck back at this conference and made speech after speech denouncing cultural figures and accusing them of endangering the success of the regime's political project. SED leader Walter Ulbricht agreed. The eleventh plenary ushered in a new period of harsh censorship and caution on the part of artists.²⁶ Thus, in the final film Materna narrates that, regardless of RIAS's best attempts, his colleagues remained calm. At the meeting on the building site on the evening of 17 June 1953, we see some workers listening to someone speaking on a podium. Yet many are holding back from the main gathering. The only people taking active part, shouting, and gesticulating are men in Western clothing. There are similar scenes in *Auf der Suche nach Gatt* (1976). The only protagonists we see ransacking a Party building are dressed in Western fashions. The film does show East German citizens on the streets, but they are milling about aimlessly and looking confused by what is happening. The crowd is made up of women and old men. There are no workers to be seen, presumably because they have all remained in their factories. When the destruction begins, the onlookers run away en masse. The message is clear: no East German citizens were or wanted to be involved in the unrest.

The most consistent aspect over time of the SED regime's account of the uprising of 17 June 1953 was its extremely vague description of the intervention of Soviet troops. History books often simply referred in no more than one or two sentences to the 'determined' action of the Soviet 'friends'.²⁷ It is thus very surprising to see Soviet tanks and troops feature in *Schlösser und Katen* (1957). They appear in a scene where Bröker Sr is attempting to escape by motorbike across the

inner-German border. Coming to a road junction, a police officer orders him to turn back. Behind the officer, two tanks and a lorry carrying troops move down the road. Later, Bröker is prevented from crossing the same road by four troop-filled lorries hurtling past. Though the film includes no scenes of troops actively putting the uprising down (in fact, a group of 'class-conscious' villagers arrest 'Western provocateur' Ekkehart Bröker themselves), it is still striking to see Soviet tanks thundering across the screen for this was a detail of the uprising so sensitive that it was essentially a taboo in East Germany.

Significantly, an earlier treatment of *Schlösser und Katen* (1957) shows that a scene with a Soviet soldier was cut from the final script. In this scene, the soldier appeared after two East German border guards arrest a character called Anton, whom they suspect of having been involved in the unrest. The Soviet soldier was to have held the grinning Anton's hands in his own and seen the 'worn hands of a farmworker'. The soldier was to have reacted to this sight with 'a little amazement' and then looked at the border guards, who were to have 'lowered their eyes in great shame'. Anton was to then do the same, his smile gone. After this, the soldier was to have accompanied the guards as they take Anton away.²⁸ One cannot help but think that the rather cryptic message here was that the East German authorities (as represented by the border guards) and workers (Anton) had let the Soviets down by allowing the uprising to happen. In the final film, however, only the border guards are shown on screen. It may be that the implicit criticism of the regime communicated in this scene was too much for the censor. It cannot also be discounted that the inclusion of a Soviet soldier taking active, if non-violent, part in the quelling of the uprising was also a step too far for the authorities. Although we do see tanks and troop-filled lorries in the final film, we do not see them in action. They simply race across the screen and are gone, phantoms disappearing into the early evening darkness. Interestingly, Erwin Geschonnek, who played Bröker Sr in the film, privately complained after the film's release that the arrival of the Soviet troops was one of many 'unrealistic scenes' in the production. Geschonnek did not elaborate on how the depiction could have been made more realistic.²⁹ The scene was, however, a little too close to reality for the censor. Their concerns delayed the release of the film for much of 1956. It is notable that the film was finally granted permission to be screened on 19 November 1956, just a week after Soviet tanks had rolled into Budapest and crushed the Hungarian uprising. Bernd Stöver has surmised that the fact that the decision to permit the film to be screened with this scene came at this point in time suggests that the East German regime wanted to remind its citizens of what had happened when they had had tried to stage their own uprising three years earlier.³⁰

A decade later, censors apparently judged any reference to tanks in *Geschichten jener Nacht* (1967) a step too far. In an early version of the script Materna was to narrate: 'Someone shouted: tanks! The hooligans suddenly disappeared'.³¹ In a further version, Materna states 'someone said: Soviet tanks are on the move'.³² In the final version, however, the scenes of the uprising end with Materna being choked unconscious by a man with whom he gets into an argument. There is absolutely no mention of tanks. Despite this, the programme published to accompany the production stated in its summary of the film, 'When Soviet tanks came, the

rioters disappeared'.³³ This reference suggests that, despite the best efforts of the regime, awareness of the Soviet intervention persisted amongst the population. Nevertheless, there is no depiction of or allusion to Soviet tanks or troops in *Auf der Suche nach Gatt* (1976).

Though these film and television depictions of the uprising remained within the general parameters of the SED's version of events, they did add detail regarding the geographical extent of the unrest. The Party's account focused on the events in East Berlin in an attempt to reduce the scale of the unrest in the minds of citizens. Yet none of these productions are set in East Berlin. *Schlösser und Katen* (1957) takes place in a rural village in Mecklenburg. Moreover, in one scene, we hear on the radio that there are protests in 'Magdeburg and rural parishes'. The fact that this film shows and alludes to unrest in rural villages is significant. The account of the uprising in East German history books did not mention trouble in rural areas. In fact, the phrase 'East Berlin and a few other cities' that appeared in the Party's version indicated that the uprising was an urban affair. The two later productions featuring scenes of the unrest are vaguer about their locations, but they nevertheless show unrest in cities other than East Berlin. The location of Materna's building site in *Geschichten jener Nacht* (1967) is not made clear. The first draft of the script for the film had stated that Halle was the setting.³⁴ Yet a revised version of the script replaced Halle with a generic 'industrial city in central Germany'.³⁵ Although the final film makes clear that Materna did not experience the uprising in East Berlin (he reports that he heard about strikes in the capital on the radio), the only indication of the setting of this episode comes when Materna recounts that 'this city ... has been destroyed six times and rebuilt six times'. The film shows no identifiable landmarks to enable the viewer to deduce the location. The implication is that this is Anytown, East Germany. Though the censor might have intended to prevent depiction of the uprising in a specific location, the ultimate effect of this is that it shows the audience that the unrest could have happened wherever they lived. Similarly, the city where Eberhard Gatt experiences the uprising is also not identified, though it is clear from the early story that it is an industrial city in the district of Halle. The lack of specificity regarding the locations featured in these later productions was concomitant with a move in the 1960s towards the deletion of any allusion to the geographical scale of the uprising in the Party's official account, however brief and vague this might have been in the first place.³⁶

A further interesting thing to consider when examining clashes between the depictions of 17 June 1953 in these productions and the Party's version of events is the fact that these films were not just screened in the years of their release. *Geschichten jener Nacht* (1967), for example, was shown at least once or twice a year for a few days at a time in East German cinemas. *Auf der Suche nach Gatt* (1976) was also occasionally repeated on East German television.³⁷ Most significant, however, is the fact that *Schlösser und Katen* (1957) was re-released in 1974 and 1984 to commemorate the twenty-fifth and thirty-fifth anniversaries respectively of the founding of East Germany.³⁸ The film was one of a number of DEFA films re-released on these occasions for their '... special significance in the history of DEFA as outstanding examples of artistic endeavor ... and which resonated

with the public'.³⁹ Thus, cinema-goers in these years were exposed to an account of 17 June 1953 that included scenes of rural unrest and the arrival of Soviet troops, details that clashed with the account of the uprising then available to them in contemporary history books and which their children were perhaps learning at school. It is tempting to argue that this clash was a result of the second SED leader Erich Honecker's announcement in 1971 that there would be 'no taboos in the field of art or literature'.⁴⁰ It is debatable, however, whether this extended to the uprising of 17 June 1953, for throughout Erich Honecker's reign as leader from 1971 to 1989, no explicit mention of the date '17 June 1953' was permitted to appear in the state's print media. When occasional reference was made to the uprising (usually in rebuttals of Western media claims about the nature of the unrest), various vague euphemisms were employed, such as 'the day on which the Cold Warriors in West Berlin were handed a miserable defeat'.⁴¹ Moreover, the expatriation of the dissident singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann in 1976 brought to an end any cultural liberalization that did occur.⁴² Can we conclude, then, that in the case of the re-releases of *Schlösser und Katen* (1957) in 1974 and 1984, culture trumped politics? To an extent, yes; but the facts that the uprising constituted barely a tenth of the film's total running time and that it was only in cinemas for a short time around the anniversaries of the founding of the state may have appeased officials.

Comparing the scenes of 17 June 1953 in these motion picture productions with those that appeared in East German literature proves interesting and fruitful. Although only two films and one television drama depicted the 1953 unrest, the uprising featured in up to 100 novels published in East Germany. The disparity in these numbers is perhaps unsurprising, given the time and money needed to produce a film as opposed to a novel. What is striking, however, is that censorship of the scenes of the unrest in these novels was far less strict in comparison to the restrictions to which these films were subjected. Although reference to geographical location was removed from *Geschichten jener Nacht* (1967), no such demands were made of authors who depicted or alluded to unrest in Halle, Leipzig, Schwedt, Eisenhüttenstadt, Mansfeld, Dessau, Bitterfeld, Sangershausen and Magdeburg.⁴³ Moreover, the censor who implored the writers of *Geschichten jener Nacht* (1967) to make plain that 'class-conscious workers' withstood the 'fascist provocation' clearly did not work on the novels *Die Söhne der Wölfe* (*The Sons of the Wolves*, 1966) or *Gewalt und Zärtlichkeit* (*Violence and Tenderness*, 1974). In the former, Fritz Selbmann describes a protest taking place as 'a genuine workers' demonstration' and writes 'not everything about the working quotas was as it should be'.⁴⁴ In the latter, Horst Bastian also describes workers demonstrating 'with demands written on cardboard – "Stop the Quotas!"', "Work – Yes, Work Till You Drop – No!"'⁴⁵ Significantly, a treatment prepared in 1976 for a possible film version of *Die Söhne der Wölfe* (1966) included no striking workers in its depiction of the uprising; only 'provocateurs' and 'work shirkers' were to be shown.⁴⁶ The fact that striking workers appeared in the novel, but were not to appear in the film, suggests that filmmakers were aware of what could and could not be screened in a cinematic portrayal of the uprising. This supports

the conclusion that the censorship process really began with the artist themselves.⁴⁷ As East German film director Wolfgang Kohlhaase recalled, 'Censorship was not exercised by an office but existed as a permanent state of mind'.⁴⁸ Erich Honecker phrased this rather differently when he spoke after the fall of the regime: 'The press was not censored. Radio and television were not censored. Things were only shaped by the individual's sense of responsibility'.⁴⁹ The 'individual's sense of responsibility' to which Honecker referred can be understood as the extent to which that individual was prepared to challenge the Party's authority.

The reactions of literary censors to references to the Soviet intervention in these novels also differed to those of their peers in film censorship. The Soviet armed forces feature in scenes of the uprising in many of these novels. Although no author depicted the active intervention of Soviet troops (the mere presence of tanks is often enough to disperse protesters in the stories), censors never advised a novelist to remove them altogether. This contrasts sharply with the deletion of references to tanks in *Geschichten jener Nacht* (1967) and the delay to the approval of *Schlösser und Katen* (1957) due to its depiction of the arrival of Soviet troops. Interestingly, the 1970 novelisation of *Schlösser und Katen* (1957) mentioned 'columns of trucks, headlight after headlight' moving along country lanes in the midst of the uprising.⁵⁰ Admittedly, this is a very vague allusion to the arrival of Soviet troops, but an allusion nonetheless and one that would not have been lost on any East German citizen with the slightest knowledge of the Soviet intervention on 17 June 1953. Yet the literary censor made no reference to it in their report. In fact, they praised the 'convincing' account of the 'attempted putsch of July [sic] 1953'.⁵¹ Furthermore, filmmakers were apparently averse to including scenes of the Soviet intervention in their productions, even if the novels upon which they were based included this aspect of the uprising. Although no Soviet troops appear on screen in *Auf der Suche nach Gatt* (1976) and there is no verbal reference made to them, the 1973 novel on which the drama is based includes the line: 'The Red Army intervened, gun turrets and Soviet stars'.⁵² Moreover, a planned film of the novel *Gewalt und Zärtlichkeit* (1974) also omitted the book's depiction of the Soviet intervention. Although in the novel only one Soviet soldier appears and tells the demonstrators to go home or else be arrested, this scene and any reference to the Soviet intervention did not feature in three treatments of a possible film which was ultimately never made.⁵³

In the case of the film *Beschreibung eines Sommers* (1962), evidence suggests that some filmmakers were loathe to include depictions of 17 June 1953 at all, even if the source novel did so. This film was based on the 1961 novel by Karl-Heinz Jakobs. In his novel, Jakobs describes over four pages the experiences of the uprising of the main character Tom. The day is key to Tom's development from someone who cares little for socialism to someone who actively supports the SED.⁵⁴ Yet the cinematic version of the story released in 1962 does not include these scenes at all. The film's preliminary treatments show that there was never any intention to include the uprising in the film.⁵⁵

Conclusion

The SED had a vested interest in permitting filmmakers to address the uprising of 17 June 1953. The Party had to take control of the narrative of the uprising in order to plug the gaping hole that it had left in the regime's self-legitimation. That said, the depictions of the uprising of 17 June 1953 that featured in the DEFA films *Schlösser und Katen* (1957) and *Geschichten jener Nacht* (1967), and the television drama *Auf der Suche nach Gatt* (1976) remained within the parameters of the SED's official version of the events. None portrayed the unrest as anything other than an attempted putsch which had been inspired and directed by the West. Moreover, developments in and adjustments to the Party's account of the unrest over time were also mirrored in these motion picture portrayals. These productions did, however, add some geographical detail to the regime's narrative of the uprising. *Schlösser und Katen* (1957) made clear that there was some unrest in rural areas. Moreover, the mere fact that *Geschichten jener Nacht* (1967) and *Auf der Suche nach Gatt* (1976) were not set in East Berlin showed audiences that the protests were more widespread than the history books revealed. That citizens in the 1970s and 1980s were also able to go to the cinema to watch *Schlösser und Katen* (1957) also meant that they were exposed to details about the uprising that had been hushed up in contemporary history books.

Comparison of the censorship of the scenes of 17 June 1953 in these films with that which literary portrayals underwent shows that cinematic portrayals of the unrest were subjected to much harsher restrictions. Filmmakers were not permitted to expand upon and embellish the Party's official version of events to the same extent that authors could. Moreover, even details that appeared in the regime's account of the uprising, such as the presence of the Soviet armed forces during the uprising, were removed from *Geschichten jener Nacht* (1967). It is clear that, if the regime were to permit depiction of the uprising in motion pictures, then portrayal of the unrest had to be in a scaled back and pared down form, even to that which appeared in the state's own history books. This was no doubt due to the huge numbers of citizens that such films could reach. In the year after the release of *Schlösser und Katen* (1957), just over three million East Germans had seen it. By 1985, another one million had viewed the film upon its later re-releases.⁵⁶ Almost 1.2 million people had seen *Geschichten jener Nacht* (1967) by 1985.⁵⁷ Authors could only dream of such numbers of citizens accessing their works. Only extremely rarely did print runs reach into the hundreds of thousands.⁵⁸ Yet filmmakers were also averse to attempting to film accounts of the uprising. The paucity of motion picture depictions of 1953 is evidence of this. Moreover, analysis of the film adaptations of novels featuring the unrest reveals that filmmakers were aware of what they could and could not screen about it, to the point that some omitted the scenes altogether. The matter of 17 June 1953 may have been acceptable (within certain parameters) for authors and literary censors alike, but when it came to screening the biggest show of dissent in the nation's history, filmmakers and cinematic censors simply found it unpalatable.

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Notes

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