

## Women of DEFA: Gender, Labor, and Precarity in (Post)Socialist Cinema

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Stewart, Faye. "Women of DEFA: Gender, Labor, and Precarity in (Post)Socialist Cinema." *Women's Film Authorship in Neoliberal Times: Revisiting Feminism and German Cinema*. Ed. Hester Baer and Angelica Fenner. Special Issue of *Camera Obscura* 99, 33.3 (2018): 20–47. <https://doi.org/10.1215/02705346-7142152>

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### Abstract:

This study traces shared national narratives about women, work, and precarity in films made by East German women directors in the state-run DEFA studios before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall. A comparative analysis of Evelyn Schmidt's *Das Fahrrad* (*The Bicycle*, 1982) and Helke Misselwitz's *Herzprung* (1992) reveals parallels in how late socialist and emerging capitalist systems produce, perceive, and gender socioeconomic instability. By rendering visible the struggles of unskilled single mothers for autonomy and fulfillment in environments marked by apathy and disdain, *Das Fahrrad* and *Herzprung* challenge the reigning narrative of not only neoliberal but also socialist citizenship: that hard work will be rewarded. The dream of the good life remains unattainable in both films. An investigation of continuities in their aesthetic sensibilities and social thematics and in how they cast their female heroines, when coupled with consideration for each director's biographical experiences across shifting political systems, troubles the prevalent perception of neoliberal discourses as intrinsically linked to capitalist systems and thus as anathema to socialist ideologies. Both films expose the possibilities for and limitations of women's emancipation and empowerment in pre-and postunification Germany, intertwining gender critiques with explorations of agency, self-determination, and social justice. When refracted through the lens of late socialist and early postsocialist cinema by and about women, a critical nexus of labor, gender, and precarity is forged for examining neoliberal citizenship.

**Keywords:** neoliberalism | labor | precarity | Evelyn Schmidt | Helke Misselwitz

### Article:

(Post)socialist cinema offers valuable but underexamined perspectives on the entanglements of gender, precarity, and neoliberal discourses of labor and self-determination. Analyzing select films produced by East German directors in the 1980s in tandem with those made in the early 1990s can unsettle conventional historical periodization to reveal parallels in how socialist and neoliberal systems both produce and perceive socioeconomic instability. A comparative investigation of films from the late German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the former Eastern states after unification with the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) reveals meaningful continuities in thematics, the characterization of protagonists, and the biographical experiences

of directors over time and across shifting political systems. In particular, the pre- and postunification productions of the Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft (German Film Corporation, or DEFA), the state-run East German film studio founded in 1946 and liquidated in 1992, evince a sustained engagement with advancing neoliberalization processes that increase socio economic inequalities and result in the gendering of menial labor. My discussion of East German female directors in the 1980s and 1990s will attest to how these developments affected women behind the camera and also emerged as a trope within their films.

This study traces shared national narratives about women, work, and precarity in *Frauenfilme* (women's films) released on both sides of the historical divide marked by the GDR's collapse in 1989 and its ensuing integration into the FRG. Evelyn Schmidt's *Das Fahrrad* (*The Bicycle*, 1982) and Helke Misselwitz's *Herzprung* (1992) were made by two of East Germany's best-known female directors and are regarded as turning points in their respective careers. Both films narrate the struggles of unemployed single mothers seeking economic stability and emotional fulfillment in environments marked by apathy and disdain. Emphasizing intersections between these texts and their contexts, my analysis also attributes their historical specificity and diverging gender critiques to late twentieth-century political transitions. I begin by considering the junctures between socialist and neoliberal ideologies as well as between feminist theory and Schmidt's and Misselwitz's work. To situate their approaches to gender and labor within GDR cultural history, I then address the relationships between women in the socialist workforce, in the East German film industry, and in these two directors' careers before focusing on the characterization of precarious women in these two landmark films.

### **Socialism and Neoliberalism: Overlaps and Dissonances**

My analysis troubles the prevalent understanding of neoliberal discourses as intrinsically linked to capitalist systems and thus anathema to socialist ideologies. Far from comprising new ideologies introduced among the Eastern German population with the opening of the Berlin Wall, liberal and neoliberal conceptions of labor and citizenship were already present in socialist philosophies, forming the very basis of subjectivity and citizens' accountability for their own self-actualization.<sup>1</sup> While there are crucial distinctions between socialism and neoliberalism, both ideologies stress individual responsibility and link social belonging with work.

Socialism lauds empowerment through labor, promises self-realization to workers regardless of education or skill, and mandates self-management and self-censorship. Though John Urang asserts that "labor" changed in meaning under East German socialism, Jens Giersdorf observes that its status as the linchpin of socialist belonging did not: "The foundation of citizenship in labor in East Germany reduced very complex issues to a simplified materialist ideological stance. Identity, nationality, and citizenship collapsed into the single category of labor."<sup>2</sup> The worker shortage in the GDR meant that everyone who wanted work could find it; female laborers were,

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Engels, "Anteil der Arbeit an der Menschenwerdung des Affen," *Projekt GutenbergDE. Spiegel Online*, [gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/anteil-der-arbeit-an-der-menschwerdung-des-affen-5093/1](http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/anteil-der-arbeit-an-der-menschwerdung-des-affen-5093/1) (accessed 31 December 2017); Nanette Funk, "Feminist Critiques of Liberalism: Can They Travel East? Their Relevance in Eastern and Central Europe and the Former Soviet Union," *Signs* 29, no. 3 (2004): 695 – 726.

<sup>2</sup> John Griffith Urang, *Legal Tender: Love and Legitimacy in the East German Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 61 – 62; Jens Richard Giersdorf, *The Body of the People: East German Dance since 1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 92.

in theory, equal to their male counterparts; and socialist policies supported mothers with the goal of keeping them in the workforce.<sup>3</sup> The GDR imagined itself as a classless collective composed of citizen-participants in the laboring community.

Neoliberalism also advances an ideology of labor as the means to self-actualization, assigning personal responsibility for the failure to achieve self-sufficiency.<sup>4</sup> However, it diverges from socialism in favoring individualization, privatization, and upward mobility. The neoliberal ideal of pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps downplays socioeconomic differences that engender unequal opportunities, access to support, and chances for success. In theory, everyone can and should work and provide for themselves — women, mothers, the poor, and the uneducated included. Mandating adaptability and self-reliance, neoliberalism celebrates freedom and choice and favors the upper classes.

These two discourses overlapped in the late GDR and the early postunification era. Although the GDR promoted socialism as a system in which all laborers were deemed equal regardless of education or profession, class differences were nonetheless manifest among its diverse citizenry. East Germany proclaimed women's emancipation and economic independence through full participation in the socialist workforce, granting women rights to abortion, divorce, maternity leave, and childcare — but not everyone could access or afford these services. With its social safety net strained by federal economic instability, the late GDR took on increasingly neoliberal contours by emphasizing self-management, personal responsibility, and agency through labor even as social alienation and class disparities continued to rise. After the fall of the wall, the socialist system that East Germans had relied on — for employment as well as for housing, health care, and childcare — all but disappeared in the uneven and protracted process of socioeconomic stabilization. These changes in postunification Eastern Germany disenfranchised female citizens disproportionately. Unemployment and financial insecurity increased significantly, while individualization, flexibilization, and responsabilization gradually replaced the collectivist ideals of the former GDR. Labor, gender, and precarity thus constitute a critical framework for examining neoliberalization, refracted through the lens of late socialist and early postsocialist cinema by and about women.

### **Feminism, Labor, and Women Directors**

Though the sociopolitical context of Evelyn Schmidt's and Helke Misselwitz's filmmaking in this era poses a challenge to the classification of their work as feminist, *The Bicycle* and *Herz sprung* traffic in tropes associated with feminist cinema.<sup>5</sup> Both expose in equal measure the possibilities for and limitations of women's emancipation and empowerment in pre- and postunification Germany. Both films investigate the intermingling of labor, financial autonomy,

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<sup>3</sup> Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 64 – 68; Jennifer L. Creech, *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts in East German Women's Films* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 12 – 15.

<sup>4</sup> Joan C. Tronto, *Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 37 – 44.

<sup>5</sup> Daniela Berghahn, *Hollywood behind the Wall: The Cinema of East Germany* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2005), 181; Andrea Rinke, "From Models to Misfits: Women in DEFA Films of the 1970s and 1980s," in *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946 – 1992*, ed. Seán Allan and John Sandford (New York: Berghahn, 1999), 201.

and female-embodied agency and desire while also disclosing male-embodied resistance to women's self-determination. They also stress intersectional concerns, intertwining gender critiques with explorations of class difference and parenthood (*The Bicycle*) as well as sexual subjectivity and ethnic diversity (*Herzprung*).

Feminist critiques of neoliberalism and precarity lay the theoretical foundation for my analysis of Schmidt's and Misselwitz's films and bolster my argument about the overlapping investments of (post)socialist, emerging capitalist, and neoliberal systems. Lauren Berlant's notion of "cruel optimism" as "a projection of sustaining but unworkable fantasy" characterizes the reigning narrative of not only neoliberal but also socialist citizenship: hard work will be rewarded.<sup>6</sup> These two directors tackle the cruel optimism of distinct but intersecting socialist and neoliberal discourses that promise stability and fulfillment to those who labor diligently while designating those who fail as inadequate or problematic. Their visual portraits of unemployed or unfulfillingly employed women challenge these discourses, revealing that precarity is, as Berlant argues, "significantly more than economic: it is structural in many senses and permeates the affective environment too."<sup>7</sup> *The Bicycle* and *Herzprung* probe cruel optimism not only in conjunction with labor but also with female desire, interrogating what Berlant refers to as "good life fantasies" through antiromantic courtship narratives. Their heroines suffer abuse, rape, and violence; as Judith Butler indicates, precarity entails exposure to risks of injury, coercion, incarceration, and death.<sup>8</sup> Butler asserts that precarity implies disposability, which Athena Athanasiou contends is on the rise in advancing neoliberal capitalism: "In the context of neoliberal forms of capital . . . bodies (that is, human capital) are becoming increasingly disposable, dispossessed by capital and its exploitative excess, uncountable and unaccounted for."<sup>9</sup> Schmidt's and Misselwitz's dispossessed female protagonists lose their positions of relative stability, thereby losing their footing within the system and becoming disposable bodies, retaining value only for their enduring exploitability. However, in dramatizing what Berlant calls "crisis ordinariness" — the characters grapple with the "overwhelming ordinary that is *disorganized* by [capitalism]"<sup>10</sup> — Schmidt and Misselwitz also generate narrative strategies of resistance: their protagonists face hardships and barely manage to get by, but they also succeed, to some extent, in asserting their agency and right to self-determination.

The conditions of film authorship within the DEFA studios merit particular attention, as Schmidt was one of only five women to direct fiction films during the short history of the GDR, while Misselwitz was prevented from doing so until the fall of the wall. Both directors' professional trajectories lay bare the challenges for women in succeeding as film authors in the GDR. DEFA's uneven relationship with female labor illustrates the gaps between theory and reality, revealing the breadth and limitations of women's roles in East German cinema. As part of a socialist state that embraced women's equality and emancipation from its inception, DEFA supported the technical employment of women as actors, writers, editors, and costumers, as well as in the service sector, including canteen kitchens. DEFA also released countless *Frauenfilme*

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<sup>6</sup> Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 188.

<sup>7</sup> Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 192.

<sup>8</sup> Judith Butler, "Bodily Vulnerability, Coalitions, and Street Politics," in *Differences in Common: Gender, Vulnerability, and Community*, ed. Joana Sabadell-Nieto and Marta Segarra (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), 99 – 119.

<sup>9</sup> Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 29.

<sup>10</sup> Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 8.

that reflect in aesthetic terms on the problem of female labor in the GDR more broadly.<sup>11</sup> But the vast majority of East German Frauenfilme — as well as its best-known productions — were directed by men. Gender equality was linked to labor, and since women had the right to work and all social classes were equal, women's emancipation was seen as a *fait accompli*. There was therefore no need for feminist critique, feminist cinema, or cinema directed by women.

The problem of gender equity behind the camera emerged in striking ways at DEFA, where only a few female directors made feature films before 1990. Ute Lischke-McNab notes the disconnect between the GDR's egalitarian ideologies and women's participation in the studio workforce: "Although women had been granted equal pay for equal work as well as equal rights and opportunity in theory, in practice it did not work out that way. . . . It is for this reason that they remained, in the film industry, mostly occupied as scriptwriters, cutters, editors, and set designers; very few became directors and producers."<sup>12</sup> Other scholars characterize the industry as "male-dominated" because "all managerial positions in DEFA studios were traditionally occupied by men."<sup>13</sup> Daniela Berghahn asserts that this paucity was viewed as an effect not of gender discrimination but of the challenge of reconciling child rearing with a demanding career, underscoring the double burden experienced by women in state socialism.<sup>14</sup> Margrit Frölich points out that the gender gap in fiction film directing persisted in the GDR's final years: "In the 1980s, the number of male and female students graduating from the East German film academy was almost equal. But women graduates frequently occupied middle-range positions (dramaturgy), often in traditional female careers (design or editing), or found employment either in television or in children's film."<sup>15</sup> DEFA's female directors were more likely to work in the documentary than in the fiction film studios (like Misselwitz and Gitta Nickel) or to direct in the children's film division of the feature film studio (like Bärbl Bergmann and Hannelore Unterberg, as well as Karin Reschke, who got her start there).<sup>16</sup> Evelyn Schmidt was the first female student to graduate from the East German Filmhochschule (Film Academy) and became

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<sup>11</sup> East German Frauenfilme exploring women's labor include Slatan Dudow's *Frauenschicksale* (*Destinies of Women*, 1952), Frank Vogel's *Das siebente Jahr* (*The Seventh Year*, 1969), Egon Günther's *Der Dritte* (*Her Third*, 1972), Heiner Carow's *Bis daß der Tod euch scheidet* (*Until Death Do Us Part*, 1979), Konrad Wolf's *Solo Sunny* (1980), Lothar Warneke's *Unser kurzes Leben* (*Our Short Life*, 1981), and Frank Beyer's *Der Verdacht* (*Suspicion*, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> Ute Lischke-McNab, "Women, Film, and Writing in the GDR: Helga Schubert and the DEFA: An Interview with Helga Schubert," in *Triangulated Visions: Women in Recent German Cinema*, ed. Ingeborg Majer O'Sickey and Ingeborg von Zadow (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 200.

<sup>13</sup> Sebastian Heiduschke, *East German Cinema: DEFA and Film History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 117; Hans Joachim Meurer, *Cinema and National Identity in a Divided Germany, 1979 – 1989: The Split Screen* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2000), 207.

<sup>14</sup> Berghahn, *Hollywood behind the Wall*, 204. See also Jeannette Z. Madarász, *Conflict and Compromise in East Germany, 1971 – 1989: A Precarious Stability* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 133.

<sup>15</sup> Margrit Frölich, "Behind the Curtains of a State-Owned Film Industry: Women-Filmmakers at the DEFA," in O'Sickey and Zadow, *Triangulated Visions*, 43.

<sup>16</sup> Many successful DEFA directors, both male and female, began their careers in children's filmmaking; see Benita Blessing, "Defining Socialist Children's Films, Defining Socialist Childhoods," in *Reimagining DEFA: East German Cinema in Its National and Transnational Contexts*, ed. Seán Allan and Sebastian Heiduschke (New York: Berghahn, 2016), 251. Of the four fulllength films Reschke directed before her untimely death in 1971, three were youth films. Her final production, *Kennen Sie Urban?* (*Do You Know Urban?*, 1971) was a successful *Gegenwartsfilm* (film about contemporary life). On DEFA's studio structure and production centers, see Günter Schulz, "Die DEFA (Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft) 1946 – 1990: Fakten und Daten," *DEFAStiftung*, 2002, [www.defa-stiftung.de/DesktopDefault.aspx?TabID=981](http://www.defa-stiftung.de/DesktopDefault.aspx?TabID=981).

one of only five women to direct DEFA fiction films, alongside Bergmann, Unterberg, Reschke, and perhaps the best known of these directors, Iris Gusner.<sup>17</sup>

With her debut, *Seitensprung (The Affair)*, 1980), Schmidt became a poster child for gender equity in filmmaking: “Those responsible at DEFA take great pride in a woman in the director’s chair who produces interesting films to boot.”<sup>18</sup> Though her second film, *The Bicycle*, stayed largely within the dominant idioms of socialist realism and critique of real existing socialism, critics felt it portrayed the GDR too negatively, deeming its protagonist Susanne (Heidemarie Schneider) too unattractive and her attitude toward work “alienating.”<sup>19</sup> Officials limited its release, and the scathing reviews of *The Bicycle* stymied Schmidt’s promising career. While Schmidt’s film was dismissed as ideologically worthless by the state-run industry that produced it, it had exchange value on the international capitalist market. The GDR sold it to the West German television station ZDF, which broadcast the film in its 1986 showcase of women directors, leading to its enthusiastic reception abroad. However, Schmidt was effectively blacklisted and never directed another feature film at DEFA, though she continued working there in other capacities.

In a markedly different career path from Schmidt’s, Helke Misselwitz was unable to direct in DEFA’s feature film studios until 1989. She remained in the documentary studio, where she rose to fame with the 1988 documentary *Winter adé (Goodbye to Winter)*, which explores East German women’s diverse experiences as adolescents, workers, wives, and mothers through interviews. Though a stint in documentary was a common detour for aspiring fiction film directors,<sup>20</sup> the challenges Misselwitz met reflect both the systemic disadvantages faced by women pursuing directing careers at DEFA and the pressures of supply and demand in a neoliberalizing industry. Marc Silberman and Henning Wrage note that DEFA experienced declining spectatorship in the 1980s despite its international reputation, owing to competition with television programming and foreign films.<sup>21</sup> Misselwitz thus became part of what Reinhild Steingröver characterizes as “a highly qualified but superfluous workforce, neither needed nor entrusted with shaping new visions for the nation’s movie theaters.”<sup>22</sup> After the fall of the wall, competition with Western products, talent, and funding accentuated the precarity of these artists.

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<sup>17</sup> Although Frölich and Heiduschke name these five directors as working in DEFA’s feature film division, Berghahn identifies Reschke, Gusner, and Schmidt as the only female “feature film directors,” noting that Bergmann and Unterberg worked in the children’s film division. Frölich, “Behind the Curtains,” 44; Heiduschke, *East German Cinema*, 117; Berghahn, *Hollywood behind the Wall*, 203 – 4. Unlike Schmidt, whose filmmaking career never recovered from the criticisms *The Bicycle* drew, Gusner was able to continue making socially critical women-centered feature films even after the banning of her debut film, *Die Taube auf dem Dach (The Dove on the Roof)*, 1973, released in 1990). Gusner’s *Alle meine Mädchen (All My Girls)*, 1980) uses the story of a male documentarian shooting an all-female factory brigade to reflect explicitly on the gender divide between men as directors and women as their filmic subjects; see Creech, *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts*, 141 – 93.

<sup>18</sup> Ines Walk, “Schmidt, Evelyn,” *DEFASTiftung*, September 2006, [www.defa-stiftung.de/schmidt-evelyn](http://www.defa-stiftung.de/schmidt-evelyn). Translations from German are my own unless otherwise noted.

<sup>19</sup> Elke Schieber, “Anfang vom Ende oder Kontinuität des Argwohns: 1980 bis 1989,” in *Das zweite Leben der Filmstadt Babelsberg: DEFASpielfilme 1946 – 1992*, ed. Ralf Schenk (Berlin: Henschel, 1994), 269.

<sup>20</sup> Reinhild Steingröver, *Last Features: East German Cinema’s Lost Generation* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2014), 13.

<sup>21</sup> Marc Silberman and Henning Wrage, “Introduction: DEFA at the Crossroads: Remapping the Terrain,” in *DEFA at the Crossroads of East German and International Film Culture: A Companion*, ed. Marc Silberman and Henning Wrage (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 9.

<sup>22</sup> Steingröver, *Last Features*, 7.

The early 1990s saw rapid transformations in the industry through privatization and marketization, which also had the effect of facilitating (at least theoretically) the participation of women in all aspects of filmmaking. Misselwitz made the long-desired move into features with her debut, *Herzprung*, whose account of the widow Johanna (Claudia Geisler) painted an unflinching portrait of the racism, xenophobia, and violence accompanying rising unemployment and social instability in the former GDR. *Herzprung* was one of the last films DEFA released before succumbing to market pressures and decreased federal financing that led to its dissolution in 1992.

### **Gendered Precarity in *The Bicycle* and *Herzprung***

Despite these different historical contexts, Schmidt's *The Bicycle* and Misselwitz's *Herzprung* are comparable in their depiction of gendered precarity. Both films feature single motherhood, unskilled labor, unemployment, financial instability, and insufficient or absent social welfare. In their opening sequences, both films show their protagonists working menial jobs that they soon lose: Susanne quits her dehumanizing factory position fifteen minutes into *The Bicycle*, and Johanna is laid off at the outset of *Herzprung*. Subsequently, both films explore their efforts to regain stability through work and the noxious effects of unemployment or underemployment on personal relationships. Let us consider their first scenes — which depict parallel precarities shaped by neoliberal labor and gender regimes — before addressing their intersectional critiques.

*The Bicycle*'s opening sequence positions it among the East German genres of the Frauenfilm, which uses female characters to pose questions about labor and socialist subjectivity, and the *Alltagsfilm* (film about everyday life), which thematizes isolation and is more pessimistic about life in the GDR compared to earlier utopian socialist filmmaking. A long shot of a gray city skyline pierced by stationary construction cranes suggests “the halted, stagnant nature of life under real existing socialism, revealing a more skeptical, even cynical relationship to East German reality.”<sup>23</sup> The ensuing montage introduces Susanne as she bikes with her daughter Jenny (Anke Friedrich) through busy streets during a torrential downpour; drops her off at kindergarten where she cannot pay for Jenny's lunch; sits at a metal-punching machine performing repetitive manual labor; and, at home in the evening, receives a visit from an insurance collector (Walter Lendrich) whose services she can barely afford. The affects of poverty are on full display: Susanne buries her face in despair when the insurance collector leaves, and in a later scene, tears run down her cheeks while she works.

This sequence connects Susanne's status as a single mother and her social isolation with her employment and existence on the brink of poverty — despite the state welfare system championed by socialism. Indeed, these scenes “describe the deficiencies of socialism primarily on a material level, questioning, through associative leaps, its ultimate purpose.”<sup>24</sup> Schmidt's struggling single mother is a far cry from the fulfilled women in earlier utopian DEFA cinema such as Anni Neumann in Slatan Dudow's *Frauenschicksale* (*Destinies of Women*, East Germany, 1952), who chooses the GDR over the FRG because of the support she receives as a single mother. While *Destinies of Women* characterizes 1950s East Germany as a viable homeland for female laborers of all stripes, *The Bicycle* asserts that quality of life is not

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<sup>23</sup> Creech, *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts*, 97.

<sup>24</sup> Meurer, *Cinema and National Identity*, 211.

guaranteed in the 1980s. Schmidt's aesthetics, dialogue, and characterization explore how "an individual woman at the bottom of the social scale experienced the contradictions still prevailing in the contemporary GDR."<sup>25</sup> Susanne's tense encounter with Jenny's kindergarten teacher (Birgit Edenharter) demonstrates that childcare is not within every worker's means. Though Nanette Funk points out that "in state socialism, women had been able to get divorced, sometimes could afford to raise children on their own (e.g., in the former East Germany), and thus had some escapes from an unsatisfactory private sphere," no such affordability or escapes appear within Susanne's reach.<sup>26</sup> Instead, Schmidt lays bare the extant class distinctions supposedly eradicated under socialism, revealing that those who can afford to pay will receive better treatment. While Jenny's kindergarten teacher is indifferent toward Susanne, she warmly greets a father and child who arrive after her. The father's evident financial stability raises questions about the gendering of Susanne's precarity — questions that intensify following the entry of her educated, bourgeois love interest, Thomas (Roman Kaminski).

*Herzprung's* opening sequence similarly dramatizes its protagonist's precarity. With its falling white feathers and a romantic song, the fairy tale – like beginning might seem to introduce a traditional *Heimatfilm* (homeland film) celebrating the idyllic German provinces, but in this scene the nostalgic folk song "Heimat, süße Heimat" ("Homeland, Sweet Homeland") references the loss of job security and the relative financial stability of the former GDR. The film introduces Johanna sitting in a factory kitchen with three female coworkers (Eva-Maria Hagen, Bärbel Bolle, and Margit Bendokat) plucking the feathers of bloody dead geese while one of them, Elsa (Hagen), sings (fig. 1). Their menial work is underscored by their dialogue about the better life that Elsa could have as a professional singer — although she would have to play up her sex appeal, she could hypothetically work less and earn more money. This interaction announces the film's investment in exploring the intersection of women's labor with earning power and objectification. As a coworker suggestively demonstrates how to shake her hips and then winces in pain, Elsa jokes that she could still tour as a singer if the factory sends her into early retirement. The women's cruelly optimistic belief in fulfillment through a different kind of labor indirectly references Konrad Wolf's *Solo Sunny* (1980), a DEFA blockbuster about a former factory worker struggling to establish herself as a solo singer.

But the fantasy is no more within reach for Elsa or her coworkers than it was for Sunny a decade earlier, as larger forces are at work in postunification Eastern Germany's new federal states. Johanna is shortly summoned by a male supervisor who releases her from her job as part of the company's downsizing, reflecting the transition from socialism to capitalism, a process "of resources and of lives being made and unmade according to the dictates and whims of the market."<sup>27</sup> The film dramatizes East German neoliberalization with the privatization of state-owned sectors, the shrinking welfare state, and rising insecurity and mobility. Filmed in a former DEFA canteen, this scene renders the factory kitchen a microcosm of the GDR. As Steingröver observes, "The film's shooting and production are thus inextricably linked to the systematic closing of studio businesses and abolition of infrastructures that had shaped life in former East

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<sup>25</sup> Andrea Rinke, *Images of Women in East German Cinema, 1972 – 1982: Socialist Models, Private Dreamers and Rebels* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2006), 240.

<sup>26</sup> Funk, "Feminist Critiques of Liberalism," 712.

<sup>27</sup> Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 192.

Germany.”<sup>28</sup> *Herzprung* reflects on these changes by depicting work that no longer happens in the space of the cafeteria, whose use as shooting location was only possible as a result of the studio’s closing. While “a sense of loss and decline underscores the film,” it unfolds in a region that had already been deteriorating before 1989: “The East Prignitz Heimat of contemporary Brandenburg is no rural idyll . . . but an area that suffered decades of neglect during the GDR and which has fared little better since.”<sup>29</sup> Long shots of desolate landscapes and stagnant water, interrupted by the occasional abandoned vehicle or dilapidated structure, indicate that the town of Herzprung has fallen on tough times. Aside from Johanna’s spirited children, who play minor roles, little seems to grow in this barren place where almost everyone seems disenfranchised. Though both male and female characters fall victim to job redundancy — Johanna points out that her husband, a cattle breeder, has been laid off too — Misselwitz exposes the uneven gender dynamics of postsocialist unemployment when Johanna’s supervisor blithely suggests that since the state can no longer guarantee her welfare, it is up to her husband to do so. Dina Iordanova notes of this period that, “having seen many of their earlier social privileges scrapped, women have largely been losing out in the new developments.”<sup>30</sup> As *Herzprung* suggests, the denationalization and neoliberalization of Eastern Germany after unification exacerbated gender inequities that already existed under socialism.

### Labor, Citizenship, and Refusal

There are, of course, differences in how *The Bicycle* and *Herzprung* each indict neoliberal labor systems, differences that derive from the divergent contexts of socialist East Germany and the postsocialist Eastern federal states. While Schmidt’s film displays a degree of ambivalence as to how much responsibility Susanne carries for her own plight, Misselwitz’s film implies that Johanna is one of many victims of a state in transition. *The Bicycle* walks the line between indicting Susanne for failing to be a proper socialist subject and underlining her struggles to balance work with childcare. While Susanne is at fault for quitting her metal-punching job for no apparent reason and then committing insurance fraud, her environment also offers her no relief. Misselwitz dramatizes the double bind that results from the overwhelming challenges Susanne faces and the ideological framework that holds nonlaboring subjects as “accountable for their own precarious position, or their accelerated experience of precaritization.”<sup>31</sup> She goes from factory to factory in search of employment, but any job for which she qualifies would either pay too little or require her to travel, work nights, or board her daughter. Anke Pinkert notes that single mothers in DEFA films have a “special obligation to negotiate multiple roles and to take care of themselves and their children.”<sup>32</sup> When this challenge proves to be too much for Susanne, she always prioritizes Jenny over work. She is willing to do tedious labor, but her unbending commitment to parenthood marks her as an improper subject in an economy in which employment with benefits is clearly available. Andrea Rinke describes Susanne’s jobhunting sequence “as a doomed obstacle race, a series of inevitable defeats,” noting its resemblance to

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<sup>28</sup> Steingröver, *Last Features*, 159.

<sup>29</sup> Nick Hodgin, *Screening the East: Heimat, Memory and Nostalgia in German Film since 1989* (New York: Berghahn, 2011), 68 – 69.

<sup>30</sup> Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe: The Industry and Artistry of East Central European Film* (London: Wallflower, 2003), 140.

<sup>31</sup> Butler, “Bodily Vulnerability,” 111.

<sup>32</sup> Anke Pinkert, “Family Feelings: Kinship, Gender and Social Utopia in DEFA Film,” in Silberman and Wrage, *DEFA at the Crossroads*, 126.

one in Slatan Dudow's *Kuhle Wampe* (Germany, 1932) in which shots of men on bicycles seeking work dramatize far-reaching unemployment, showing an entire precarious population who would presumably be better off under socialism.<sup>33</sup> As in Dudow's montage, Susanne's bicycle seems to get her nowhere, but she is alone in her inability to procure satisfactory work (fig. 2). In desperation, she reports her bike as stolen and collects the insurance money.

Susanne's rejection of factory work was problematic for East German censors because it challenged the very terms of socialist citizenship as founded on labor. The GDR buttressed this ideology through a rhetoric of personal responsibility, workers' self-realization, and citizens' self-censorship: it was every socialist's duty to contribute to the state through labor, communitarianism, and compromise, effectively policing their own selfish tendencies. Following this path was supposed to guarantee gratification. In a state where everyone could and should work, "non-working was stigmatized as antisocial."<sup>34</sup> Shots of Susanne performing unskilled labor, first as a metal puncher and later in a brewery, leave no doubt that she experiences it as dehumanizing — the *mise-en-scène* renders her as one with the factory apparatus awash in a monochromatic palette of grays, silvers, blacks, and blues, while later she appears decapitated, an impassive face hovering over an assembly line. As Jennifer L. Creech notes, such scenes depict Susanne as "physically connected to the machine, a kind of human outgrowth of the mechanization process."<sup>35</sup> Like the workers in modernist films such as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (Germany, 1927), Susanne exemplifies the human currency of advanced industrialization and liberalization whose machinery subdues and oppresses, a cycle from which Susanne finds temporary respite by going to the bar, meeting friends, and drinking heavily. As the camera movement suggests, such work inevitably leads to alienation. A bar scene with Susanne at a table and an ensuing scene of her working at a brewery are connected by slow pans to the left and show Susanne alone, surrounded by empty bottles. Later, in a particularly wrenching sequence, an intoxicated Susanne stumbles out of a club and picks up a similarly inebriated man; the cut to a bruised Susanne awaking in a strange bed the next morning reveals that she was beaten and likely raped.

Viewers may ponder how Susanne can go out drinking when she cannot afford her child's school meal plan and borrows money from friends. In a desperate moment, Susanne calls Jenny's father and begs him for money, explaining that their daughter has been ill and needs medicine. The father, whom we encounter only as a disembodied voice through the phone, is unmoved by Susanne's tears and refuses to help, retorting that she is responsible for managing her finances. The work never ends for Susanne. When she is not drinking, working, or seeking employment, Susanne is either completing domestic chores — caring for Jenny, buying groceries, sweating over a boiling pot of laundry — or rushing from her unpaid job (motherhood) to a paid one (factory work). *The Bicycle* thus engages a rhetoric of crisis in the persistent fight for stability: Susanne's routine resembles what Berlant describes as "a life dedicated to moving toward the good life's normative/utopian zone but actually stuck in what we might call survival time, the time of struggling, drowning, holding onto the ledge, treading water — the time of *not-stopping*."<sup>36</sup> Despite her struggles, Susanne has a cruelly optimistic faith that life can get better.

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<sup>33</sup> Rinke, *Images of Women*, 241.

<sup>34</sup> Berghahn, *Hollywood behind the Wall*, 176.

<sup>35</sup> Creech, *Mothers, Comrades, and Outcasts*, 102.

<sup>36</sup> Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 169.

As she tells Frau Puschkat (Gertrud Brendler), an elderly neighbor who babysits Jenny, “It might work next time.” But Frau Puschkat disappears at the end: she has probably died, leaving Susanne alone to care for her child.

Whereas Schmidt implicates Susanne as at least partially responsible for her own precarity, Misselwitz casts Johanna as a victim of sociopolitical change. Precarity becomes a wider condition affecting the entire region: jobs are disappearing, and the only new investor on the horizon is a West German chocolate manufacturer, Horst Papenfuß (Hanns Zischler), whose last name — meaning “cardboard foot” — implies cheapness and unstable ground, taking advantage of real estate prices that are “bottoming out” amid high unemployment. Horst embodies the exploitative capitalist mindset, believing he can buy Johanna with a bottle of champagne, but she is not so desperate for work that she would sleep with him. Johanna takes over as a hairdresser for her friend Lisa (Tatjana Besson), who embarks on a Mediterranean adventure. But when Lisa decides to sell her salon to purchase another one in Italy, Johanna finds herself out of work again. In pointing out that “as a legal term, *precarious* describes the situation wherein your tenancy on your land is in someone else’s hands,” Berlant could be characterizing both Johanna’s plight and the general social conditions in the village of Herzsprung.<sup>37</sup> The land on which the town sits appears contested and unstable: Soviet troops withdraw, farmers struggle to sell their products, and shops close, while a xenophobic gang moves in.

*Herzsprung* rounds out its portrait of precarious women with depictions of precarious men who cause trouble and pain for others, particularly Johanna. The suicide of her husband Jan (Ben Becker) near the beginning of the film intensifies her economic insecurity, while also liberating her from his abusive behaviors — earlier in the film, when she seeks him out at a bar to tell him she has lost her job, he responds with blows. This scene connects the high rates of alcoholism and divorce in the GDR with the presumably concomitant frequency of domestic abuse.<sup>38</sup> Josie McLellan notes that, “by the end of the 1980s, the GDR had the highest per capita consumption of beer and spirits in the world. . . . It is not difficult to imagine how this drinking culture caused conflicts in relationships.”<sup>39</sup> Alcoholism, a violent streak, and desire for Johanna link two parallel characters, her husband Jan and a neo-Nazi named Soljanka (also played by Ben Becker). Their shared appearance and name — *Jan* forming the middle syllable of *Soljanka* — point to a shared origin: both men embody destructive responses to the insecurity brought about by the collapse of the GDR, unemployment, and the dismantling of welfare. Soljanka’s pursuit of Johanna is an attempt to regain control in an environment where he feels disenfranchised. Johanna’s casual comment that she’ll see him at the unemployment office indicates that he too is without work. Johanna’s liability is not her unemployment so much as her femininity in a space where power relations are being radically destabilized and renegotiated, and her accidental death (due to Soljanka’s violence) underlines her vulnerability and lack of value in the emerging order.

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<sup>37</sup> Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 192.

<sup>38</sup> While not a common topic in DEFA production (likely due to censorship), domestic abuse makes an appearance in some late GDR Frauenfilme without ever becoming a central issue. For instance, spousal abuse appears in *Until Death Do Us Part* and *Our Short Life* as a symptom of the unequal rates at which women were emancipated in the public and private spheres and the insecurity this causes their male partners.

<sup>39</sup> McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*, 77.

Racism and xenophobia also take center stage in *Herzprung*'s treatment of unemployment and gendered precarity. A nameless dark-skinned wanderer (Nino Sandow) of unspecified national and ethnic origin comes to the town of Herzprung and becomes romantically involved with Johanna, setting off a chain of events that culminate in Johanna's death at the hands of Soljanka and his neo-Nazi crew. Soljanka and his gang stalk and threaten the wanderer, then accidentally stab Johanna instead of him. The wanderer's possible foreignness — he might hail from the FRG, given that he speaks flawless German — becomes conflated with his racial difference in the eyes of these right extremists, who resent him for supposedly taking their women and their jobs. As Nick Hodgin remarks, "The reference to the perceived threat posed by immigrants in the context of a new geo-political situation outlines and contemporizes east Germans' apparent hostility to others."<sup>40</sup> A scene centering on anonymous graffiti defacing a Holocaust memorial in Herzprung connects rising xenophobic violence in the new federal states (which took shape as a wider phenomenon in the 1991 – 92 riots in Hoyerswerda and Rostock-Lichtenhagen) to the Nazi past. Misselwitz thus alludes to historical continuities between fascism in the first half of the twentieth century and intolerance in postunification Eastern Germany. *Herzprung* lays bare the overlap between xenophobia and racism. While Johanna's wanderer-lover, who is likely German, is perceived as a "foreign" threat to the local economy, Johanna's white Polish father (Günter Lamprecht) is not a target of violence, nor does any such animosity greet the arrival of West German chocolate manufacturer Horst, presumably because he is white, affluent, and assumed to be capable of bringing jobs to the region. Whiteness, however, does not guarantee acceptance: Johanna's lover gains employment as a cook in a highway restaurant, while Johanna herself cannot find work because of her relationship with him, which other villagers view with suspicion and disdain.

Misselwitz dramatizes the connections between sexism and racism, critiquing the insidiousness of bigotry and the intersectionality of inequality and prejudice. In the neoliberalizing economy of Herzprung, it is apparently easier for a dark-skinned male stranger to get a job in the hospitality industry (where exoticism sells) than for a local white woman to get hired by a nearby hotel owner, not least because the villagers' racism casts her as tainted by association with the wanderer. Johanna's plight resonates with prevailing literary and cinematic depictions of racial anxiety about miscegenation, which cast white women as betraying the white community through interracial romance — a transgression for which they often suffer or die.<sup>41</sup> The film also underlines gender inequities that existed under socialism: "In postsocialism women faced severe displacement from the public sphere and a new and terrifying unemployment they had never before known. . . . The gendered nature of postsocialist privatization meant women in most countries in the region were even more affected than men."<sup>42</sup> Iordanova agrees that "women's social position has, in fact, worsened, and that gender inequalities are on the increase," owing in part to the disappearance of state benefits.<sup>43</sup> Even if the dark-skinned wanderer may be the target

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<sup>40</sup> Hodgin, *Screening the East*, 71.

<sup>41</sup> For a discussion of anxieties about interracial relationships and offspring in American and West German cultures, see Angelica Fenner, *Race under Reconstruction in German Cinema: Robert Stemmle's "Toxi"* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 186 – 88. See also Heide Fehrenbach, *Race after Hitler: Black Occupation Children in Postwar Germany and America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005). For a complementary perspective on American films where the white man's female lover of color dies, see M. Elise Marubbio, *Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006).

<sup>42</sup> Funk, "Feminist Critiques of Liberalism," 712.

<sup>43</sup> Iordanova, *Cinema of the Other Europe*, 140.

of hate speech and violent threats, he still benefits from male privilege. Johanna's social status declines while her lover's status and desirability increase: he finds a job and a place to stay and has affairs with other women.

Unable to find work, Johanna discovers her main avenues to self-realization through her relationship and the rejection of local mores. Several other characters, including her father, warn Johanna against the consequences of her involvement with the wanderer. She refuses to give up the pleasure she derives from their liaison and chooses self-determination, romantic fulfillment, and sexual autonomy over compromise and the tedium of conformity. Johanna's devil-may-care attitude and self-emancipation from East German provincialism resonate with the contemporary cinema of feminist empowerment like Ridley Scott's *Thelma and Louise* (US, 1991), which *Herzprung* references in a scene in which a red-haired Johanna and Lisa enjoy a night out on the town. Like *Thelma and Louise*, Johanna and Lisa want to break free of small-town life and its socioeconomic limits — with both films highlighting the car as a symbol of mobility and potential liberation — but such attempts have life-and-death stakes. Lisa's successful breakout initially seems to bode well for Johanna's chances of achieving stability and happiness, but Johanna ultimately pays a fatal price for falling in love with a man whose skin is darker than hers.

### **Aesthetics, Agency, and Autonomy**

Schmidt and Misselwitz develop critiques of romantic fantasies through their aesthetic choices. *The Bicycle* and *Herzprung* both generate “a palpable sense of disquiet or unease” that is, according to Pinkert, often associated in East German film “with the difficulty women experience in forming or sustaining new stable, romantic, domestic partnerships.”<sup>44</sup> *The Bicycle*'s realist presentation of Susanne and Thomas's markedly dispassionate courtship keeps viewers from investing in any idealistic expectation that their pairing will solve Susanne's problems. The sequence narrating their first date notably breaks with the socialist realist aesthetic that dominates the rest of the film, using a soft lens and voiceover to frame their ideas about love and courtship as superficial fantasies. Cinematography and sound here signal the collision of the daydream with the disappointing reality, recalling an earlier scene in which Susanne learns that a job she had been offered as a travel agent was given to another applicant.

*Herzprung* similarly shapes its dismissal of good-life fantasies through formal means, by threading together fairy-tale imagery with jarring images of corporeal and emotional suffering. On the one hand, the film is punctuated by the color red, rife with animal symbolism, and introduces a waiflike Johanna dressed in white. On the other hand, it alludes to violence with images of blood, death, xenophobic graffiti, and threatening posturing. This juxtaposition of beauty and savagery conveys the unmet expectations of sociopolitical stability with German unification vis-à-vis the painful realities of living in its abandoned landscapes. When Johanna visits her lover in a wedding dress on New Year's Eve, the costume and occasion seem to suggest a new beginning, but the viewer can be certain that no happy end awaits, as the film's aesthetics have consistently foreshadowed Johanna's cruel demise.

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<sup>44</sup> Pinkert, “Family Feelings,” 126.

Even as both films approach cruel optimism and good-life fantasies critically, they endorse their protagonists' aspirations for autonomy and empowerment, with both women attaining a certain degree of romantic, sexual, and familial self-determination. Susanne's route to a gratifying job and exoneration from the crime of insurance fraud may occur through the interventions of her boyfriend Thomas, but she ultimately liberates herself from his control. Thomas's patronizing attitude prompts her to leave him, moving out of his spacious bourgeois flat and back into her own shabby apartment. Indeed, Thomas appears to think he has bought Susanne by providing stability and a more comfortable life, much like Horst plying Johanna with the promise of a job and luxury items like chocolate and champagne. Though Wolfgang Engler argues that the socialist foundation for heterosexual interactions in the GDR allowed men and women to enter into and terminate relationships independent of financial considerations, *The Bicycle* illustrates how the gendered economy of power — *economy* understood here both literally and figuratively — ultimately chips away at the affair between Susanne and Thomas.<sup>45</sup> When Thomas asks Susanne what she has achieved in her life, thereby implying he measures personal worth in terms of accomplishments, Susanne retorts, "I've brought up Jenny." Child rearing, she asserts, is work worth acknowledging, even if it is unpaid. It is also a means to resist the neoliberal socialist agenda: "In contradistinction to Party policies, which promoted the ideal of the full-time working mother but placed the emphasis on woman's fulfillment through work, Susanne's chosen path of self-realisation is motherhood."<sup>46</sup> Susanne also corrects Thomas's misperception that having children is a lucrative affair for a single mother and shows solidarity with a coworker who is beaten by a husband she refuses to leave because she cannot afford to raise her three children alone. In contrast with Susanne, who has had to struggle for the little she has, the childless Thomas benefits from access to training and career advancement. Education, professional development, and financial independence are within closer reach for men than women, especially single mothers, in the GDR.

Ultimately *The Bicycle* ends on a hopeful note, with Susanne securing a job where she benefits from a supportive brigade, breaking up with Thomas, and living on her own with Jenny. She also accomplishes a seemingly impossible feat by teaching the tiny Jenny to ride her adult-sized bicycle, taking pleasure in the moment while oblivious to Thomas, who has stepped into the public scene and looks on, stunned. The continuously moving camera constructs Susanne as a mobile, three-dimensional subject in a hopeful ending that pairs her with Jenny rather than with Thomas. This final scene interrogates the male gaze through the camera's 360-degree pan of the traffic rotary around which Jenny rides, depicting a moment of mother-child bonding in which the male onlooker plays no part and that is not performed for his enjoyment. This achievement is Susanne's alone.

In *Herzprung*, the collapse of the GDR seems to precipitate Johanna's sexual emancipation. In an early scene with her husband, Johanna appears to be kneeling submissively before him as if about to perform oral sex, and later she naively indulges chocolatier Horst's flirtations in hopes of a job. But we soon encounter a resolute protagonist who refuses to be objectified or controlled. She resists commodification by Horst, a Westerner who believes everything in the East is for sale, and instead pours the luxury products he offers her into his lap (champagne) and over his head (chocolate). Though Horst offers her financial stability as either his mistress or his

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<sup>45</sup> Wolfgang Engler, *Die Ostdeutschen: Kunde von einem verlorenen Land* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1999), 257 – 58.

<sup>46</sup> Berghahn, *Hollywood behind the Wall*, 206.

employee, Johanna exercises self-determination in choosing sexual integrity and unemployment over prostituting herself and becoming a cog in the demand-driven neoliberal machine. But Johanna's labor — sexual or otherwise — is easily replaced, reducing her to just another surplus good in the capitalizing economy that has rendered the regional labor force redundant: she is “disposable, dispossessed by capital and its exploitative excess.”<sup>47</sup> Johanna's pursuit of sexual subjectivity is also complicated by the efforts of homegrown radicals to contain the threats she embodies, and though she fends off Soljanka's advances, his aggression culminates in her death. Only with the unnamed wanderer can Johanna enter into a mutually negotiated relationship that both participants enjoy and in which neither seeks to possess the other. The wanderer demands sexual freedom for himself too, claiming that no one can own his body. However, even as Johanna succeeds in asserting her sexual agency and emerges as an empowered subject, this moment is cut short by the violence engendered in part by sociopolitical transformations. The price for gender emancipation, it seems, is not only a resurgence of racism but other social inequalities as well.

### Thematic Continuities

Schmidt's and Misselwitz's respective critiques of late socialism and postsocialism mobilize gender to expose and challenge neoliberal values. These films merit attention for their powerful portrayals of women unemployed, underemployed, unfulfillingly or exploitatively employed, and expediently laid off; women who are unable or refuse to adapt to the demands of the neoliberal economy; women who stubbornly seek pleasure even as they struggle to survive. Their perilous status in the labor force shapes their lives in the public sphere as well as the private, the economic realm as well as the affective. These lives are summarized in haunting images: Susanne, the loving mother, sullied by drinking; Elsa, the singing cook, sullied by the blood of slaughtered geese; Johanna, the charming widow, sullied in the eyes of her community by miscegenation. These lives of unease, disquiet, and marginality reflect a brutal political reality: for East German women, the promises of neoliberalism and unification are like Susanne's bicycle, which goes nowhere or travels in circles — except perhaps leading them to initiate the next generation of women, represented by Susanne's daughter Jenny, into this ongoing struggle.

Because *Herzprung* is set in East Germany shortly after 1990, it is tempting to read Misselwitz's critique of gender, labor, and precarity as specific to unification-era cinema. But a comparative reading with Schmidt's film reveals that many of Misselwitz's concerns echo those voiced a decade before, including those of earlier East German Frauenfilme. The postunification films of various West German and Austrian directors (such as Maren Ade, Doris Dörrie, Ulrich Seidl, and Hannes Stöhr) extend these lines of inquiry into contemporary cinema, in which distinctions between East and West may have become less apparent but nonetheless remain visible and formative. Expressed in the song “Heimat, süße Heimat,” Johanna's and Elsa's longing for opportunity, stability, and self-determination may not have found fulfillment with German unification or European expansion, but many films have continued to explore the stakes of its realization well into the twenty-first century.

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<sup>47</sup> Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession*, 29.