

Call for Papers

International Symposium

Quo vadis DEFA Research? New Perspectives in the Treatment of East German Film Heritage

University of Rostock; in cooperation with the DEFA-Stiftung

University of Rostock, 29–31 May 2024

Deadline for submission: 30 October 2023

Since the Fall of the Berlin Wall, many scholars from a wide range of disciplines, journalists and filmmakers have examined the GDR – sometimes provocatively, often emotionally and in many cases autobiographically. Their research and stories, tied to ruptures and tensions in the German transformation process, have increasingly found expression in a wide variety of publications, especially in recent years (for instance: Dirk Oschmann's polemic *Der Osten: Eine westdeutsche Erfindung*; Katja Hoyer's survey study *Diesseits der Mauer: Eine neue Geschichte der DDR*; Anne Rabe's autofiction *Die Möglichkeit von Glück*; and Annika Pinske's directorial debut *Alle reden übers Wetter*).

Focusing on the cinema of the GDR, the international symposium **Quo vadis DEFA Research?** seeks to place national and international DEFA research under the microscope. Has DEFA film already been researched to its limits? Eight decades after the foundation of DEFA as a state film production company and 34 years after the political Wende in the GDR, there are ever fewer contemporary witnesses who can share their experiences and be invited as guests to academic conferences or public events. Is interest in DEFA research now waning? Today, almost every film that was produced in the GDR is available to study as part of an all-German and global film culture, be they feature films, documentaries, animated films or dubbed foreign films. It is time for a fresh look.

Which current and interdisciplinary discourses are fruitful for DEFA film research? How can academic engagement with films from the GDR have an impact on our lives today and help to address current problems? A critical and reflective examination of our own research, teaching, evaluation and academic treatment of East German film history is necessary. How can DEFA film find new potential interested parties in addition to the perspective of contemporary witnesses and official structures of remembrance and reappraisal? How can young people in particular be inspired by DEFA films? Are there interesting theoretical approaches and methods that have not yet found their way into these fields of research? And how can we examine and question marginalizations, distortions and injustices in DEFA film heritage and its research?

This symposium aims to go beyond familiar paths that focus exclusively on established thematic, narrative, genre, production, and institutional aspects of film production and its well-known participants. Instead, it will pose questions about the future of DEFA research from a systemic, theoretical and methodological perspective, and push the boundaries of established paradigms. In this way, we hope to open up critical reflections on the role of DEFA research and interdisciplinary discussions on the value of the limited object of study for current and future societal challenges.

Relevant areas of research and discussion for the symposium include:

- DEFA research in the digital age
- Exploitation, distribution and reception
- Marginalization and minorities
- Postcolonialism and Othering
- Racism, discrimination and intolerance
- Identity
- Historical audience research and reception studies
- State reception and control
- Gender and sexuality
- Environmental questions and the Anthropocene
- DEFA films in educational contexts today
- Dubbing and subtitling challenges
- Import and export

The symposium will take place at the University of Rostock and will be held in German and English. Researchers from all disciplines are invited to submit proposals and/or attend the symposium. We especially welcome submissions from early career scholars and PhD candidates who are working on DEFA film heritage. A limited budget is expected to be available for travel and accommodation costs for early career scholars. A publication is planned following the symposium.

Please submit a short abstract (maximum 300 words) in English or German by 30 October 2023 to Elizabeth Ward and Andy Räder (andy.raeder@uni-rostock.de). The selection of presenters will take place in December 2023.