Document généré le 2 mai 2024 05:48

Cinémas
Revue d'études cinématographiques
Journal of Film Studies

CiNéMAS

On the Road to the New Beginning: History and Utopia in Frank Beyer's *Karbid und Sauerampfer* (*Carbide and Sorrel*)

Sur la route d'un nouveau commencement. Histoire et utopie dans *Carbide und Sauerampfer (Carbure et oseille)* de Frank Beyer

Thomas Lindenberger

Volume 18, numéro 1, automne 2007

Mémoires de l'Allemagne divisée. Autour de la DEFA

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/017848ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.7202/017848ar

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Éditeur(s)

Cinémas

ISSN

1181-6945 (imprimé)
1705-6500 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Lindenberger, T. (2007). On the Road to the New Beginning: History and Utopia in Frank Beyer's *Karbid und Sauerampfer* (*Carbide and Sorrel*). *Cinémas*, *18*(1), 91–107. https://doi.org/10.7202/017848ar

Résumé de l'article

Carbure et oseille de Frank Beyer (éminent réalisateur de la DEFA récemment disparu), apparaît aujourd'hui comme un précieux témoignage documentant de manière rétrospective la construction d'une nouvelle Allemagne. À travers le parcours d'un ouvrier jeté sur les routes à l'été 1945 par ses camarades en quête de carbure, cette comédie de 1963 — produite deux ans après la construction du Mur de Berlin — esquisse le portrait d'une société allemande aux prises avec les futurs protagonistes de la guerre froide. Les pérégrinations bouffonnes, entre occupants américains et soviétiques, du protagoniste y évoquent de manière détournée, soutenue par une ingénieuse utilisation d'airs populaires, l'utopie d'une existence au-delà des blocs politiques dominants.

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On the Road to the New Beginning: History and Utopia in Frank Beyer's *Karbid und Sauerampfer* (*Carbide and Sorrel*)

Thomas Lindenberger

ABSTRACT

Today, the film *Carbide and Sorrel*, by the eminent and recently deceased DEFA director Frank Beyer, is a valuable retrospective look at the construction of the new Germany. Through the story of a worker tossed by his workmates onto the country's roads in search of carbide in the summer of 1945, this 1963 comedy, made two years after the construction of the Berlin Wall, is a portrait of German society in the grip of the future protagonists of the Cold War. The protagonist's comic peregrinations between the American and Soviet occupiers are an oblique depiction, reinforced by popular songs of the day, of a utopian existence beyond the dominant political powers.

Voir le résumé français à la fin de l'article

Frank Beyer undoubtedly counts among those DEFA directors whose work will remain in the canon not just of East German film history but of post-war German if not European film history for a long time. Notwithstanding the always uneven representation of East Germany in the cultural memory of unified Germany, there can be no doubt as to his eminent position within German film history: he directed the only DEFA movie ever nominated for an Academy Award—*Jakob der Lügner* (*Jacob the Liar*) in 1974—and his *Spur der Steine* (*Traces of the Stones*), produced in 1965–66 and banned immediately after its premiere, is probably the best-known DEFA film outside the original East German target audience.

In the present article, I will discuss *Karbid und Sauerampfer* (*Carbide and Sorrel*), the movie Beyer made in 1963, just before

Traces of the Stones. Some of these two films' common features set them apart from Beyer's earlier productions. In one way or another, the earlier films all dealt with the period of Nazi rule and the antifascist struggle against it. By contrast, *Traces of the Stones* and *Carbide and Sorrel* are about the beginnings of the new Germany *after* fascism. They belong to different genres: *Traces of the Stones* starts as a kind of "Eastern" and ends as a didactic drama. *Carbide and Sorrel*, by contrast, is a comic road movie with a penchant to the farcical, replete with fast-motion slapstick, situational comedy, irony and satirical undertones. Both the audience and the culture bureaucrat, used to dull and didactic DEFA standards, perceived this comedy as a truly entertaining *Volksstück* (popular play) and, for that reason, as a qualitative breakthrough in DEFA filmmaking.[1]

Hitting the Road and Finding Love in a Germany of Rubble

In summer 1945, Karl (so-called "Kalle") Blücher, a repair engineer in a bombed Dresden cigarette factory, is sent by his colleagues on a trip to Wittenberge, 300 kilometres down the Elbe River, to get carbide, a substance which is needed for welding in order to rebuild the factory. He is picked not only due to his private connections to the carbide producer in Wittenberge, but also because he is the only bachelor without children and, at least as important, he is a vegetarian, a Rohköstler, as the somewhat old-fashioned expression of the time would have it. As such he would surely be able to survive on what nature had to offer on the roadside.

The decision made, Kalle hits the road immediately. The next two minutes show the trip to Wittenberge and simultaneously serve as background for the film's title. Kalle is first shown in close-up, walking towards the camera on a deserted road in the countryside, whistling a hiking song accompanied by a jazzy arrangement.

After a short close-up showing only his feet, the music slows down a little. Kalle is not whistling any more and walks on the side of the road, which is now crowded with a continuous stream of civilians walking in the opposite direction, easily identified as some of the millions of migrants of the summer of

1945: refugees, returning evacuees, displaced persons, etc. The instrumental accompaniment to the hiking melody continues with its middle and final section. Kalle leaves the frame towards the right while the seemingly endless stream of civilians goes on towards the left and the music switches to a slower, flat modulation of the melody. A reverse medium shot now shows Kalle from behind looking to the far end of the road, the melody reaching a final chord and followed immediately by an instrumental version of the chorus of the Russian folk song *Kalinka*. Kalle turns around and sees a convoy of Soviet army vehicles rushing by. The camera follows their speedy passage in a horizontal pan until they disappear at the other end of the empty road and then approaches a nearby car wreck toppled on the right side of the road. Kalle crawls out of it, cautiously looking down the road in both directions before continuing his walk in the direction the army convoy had disappeared, again whistling the first line of the hiking song.

We do not learn more about the trip to Wittenberge, but these two minutes are crucial for setting the tone of the whole movie: despite being set in serious times, this is going to be funny. The close montage of the two musical motifs focuses on one crucial issue: the relations between Germans and Russians, represented by two more or less innocuous folk songs. That the German song is not as innocuous as it seems on first listening is one of the subtle points of the film I will return to below.

The actual road-trip story sets in with the return trip: Kalle has purchased seven barrels of carbide, 50 kg each, in Wittenberge, but he has no means of transportation. So he has to hitchhike all the way back to Dresden. Although he goes only some hundred metres with the first person to stop for him, this encounter is decisive for the whole story. This is the young peasant widow Karla, working her farm on her own, with whom he falls in love immediately.

Arriving at the farm, Kalle starts washing himself at the water pump in the yard. A medium shot shows him stripped to the waist, Karla assisting by working the pump handle and sharing our view of Kalle's well-built muscular body. He bends forward and asks her to help him by brushing his back, which she does

with an expression of physical relief.

In the following close-up she asks him about a tattoo on his lower arm. His reply—"Just a heart with an arrow! But no name in it as yet!"—is accompanied by an inquiry about other inhabitants on the farm. Her answer—that her father is working in the local administration and will not come home for the night—clears the way for their mutual rapprochement.

This sequence establishes Kalle as an object of erotic desire: Erwin Geschonneck's impressive physical presence triggers a play of gazes and subtle allusions to be continued in the scene of sharing a supper enriched by Kalle's findings in the farm's herb garden. In the conversation he yields insights into his vegetarian, atheist and bachelor lifestyle. The first detail prompts Karla's highly allusive question "And you could never get used to meat?" followed by a cut to the breakfast-in-bed scene the following morning. The couple's ensuing dialogue continues the allusive talk about hunger and herbs, ending with her invitation: "Perhaps some sorrel?" and mutual embracing, followed by a cut to the farewell scene on the road again: he promises to return after delivering the carbide in Dresden.

From here on, a duplicity of displacements is built into this road movie: a physical, "real" one with Kalle travelling under extreme conditions from Wittenberge to Dresden, facing both dangerous and seductive situations; and an opposite one on a purely virtual and imaginary level. During the whole trip Kalle has one thing in mind: to get back to the good starting point of this arduous trip, which was marked by the promise of pure love and a good life in the countryside, replete with watercress and sorrel.

The rest of the story consists of a series of episodes deriving from Kalle's encounters with other people taking him a few kilometres along his route. The narrative exploits the often grotesque situations of a country totally out of joint as a result of war and mass destruction, situations which lend themselves to celebrate Kalle's talent to find shrewd ways out. I will not go through every one of these more or less comic adventures, but focus instead on one particular aspect, namely the Cold War. Or, to be more precise: the interaction of Kalle with the future

protagonists of the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the United States. It is these encounters which push the story forward and which attracted the most interest on the part of viewers in the early 1960s.

The omnipresence of Russian troops is the main reason Kalle cannot complete his journey in a swift and easy way. After having taken refuge overnight in a deserted building in the forest, Kalle is woken up and arrested by a Red Army squad. Interrogated by the commanding officer at unit headquarters, he manages to talk himself out of being suspected as a smuggler and thief. But then he is sent to the supply officer, who had arrested him, who now wants to confiscate the seven barrels of carbide for army purposes. He negotiates with the officer in a one-and-a-half-minute sequence, legitimizing his claims in the following way:

> "Comrade Captain, it would be okay if you would just ruin me. But think of all the people who want to smoke cigarettes again. Besides, I have carted the barrels already all the way up to here. It's not just carbide inside, but also work . . . rabota, understand? [shaking his lower arm and fist] . . . is in it. Could you confiscate them?"

Enervated by Kalle's rhetorical skills, the supply officer gives up and concedes a deal that leaves Kalle five of the seven barrels and an old cart to drag them to Dresden. In the encounter with Karla, Kalle had been introduced from the point of view of his physical and sensuous qualities. In this scene, we move from Kalle the man to Kalle the worker of the hour zero (Stunde Null). Confronted with the threat of arbitrary confiscation, he mobilizes the suggestive power of proletarian world views: it's all for the good of the people desperately starving for cigarettes that he needs the carbide barrels. And, above all: having transported them already a good way up to Dresden, these barrels represent his personal physical investment, his "work." This rhetorical attack, with typically "workerist" arguments, moves even the very practical Russian supply officer to accept a deal.

Obviously, our working-class hero is capable of establishing an understanding with the new power in place not through a

refined knowledge of politics—this is far off—but by mobilizing in a seemingly naïve way shared commitments regarding the intrinsic value of physical work, whose products should not be alienated from their producers—at least not completely. At the same time, however, the bodily representation of this act of persuasion is supported by a strong element of irony: The way Kalle shakes his worker's fist in order to lay claim to the product of his labour bears a double ambivalence: first, it can be perceived not just as an act of self-assertion, but also as a threatening gesture in the direction of the camera. Second, it is left open whether at the moment of the fist-shaking gesture the Soviet officer is still positioned in the camera's place. Taken together, this suggests the image of a German civilian intimidating a Red Army officer by shaking his fist right in front of the latter's nose—something unthinkable and above all not allowed to be seen by the public of communist East Germany.

Of course, the subversive undertones of this scene were not rendered explicit in the critical coverage accompanying the release of *Carbide and Sorrel*. Enthusiasm focused more or less unanimously on a sequence of good-hearted but definitely non-aggressive mocking of the allied forces, East and West, when Kalle encounters the other side of the World theatre, the U.S. army. After using a small, but unfortunately leaky, rowboat to transport his barrels, he is stuck on a solitary bridge pillar, without a bridge, right in the middle of the Elbe, the river which also served as the border between Soviet and British-American troops in May–June 1945. There he is found by an American officer cruising along in his fancy motorboat to a big-band version of *Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!* The officer offers him a ride at least to the American side of the Elbe. In order to load the barrels, they switch places: Kalle is in the boat, receiving the barrels from the American standing on the pillar. This gives Kalle the unique opportunity to nab the boat without the American, driving his barrels up the Elbe on his own. Soon enough, his next challenge awaits him: an American patrol on the western side of the river, taking him for a boat thief, calls him to stop, and just before they begin to shoot, he puts on the officer's cap, salutes and thereby passes as the legitimate owner of the boat. Soon

after, facing the same challenge from the eastern side, he salutes a patrol of Soviet soldiers, and so on. The display of the alternating patrols is underlined with *Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!* and *Kalinka* on the soundtrack, with an increasingly relaxed and whistling Kalle now saluting in a friendly manner every soldier in sight.

This is the farcical and at the same time phantasmagorical climax of the trip to Dresden. The centre of the viewer's attention is caught by the tactics which allow Kalle to find his own path between the two superpowers in a literally middle-of-the-road manner: he displays truly Schweykian qualities, pretending compliance and harmony with everyone and quickly adapting to fast-changing situations. The soundtrack highlights the fantastic (in the conventional sense) and unrealistic nature of this episode by alternating tunes considered to represent the essential folk culture of the two superpowers of the day.

I will not elaborate on the remaining episodes, which focus mainly on issues of domestic society involving only Germans. One detail, however, has to be mentioned, because it brings

Karbid und Sauerampfer (Beyer, 1963) © DEFA Stiftung/Heinz Wenzel

about the happy ending, namely Kalle arriving in Dresden, delivering the two remaining barrels and finally setting off back to Wittenberge for his new family life with Karla. After Kalle is arrested by the German police on the black market, a fellow prisoner prophesies that he will end up being sent to Siberia for twenty years of hard labour. Panic-stricken, Kalle manages to escape during the night, only to be caught a second time. Now he is received by a cautious German police officer who has found among Kalle's affairs the Soviet *Propusk* certifying Kalle's legal entitlement to the carbide barrels. It is now the still very provisional German police which bring him back home to his workmates at the ruins of the cigarette factory. In the end good Soviet order, executed by servile German apparatchiks, prevails over the widespread Siberia scare, which is thereby represented as superstitious folklore. In the context of the strict taboo imposed on deportations of Germans from the Soviet occupation zone to Siberia in the late 1940s and early 1950s it would be short-sighted to see this only as a euphemistic and belittling allusion to the real terror carried out by the Soviets. It is worth noting the mention of "Siberia" as such, although couched in a denunciation of folk superstition—probably the only manner in which this part of post-war East German experience could be alluded to at all.

Transcending the Cold War Predicament

In order to fully assess the cultural and political meaning of this comic road movie, *Carbide and Sorrel* has to be interpreted in the context of the Cold War as it was perceived and experienced in the GDR. By virtue of its retrospective stance, the narrative combines two time layers: the one in which the story is set in an evident and "realistic" manner—summer 1945—and the one in which the story was told, 1963, which is not signified in an explicit way. "Summer 1945" is marked by extreme insecurity, chaos, starvation, violence and death, which combine, however, with the openness and undecidedness of the situation: nobody knew exactly what would happen next. Everyone, the new power holders as much as the defeated Germans, had to improvise and take chances. The catastrophic and the contin-

gent were closely intertwined. The Cold War as such was still far ahead. The Germans, in particular those east of the Elbe, experienced the differences between the occupying armies, but they could not yet count on their mutual antagonism.

This situation of openness has to be set against the closure of history reached in 1964: the GDR is now a safe state, it seems, although it has reached this quality through an act of spectacular state violence with severely restricting consequences for its population: the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961. Contingency and the openness of the historical process are almost gone, at least for the moment. What follows now is officially termed "completing the construction of socialism," but strictly within the Soviet hemisphere.[2] After the turbulent years of the 1950s, with their dense sequel of international and national crises, East Germany and the East-West antagonism seem to come to rest.

What does *Carbide and Sorrel* achieve by indulging in the comic and romantic possibilities of the openness and "undeterminedness" of 1945 Germany (besides procuring some entertainment, of course)? To understand the arbitrary character of the narrative, a closer look at the months and years following the building of the Wall in August 1961 is necessary: since the Wall was built to stop the massive exodus of East Germans, it marked a deep caesura in the lives of millions of people. It was experienced as a violent intervention that not only deprived them of the exit option, but also separated families and friends and destroyed professional careers. For the majority of East Germans it created a no-escape situation vis-à-vis a state and a state party which they had never accepted as legitimate, and for which they would not have voted in free elections in their majority at any given moment of their existence. For the rest of their lives, or at least for the decades to come, they now had to cope with this state of affairs—and make the best of it.

"The majority of East Germans" refers to the population at large: workers, peasants, the lower middle class and older generations already grown up before Nazism. Against these a minority of devoted Communist Party members can be set, who together with the Party leadership actively supported the mea-

sures of the 13th of August 1961. They were, however, not completely on their own. They were supported to some extent by another minority formed by the new and often young intelligentsia, by writers such as Christa Wolf and Stefan Heym, and notably also by filmmakers and film authors. It was of course not that such intellectuals, artists and writers "liked" the Berlin Wall, or that they bought into the ridiculous justification of it being a wall against an imminent fascist invasion. They conceived of it first of all as an ugly necessity, as something unavoidable. They accepted it not only as a means to preserve the precarious state of non-war in Europe (in this they might have been supported by many of their co-citizens). Above all, they perceived the Wall as a pre-condition to give socialism in Germany a real chance. From this perspective, the Wall had created a situation in which GDR socialism was allowed a second try under better auspices: without Western intrusion, without imminent competition of the economically stronger capitalist rival, without immediate dependency on the big brother Soviet Union. Hopes were rising that now a less dogmatic, less repressive and more truly humane and democratic socialism could become reality.

Carbide and Sorrel can be seen as a story mediating—among other things—this message: it linked the hopes for new and more humane socialism on the part of committed but idealistic antifascists and communists with the expectations of a much less committed larger audience, an audience which, however, was also prepared to make their arrangements in order to live a good life under the adverse conditions established after August 1961. This mediation is manifest in the set of compromise formulae supporting the main narrative:

— the figure of the "other" worker as bearer of the hopes for a socialism with a more human face;
— a proposal to thematize the sensitive issue of the strained relations between Germans and Russians, a taboo topic due to the traumata which the real encounters in summer 1945 between Soviet soldiers and the German population, in particular the women among them, had left behind;

— the imaginary self-understanding of a GDR which is always, even behind the Wall, somehow positioned between the East and West rather than being swallowed up by the Soviet empire once and for all and thereby secluded from the rest of the world.

The other worker: as a portrait of a worker Kalle Blücher is truly remarkable. He does not share very many things with the "average" German worker: he doesn't smoke, he doesn't eat meat, he is extremely peaceful and even non-sexist. He is hedonistic and oriented towards rather practical and material goals concerning his own future—that's already more realistic, but does not exactly correspond to the politically devoted working-class hero of official "socialist realism." He is an individualist through and through, a non-conformist, often moving against the stream as displayed in the opening scene. But he is not an egoist: it never crosses his mind to give up his heavy burden of carbide barrels in order to rejoin his new love immediately.

Rendered in an extremely appealing and sympathetic way by Erwin Geschonneck, this figure marked, of course, a deliberate contrast to the antifascist super-heroes and noble construction activists populating the average DEFA films with which the larger audience had fallen out during the 1950s. This utterly naïve, but also somehow shrewd character, always friendly and good humoured, a kind of "alternative" worker, was greeted also as a medium for imagining a new and better origin of the first workers' state on German soil. What is at stake here is a legitimate and "politically correct" way of imagining an optimistic beginning after 1945, which the East Germans had missed due to the particularly adverse conditions of defeat, occupation and national partition.

At the same time this figure, seen from the mid–1960s, also contained rather futuristic qualities: incarnating individualism and a hedonistic and private, though carefully balanced, lifestyle, Kalle not only delegitimizes the model of the old-style puritan and self-denying class-conscious worker. He also contributes to establishing the model of a future GDR citizen, defining what socialism should be about without resorting to the dogmatic platitudes of "developed socialist personalities"

and their "developed desires."[3] He is a harbinger of the GDR consumer-citizen, later to become the key addressee of the SED's oversized welfare policy of the 1970s and 80s, which would eventually seal the economic fate of the GDR.

The basic presupposition rendering this figure effective within this particular plot is the genre formula of the comedy in the popular sense, that is, one which renounces any "deeper" or edifying messages and moral teachings. Beyer himself has pointed out in a lengthy interview that his notion of comedy in this film was rather derived from Goldoni's plebeian farces than from classic "high-brow" comedies such as Molière.[4] In this particular case, the farce enables an implicit contract of perception between author and audience: everyone in 1964 knew of course that, "in reality," spring and summer 1945 had been full of individual and collective catastrophes, extreme hardships and, above all, traumatic experience of violence and death. These had been very "serious" and "hard times." Everyone knew that and why it could not be remembered in a realistic way because of some basic taboos due to the existential dependence of the GDR on the Soviet Union—the elephant in the room so to speak. That these times also had their utopian and absurd moments was (and still is) remembered as well, and it is this element of remembrance which is exploited in the story by giving it absolute priority. The mere gesture of unrestrained, wilful fancying renders this diegetic operation slightly subversive without ever crossing the thin line into explicit taboo-breaking.

Coming to Terms with the Russians

Within this basic formula of a naïve, utterly unpretentious comedy, such basic taboos could be approached, in particular those regarding relations and interaction with "the Russians." After the first—overwhelmingly, though of course not exclusively—negative encounters between Germans and Soviets in the years 1945–46, Soviet troops were consequently separated from the German population by confinement to their own garrisons and settlements from 1947 on. Personal interaction with Russians was rather exceptional for the average GDR citizen. Campaigns for German-Soviet friendship were part of the offi-

cial rhetoric and mise en scène and by this very fact more or less artificial, soliciting opportunistic lip service.[5]

Beyer's comedy makes a breach into this bulwark of lies, false pretensions and evident taboos by finding ways to laugh *about* the Russians by laughing *with* the Russians. This was actually tried out by the filmmakers before the film's official acceptance by showing it to a selected audience in Moscow. The latter's utter delight paved the film's way against some over-cautious and dogmatic censors at home. Later on in the story, Kalle is even allowed to cheat the Soviet officer after having been arrested a second time, though in insignificant proportions compared to stealing the boat from the American officer.

Again, we have to emphasize the relative dimension of licensed irony: the sympathetic laughing about the Russians had a liberating effect in so far *as it was allowed at all*. The "elephant" was still occupying a large part of the living room: by rendering him perceptible he might become a bit smaller and maybe more manageable.

The seemingly definite nature of the division of Germany after 1961 and, thereby, the bad luck of the East Germans to have ended up on the "wrong side" of the Iron Curtain, was only another aspect of this taboo situation in the GDR's censored public sphere. Immediately after August 1961, the SED state and the DEFA had attempted to legitimize the Wall by some feature films which, however, went over very badly at the box office.[6] Anything trying to bring home the message that confinement and separation from their wealthy relatives and co-nationals was really good for every GDR citizen was met with frustration, if not outright hostility by an East German audience still under the shock of the event itself. It took at least a year of accommodation and resignation to the new existential conditions of life before the issue of divided Germany could be alluded to in new, adapted ways. *Carbide and Sorrel* was just one of them, and it did so by engaging the viewer's fantasy: situating the plot before the great divide, in summer 1945, gave licence to East Germans' dream of being positioned between the blocs rather than just as an integral part of the Eastern one.

To achieve this, a careful play with politically encoded geography is at work here: Kalle moves from Dresden to Wittenberge at the Elbe, nearer to the West, but always within the confines of the future GDR. Theoretically, such a mission in 1945 Germany could also have led him all the way down, let's say, to Hamburg in the British zone. This, however, would have transcended the mental mapping of the imagined community to be addressed by the movie in the year 1964, which was confined by the territory of a sealed-off GDR. Rejoining his new love Karla in—for instance—Hamburg at the end of the story would have implied leaving the future GDR altogether.

The geographical limitation of the action is therefore highly significant: it stabilizes the image of the future range of action, the GDR, as confined by the German division and the Wall. The Elbe River was the very line separating the two world spheres: using it as a display and a self-assured way of operating in the narrow zone between these two worlds engaged fantasies about an alternative, or a third way between the blocs.

This non-verbal allusion to the future border between the two political systems is underlined by the melody Kalle whistles throughout the film. It is a typically German *Wanderlied*, a hiking song, but a well-chosen one: "Wohl auf die Luft geht frisch und rein" is one of Germany's regional anthems, this one being devoted to the beautiful landscapes of Franconia, a region in West Germany neighbouring Thuringia and Saxony. The first stanza ends with the lines: "Ich will zur schönen Sommerzeit / ins Land der Franken fahren!"("In the beautiful summer season / I want to travel to the land of the Francs!"[7])

Thus, although the geographical scope of action is limited to the territory of the future GDR, the remembrance of the larger Germany is alluded to by Kalle whistling this song here and there throughout the film.

*

Was bleibt?—what remains (to quote Christa Wolf)? The phase of a degree of liberalization of cultural policy which made the production of films such as *Carbide and Sorrel* or *Traces of*

the Stones possible was short lived. The idea that these were actually years of a second chance to build a truly humane and democratic socialism must be denied, if one looks deeper at recent research into other realms of the SED state such as the economy, the legal system and the politics of internal security.[8] From 1965–66 the hardliners got the upper hand, banning not only *Traces of the Stones* but also nearly a whole year's production of feature movies, among them some of the best DEFA ever produced. Luckily, *Carbide and Sorrel* premiered early enough not to be hit by this wave of reactionary censorship. It had enough time and licence to establish itself as a truly popular movie, thus becoming part of the historic DEFA canon with frequent re-runs on television and in movie theatres.

For our reflections eighteen years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, these films of the early 1960s contain two opposing messages. A positive one: first of all they reveal the enormous amount of artistic talent concentrated in the culture industry of this quite unique country. Actors such as Erwin Geschonneck, Manfred Krug and others will remain outstanding in the German cinematic production of their time, not the least thanks to very popular characters such as Kalle Blücher and Brigadier Balla and the artistic mastery of directors such as Konrad Wolf and Frank Beyer.

The negative one consists in reaffirming that communist dictatorships, at least those in Europe, stand out as actual graveyards of utopias. In stories such as *Carbide and Sorrel* history and utopia are intertwined in a paradoxical and in the end tragic way: the recourse to a concrete historical situation, the end of war in summer 1945, which was attributed a founding function in the state's legitimacy—"liberation from fascism"—is invested with a fantasy about the better beginning of socialism that has been spoiled through the Stalinist experience. Believing and wanting to believe in such righteous origins betrayed by evil power politics became one of the basic techniques of mental survival in the face of a seemingly sealed future. DEFA films contributed crucially to living out this historicist utopianism. *Le passé comme illusion* preceded *le passé d'une illusion*.[9]

Universität Potsdam

NOTES

1. For a recent general overview on GDR film history see Berghahn 2005 and, in French, Buffet 2007.
2. See Harrison 2003.
3. See among others Feinstein 2002.
4. See Beyer 1964 and Richter 1995.
5. See Satjukow 2005, Naimark 1995 and Behrends 2006.
6. See the film reviews from contemporary GDR newspapers in Major 2002.
7. <http://www.schulphysik.de/frank.html>. This site also includes the score and an instrumental version of the melody.
8. See Steiner 2004 and Fulbrook 2005.
9. See Furet 1996.

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RÉSUMÉ

Sur la route d'un nouveau commencement. Histoire et utopie dans *Carbide und Sauerampfer* (*Carbure et oseille*) de Frank Beyer

Thomas Lindenberger

Carbure et oseille de Frank Beyer (éminent réalisateur de la DEFA récemment disparu), apparaît aujourd'hui comme un précieux témoignage documentant de manière rétrospective la construction d'une nouvelle Allemagne. À travers le parcours d'un ouvrier jeté sur les routes à l'été 1945 par ses camarades en quête de carbure, cette comédie de 1963 — produite deux ans après la construction du Mur de Berlin — esquisse le portrait d'une société allemande aux prises avec les futurs protagonistes de la guerre froide. Les pérégrinations bouffonnes, entre occupants américains et soviétiques, du protagoniste y évoquent de manière détournée, soutenue par une ingénieuse utilisation d'airs populaires, l'utopie d'une existence au-delà des blocs politiques dominants.