

The Russians Are Coming: A Film with Two Birthdays – 1968 & 1987

BY BURGHARD CIESLA



Director Heiner Carow on the set of *The Russians Are Coming* in 1968.
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*I am victory
My father was war
Peace is my dear son
Who already resembles my father*
—Erich Fried (1921–88)

The film *Die Russen kommen* (*The Russians Are Coming*, 1968/87), directed by Heiner Carow (1929–97), was shown for the first time on the evening of December 3, 1987, at East Berlin’s prestigious International cinema. This premiere took place almost twenty years after the film was made. Earlier that night, the director explained in an interview on the Berliner Rundfunk radio station why it had taken so long to release the film. In introducing the broadcast, the radio host didn’t beat around the bush: “In a way, the film has two birthdays, 1968 and 1987. So what were the main reasons that the film wasn’t released back then?”¹

¹ Carow, Heiner. Transcription of an interview with Berliner Rundfunk, Dec. 3, 1987. Filmmuseum Potsdam (film press folder).

Heiner Carow presumably took a long, deep breath on that December day in the Berliner Rundfunk studio before answering the question posed to him. He explained that, at the time, there had been a vast number of reasons, but the one that was probably decisive was “the unbelievably complicated political year of 1968.”² That year a generational conflict emerged that shook both sides of the heavily militarized, bipolar Cold War world. Two currents of history collided: in the East, the idea of democratic socialism; and in the West, the anti-capitalist youth revolt and anti-authoritarian rebellion.

With regard to the West, Daniel Cohn-Bendit—the German-French anarchist and student leader—later explained: “We were in the mood for revolution!” Looking back, he summarized the significance of the year: “In 1968, a political and cultural revolt broke out that didn’t stop at borders. The upheaval began in the United States, where it was fueled by the Vietnam War, and spilled over into Germany and France, but also into Eastern Europe. In Poland and Yugoslavia, for instance, there were riots directed against authoritarian communism. Students in Latin America and Turkey revolted.”³

In the East, however, the “dream of socialism with a human face” ended in Czechoslovakia in late August 1968, when the Warsaw Pact states militarily brought their “brother state” back under their control.⁴ In East Germany, the leadership of the SED (German Socialist Unity Party) saw the events of 1968 as a confirmation of their fear that social and cultural reforms would quickly lead to political destabilization and “ideological softening.” They felt it was necessary to clamp down and minimize or even eliminate the influences of the student movement in the West on “actual existing socialism” in the East. In the face of these developments, party leaders were reassured that the measures taken after the 11th Plenum (December 1965) had been the right decision. These measures fell especially hard on the DEFA Studio for Feature Films, where nearly a full year’s production was censored or banned. For several years, East Germany’s “abandonment of a policy of cultural openness” left the filmmakers at DEFA little leeway to break new ground.⁵

The political and ideological climate prevailing in the GDR after the military repression of the Prague Spring became evident at a film premiere in October 1968. DEFA had commissioned *Abschied (Farewell, 1968)*, a film adaptation of a semi-autobiographical novel by Johannes R. Becher, a communist poet and the first East German Minister of Culture. The film, which closely parallels the events of Becher’s youth, was written by Günter Kunert and directed by Egon Günther. At the time of its celebratory premiere at the Kosmos cinema on October 10, 1968, everything seemed right with the world.⁶ However, Becher, who had died in 1958, was a friend of SED First Secretary Walter Ulbricht and his wife, and the Ulbrichts were furious about the modernist film adaptation, allegedly leaving the screening early. At the premiere, one of the SED’s chief ideologists, Alexander Abusch, also gave a commemorative speech; the digs at Czechoslovakian intellectuals highlight the tensions then reigning in the East Bloc: “We have seen how they ‘promote a new socialism with a human face,’ but at the same time disfigure and deform the face of the people of their socialist fatherland through their provincial mimicry of Western late bourgeois decadence in films and plays.”⁷ *Abschied* would later be quietly taken out of circulation. The immense political pressure weighing on the DEFA Studios in 1968 “forced embarrassing submission, platitudes, and trivialities”⁸ into the daily business of filmmaking.

It was in this atmosphere that *The Russians Are Coming* was being finished. Author and screenwriter Claus Küchenmeister (1930-2014) was, as he expressed it, the actual “originator” of the film. Carow and Küchenmeister had met in the early 1950s at the DEFA Studio for Young Filmmakers, under Slatan Dudow and Gerhard Klein. Both of them belonged to the generation of children and youth that had been shaped by National Socialism, but they had had completely different experiences. Küchenmeister was the son of communist journalist Walter Küchenmeister, who was part of the Red Orchestra resistance group and was executed in 1943. The father had made sure that his son was gotten out in time; after spending the war in Switzerland, Küchenmeister returned to the Soviet occupation zone in 1946. He remained preoccupied with his stance towards those who had remained in Germany and not taken action against the Nazis; for him, all Germans were more or less guilty. After the war, the collective silence of the Germans about their past also infuriated him. He

² Ibid.

³ Mohr, Joachim. “Die 60er Jahre. Pop, Protest und Fortschrittsglaube.” *Spiegel Geschichte*, 4/2016. 15.

⁴ Wolle, Stefan. *Der Traum von der Revolte: Die DDR 1968*. Berlin: Links, 2008. 9.

⁵ Hertle, Hans-Hermann and Stefan Wolle. *Damals in der DDR: Der Alltag im Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat*, 2nd ed. Munich: Goldmann Wilhelm GmbH, 2004. 128-159; Herbert, Ulrich. *Geschichte Deutschlands im 20. Jahrhundert*. Munich: Beck, 2014. 740.

⁶ Wolle 221-223; Gersch, Wolfgang. *Szenen eines Landes: Die DDR und ihre Filme*. Berlin: Aufbau, 2006. 133-134.

⁷ Qtd. in Wolle 221.

⁸ Gersch 133.

posed uncomfortable questions: “Where were you in 1944? And which uniform did you wear?”⁹ Heiner Carow then told Küchenmeister his own story: how he had experienced the collapse of Germany in 1945, how an entire generation had been manipulated and what that had done to them. Carow spoke about damaged relationships with parents and especially fathers, who had not spoken the truth: “nothing they told us was true.”¹⁰

The first film the two produced together was based on Küchenmeister’s childhood. *Sie nannten ihn Amigo* (*They Called Him Amigo*, 1958) conformed to standard party doctrine, according to which the main heroes should be represented as “victors of history.” (Heiner Carow later commented that, after the first third of the film, such heroes were always supposed to fall into the hands of an upstanding resistance fighter and get rescued.)¹¹ Their collaboration on *Sie nannten ihn Amigo* (*They Called Him Amigo*) went smoothly. Küchenmeister was looking for a way to rebuild his relationship to the Germans: he wanted to understand what had happened back then, and his collaboration with Carow helped him in that process. It took several years before Küchenmeister found the appropriate material to tell Carow’s autobiographical story. In the meantime, he worked with Joachim Kunert on the script for *Die Abenteuer des Werner Holt* (*The Adventures of Werner Holt*, 1964), an adaptation of a novel by Dieter Noll. This anti-war film, which was very successful internationally, offers a convincing portrait of the experience of a generation of boys as young as sixteen who, as of 1943, were drafted to help with anti-aircraft guns (*Flakhelfer Generation*).¹²

In early 1966, Küchenmeister stumbled upon the short story collection *Ferien am Feuer* (trans. *Vacation around the Campfire*), the literary debut of Egon Richter (1932-2016). Küchenmeister reviewed the book in an article about the new list of the Rostock publishing house Hinstorff Verlag, which appeared in the SED party newspaper, *Neues Deutschland*. He remarked, “In *Ferien am Feuer*, Egon Richter, previously known for his reportage, presents the generation that was brought up in the fascist spirit and yet was too young to be sent to war. After the end of the war, the boys get to know Soviet soldiers and officers and have to change their thinking. This ‘post-Holt generation’ has scarcely been explored in literature here in the GDR.”¹³ *Ferien am Feuer* contains eleven short stories about WWII, its end, and the subsequent period in a town on the Baltic island Usedom.¹⁴ These loosely strung-together stories deal with the same main characters, who are all in the Hitler Youth. Küchenmeister and Carow were inspired by one of these stories—“Die Anzeige” (trans. “The Denunciation”)—and submitted the script to the DEFA Studio in 1967. “In ‘Die Anzeige,’ Janek, a Polish forced laborer around sixteen years old, is shot and killed by the village police officer, a staunch Nazi supporter. After the end of the war, a boy files a report with the Russian commandant’s office because he witnessed this brutal act.”¹⁵ In *The Russians Are Coming*, the scriptwriters replaced the character of Janek with a so-called *Ostarbeiter*¹⁶ from Russia.

The DEFA Studio management received the first version of the script for *The Russians Are Coming* on March 16, 1967. Working titles included *Ferien am Feuer*, *Um den Preis des Lebens* (*At the Cost of Life*) and later also *Kompliment EK II* (*Iron Cross 2nd Class, with Compliments*).¹⁷ The script was immediately deemed unsuccessful by the three parties involved, however: the DEFA Studio management, the Studio’s party leadership, and the Central Administration for Film at the Ministry of Culture (*Hauptverwaltung Film*, or HVFilm). Consequently, it was temporarily removed from the thematic production program in April 1967. After multiple revisions, the final version was ready, and the production was included in DEFA’s feature film program for 1968. *The Russians Are Coming* was now classified as a film that would help meet DEFA’s annual production goal in the planned economy (*Planerfüller*), so it had to be finished by the end of the year.¹⁸

⁹ Trepper, Leopold. *Die Wahrheit: Autobiographie*. Munich: dtv, 1978; Carow, Interview; “Filme des Monats.” Filmmuseum Potsdam, 1987; Eckstaedt, Anita. *Nationalsozialismus in der “zweiten Generation”: Psychoanalyse von Hörigkeitsverhältnissen*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992. 135-141; Küchenmeister, Claus., Letter, “Es war schlimm, gespenstisch beklemmend. Der Nachruf für Heiner Carow. (*Neues Deutschland* vom 4.2.) und sein Film *Die Russen kommen*,” *Neues Deutschland*, Feb. 11, 1997: 15; Jacobsen, Wolfgang and Rolf Aurich, *Der Sonnensucher: Konrad Wolf*. Berlin: Aufbau, 2005. 324-325; Gersch 81-82, 133-137; Carow, Heiner. “Nachdenken über den 8. Mai,” *Sonntag*, 18, 1990.

¹⁰ H. Carow, Interview; “Filme des Monats.”

¹¹ Poss, Ingrid and Peter Warnecke, eds. *Spur der Filme: Zeitzeugen über die DEFA*. Berlin: Links, 2006. 239-240.

¹² Carow, Interview; “Filme des Monats”; Habel, F.-B. *Das große Lexikon der DEFA-Spielfilme*. Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2000. 11-12; Poss, Ingrid and Peter Warnecke, eds. *Spur der Filme: Zeitzeugen über die DEFA*. Berlin: Links, 2006. 239-240.

¹³ Küchenmeister, Claus. “Brücke zum Norden: Neu auf der Buchmesse: Aus dem Messeangebot des Hinstorff Verlages,” *Neues Deutschland*, March 2, 1966. 4.

¹⁴ Richter, Egon. *Ferien am Feuer*. Rostock: Hinstorff, 1966.

¹⁵ Steinlein, Rüdiger. “‘Er hiess Jan’ – Bemerkungen zum Polen-Bild in deutscher Jugendliteratur zum Thema Nationalsozialismus/Judenverfolgung.” In Neumann, Bernd, Dietmar Albrecht, and Andrej Talarczyk, eds. *Literatur, Grenzen, Erinnerungsräume: Erkundungen des deutsch-polnisch-baltischen Ostseeraums als einer Literaturlandschaft*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004. 301.

¹⁶ The term *Ostarbeiter* (Eastern worker) was used by the Nazis for foreign slave laborers brought from occupied Central and Eastern Europe to work in Germany during WWII.

¹⁷ The Iron Cross (German: Eisernes Kreuz or EK) was a Prussian military award established during the Wars of Liberation against Napoleon (1813). As of the beginning of WWII (1939), four different classes of Iron Cross were given out.

¹⁸ Jacobsen and Aurich 324.

Certain key scenes for *The Russians Are Coming*—for instance the chase scene through the woods—were shot on location in the little town of Schorfheide and its surroundings, located sixty kilometers northeast of Berlin. DEFA personnel deliberately torched the Ahlimbsmühle, a water mill first mentioned in 1553. The primary location for the rest of the outdoor scenes was the seaside spa town of Bansin and the surrounding area on the Baltic island of Usedom.¹⁹

For director Carow, it was imperative to cast lay actors in the main roles. As he explained later, “It is simply not possible to artificially reproduce the purity of youth in a film. I conducted an endless number of test takes with young people, and that’s how I found the actor for the German boy.²⁰ The Russian boy was actually supposed to be played by the boy from Tarkovsky’s *Ivanovo Detstvo* (*Ivan’s Childhood*, 1962). We negotiated, but in the end we didn’t get him. I was quite desperate and called the Soviet Film Association. My colleagues there suggested this Viktor Perevalov from Leningrad. He was a lay actor, but he’d already shot a lot of films at Lenfilm, especially fairy-tale films. It still overwhelms me, even now, how this boy, without being able to speak German, felt with his entire sensitivity what I wanted from him—that was incredible.”²¹

In order to portray Nazi propaganda and its manipulation, Heiner Carow integrated original footage from *Kolberg* (1945) into the first third of his film. *Kolberg*, directed by Veit Harlan (*Jud Süß*) and Wolfgang Liebeneiner was one of UFA’s so-called *Durchhaltefilme*, designed to convince Germans to persevere to the bitter end of the war. About twenty-six shots from the UFA film were edited into *The Russians Are Coming*, giving rise to debates during filming as to “whether such usage [was] legally and politically permissible.”²²

After shooting came the rough cut, followed by discussions and misgivings on the part of Studio management; then the fine cut, prior to sound mixing.²³ The Studio approval date was then set for December 23, 1968, in Potsdam-Babelsberg. Franz Bruk, then director of the DEFA Studio for Feature Films, was deeply moved after the Studio screening because of his own experiences during the war. He told Carow: “You can work on the film for four more weeks. We’re deciding that now because the film turned out so incredibly well. But HVFilm still has to see it.”²⁴

A week later, on December 31, 1968, came the screening for final approval by the Ministry of Culture. *The Russians Are Coming* failed this final test. Because HVFilm denied official state approval, the film could not be shown in theaters. This rejection from the top came as a surprise to Carow and the film team, as well as to DEFA management, because the Studio approval the week before had gone so splendidly.²⁵ The film reels were returned to the DEFA Studio in the new year. The film’s editor, Evelyn Carow, recalled the condition in which the reels were returned in a November 2005 interview: the film that arrived “quietly, sometime around January 10, 1969, [was] completely tattered. I painstakingly cobbled it back together; to be able to continue working on it, I had a work print made from the positive—it was the only way I could get the film to the editing table.”²⁶

Along with the film reels, HVFilm sent a scathing report on the film to the Studio management in Potsdam-Babelsberg. Heiner Carow later commented that their assessment “was simply impossible to fathom.” He declared Siegfried Wagner (1925-2005), the head of HVFilm, to be the film’s “murderer.”²⁷ Wagner was counted among the cultural-political hardliners within the SED leadership and had led the Culture Division of the SED’s Central Committee from 1957 to 1966. Wagner had also been the main speaker at the 11th Plenum, in December 1965, where he had attacked DEFA personnel, claiming that they were distorting socialist reality and the activities of the party with their films.²⁸

¹⁹ Piethé, Marcel. *Filmland Brandenburg: Drehorte und Geschichten*. Berlin: Bäßler, 2012. 101.

²⁰ Gert Krause-Melzer (who plays Günter) never acted in another DEFA film; later on, however, he did end up following an artistic career path and became a cabaret artist. The film begins surprisingly, with a contemporary scene. Two young people stroll through Bansin on a summer’s day, talk to two girls, and then walk to the Baltic coastline. One of the boys plays a song on his guitar for the girls. This strolling scene is accompanied by a song, which is a musical setting of the poem “Dass du mich liebst, dass wusst’ ich” (“I Was Aware You Loved Me”) by Heinrich Heine. The song is performed by Gert Krause-Melzer, and the melody was written by Peter Gotthardt, a composer and musician, who also worked as a publisher after 1990.

²¹ “Filme des Monats.”

²² Kannapin, Detlef. “Was hat Zarah Leander mit der DEFA zu tun? Die Nachwirkungen des NS-Films im DEFA-Schaffen – Notwendige Anmerkungen für eine neue Forschungsperspektive.” *apropos: Film 2005. Das Jahrbuch der DEFA-Stiftung*, eds. Ralf Schenk, Erika Richter and Claus Löser. Berlin: Bertz + Fischer, 2005. 207.

²³ At DEFA, a film went through the following phases: rough cut, fine cut, then sound mixing, followed by Studio approval. Finally, HVFilm had to give official state approval and permission to show the film in theaters.

²⁴ Poss and Warnecke 239.

²⁵ Schittly, Dagmar. *Zwischen Regie und Regime: Die Filmpolitik der SED im Spiegel der DEFA-Produktionen*. Berlin: Links, 2002. 160-161; Carow, Evelyn. “Es war immer Teamarbeit,” Interview by the Forum für Filmschnitt und Montagekunst in Cologne, Nov. 26-28, 2005. [archiv.filmplus.de/2005/hommage/interview/](http://www.archiv.filmplus.de/2005/hommage/interview/). Accessed March 9, 2016.

²⁶ E. Carow, “Es war immer Teamarbeit.”

²⁷ Poss and Warnecke 239.

²⁸ ‘Siegfried Wagner.’ Biographical database, Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur (Federal Foundation for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Eastern Germany). <http://www.bundesstiftung-aufarbeitung.de/wer-war-wer-in-der-ddr-%2363%3B-1424.html?ID=3670>. Accessed Sept. 27, 2016; Schittly 138; on Siegfried Wagner, see also Beyer, Frank. *Wenn der Wind sich dreht: Meine Filme, mein Leben*. Munich: Ullstein, 2001. 150-151; Niemann, Mario and Andreas Herbst, eds., “Siegfried Wagner,” *SED-Kader: Die mittlere Ebene. Biographisches lexikon der Sekretäre der Landes- und Bezirksleitungen, der Ministerpräsidenten und der Vorsitzenden der Räte der Bezirke 1946 bis 1989* (Paderborn/Munich/Vienna/Zurich: Schöningh, 2010) 501-502; see also Niemann and Herbst, eds., “Franz Bruk,” *SED-Kader* 135.

The primary critiques leveled at *The Russians Are Coming* were that it attempted a “psychologization of fascism”; it did not correspond to “the Marxist-Leninist worldview”; and its “subjectivist representation” did not permit a realistic view of conditions at the end of WWII.²⁹ HVFilm found the greatest problems to be the film’s lack of necessary party loyalty and the fact that it was an antifascist film without antifascist heroes.³⁰ In his December 1987 interview, Carow described the arguments made against the film: “The main criticisms were about the psychologization of fascism—which meant that the characters were depicted in their full psychological complexity and the socioeconomic causes, conditions, and mechanisms of the fascist regime were not described—and that the dreams were modernist, which was related to the first criticism. To that, I can only repeat: So, why not? The time seemed right, and it’s the only possible way to talk about fascism today, at least for me.”³¹ Further arguments made against the film included: the main character does not encounter any communists; the lone communist in the film was more a petty bourgeois; and, in general, the film depicted rescue by outside (Soviet) forces rather than through internal antifascist resistance.³²

The powers that be were particularly bothered by the subjective, psychological and fictitious narrative style of the film. The playfully lyrical tone did not suit HVFilm at all, as it did not seem appropriate for the harsh realities of war. The criticism was also raised that the film tried to depict fascism through adolescent sexual fantasies involving murder, blood and death (which Carow had in fact intended). But it was precisely this generally light style and the simple narrative about how a young person experienced the last days of the war, understood through dream sequences and flashbacks, which convincingly illustrated the inner world and constitution of the sixteen-year-old Hitler Youth boy influenced by National Socialism. It was above all the dream sequences, for which Carow drew inspiration from Andrei Tarkovsky’s film *Ivan’s Childhood*, that disturbed the film functionaries and led to an “absurd criticism of modernism.” Among the film policy bureaucrats, the dream sequences were interpreted as clear signs of a lack of party loyalty and ideological softening.³³ Ultimately, Carow didn’t allow the use of memory and dream sequences to be taken from him; in his next film, *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* (*The Legend of Paul and Paula*, 1972), “the dream scenes [become] the necessary finding-of-oneself of a person who reflects and wants to be productive.”³⁴

Claus Küchenmeister, who in addition to writing the script also played the role of the ironically resistant German in the film (the one criticized as “petty bourgeois”), recalled the long deliberations about the film at DEFA in 1997: “It was worse. It was hauntingly nightmarish. The film shows how a sixteen-year-old German boy becomes the innocent accomplice of murderers. That touched a nerve for some people because they could not, or chose not to bear the fact that, in reality, it was their own past that was being talked about. A past they had done an excellent job of suppressing.”³⁵ Küchenmeister’s analysis is broadly applicable outside of the DEFA context as well: after WWII, the defeated and occupied country of Germany was largely characterized by collective silence. The generations that had been socialized by the Nazi system made taboo their true identities, feelings, ideals, hopes, testimonies—everything they had experienced during the Third Reich—by remaining silent. The final months of war and the first weeks after the war in 1945 were traumatic for many people, who saw their belief in the so-called Thousand Year Reich destroyed. When the war was over, there were basically only two ways to escape this personal dilemma and preserve one’s own identity—to own up or not.³⁶ According to Carow and Küchenmeister, it seemed that *The Russians Are Coming* must somehow have served as a mirror that reminded Siegfried Wagner of his own personal dilemma. He may have wanted to protect other SED comrades with similar life stories from having to reflect on their own silences and suppressions as well.

Multiple discussions about the film took place in January 1969. Carow later explained that he was completely helpless in the face of the attacks. In one of these meetings, DEFA Studio director Bruk apologetically explained that “the film had moved him too much emotionally; that’s why he wasn’t able to evaluate it.”³⁷ According to Carow, others simply remained silent and voted against the film. During one of the many sessions, to which Küchenmeister had not been invited,

²⁹ Schittly 160-161.

³⁰ Jacobsen and Aurich 324.

³¹ “Filme des Monats.”

³² Ibid.

³³ Kannapin 207.

³⁴ Richter, Rolf, ed. *DEFA-Spielfilm-Regisseure und ihre Kritiker*. Berlin: Henschel, 1983. 56.

³⁵ Küchenmeister, “Es war schlimmer.”

³⁶ Eckstaedt 135.

³⁷ Poss and Warnecke 239.

Carow finally gave in and agreed to restructure the film, bringing it into conformity with the party line but mutilating it in the process.³⁸ This decision caused a quarrel between Carow and Küchenmeister. From that point until the premiere in December 1987, they tried to stay out of each other's way as much as possible. In his 1987 interview with the Berliner Rundfunk, Carow explained: "And then this blow-up over the film also came between us, so that now, twenty years later, we're once again standing together on the stage. That's really strange."³⁹

How was the film supposed to be restructured? Under a new title, *Karriere* (1970), Carow and his new scriptwriter, Herman Herlinghaus, attempted to retroactively build a contemporary framing story around *The Russians Are Coming*. In the film, Günter, who is now 40 years old, works for a West German enterprise and is supposed to lay off the communist chairman of its Workers' Council. Both men respect each other in spite of their differing political views. In flashbacks comprised of footage from *The Russians Are Coming*, Günter recalls the Nazi period and his involvement in a person's death in 1945. Now, two decades later, he still hasn't drawn the lessons of his complicity and once again allows himself to be corrupted. When he finally confesses everything to his son, the son leaves because he has been lied to. In comparison to the flashbacks, the contemporary frame story comes across as sterile and cold. It remains a workaround that can be easily identified as a later addition to the film. *Career* premiered on April 15, 1971.⁴⁰ Carow was later very unhappy with his "act of voluntary self-mutilation" (as Küchenmeister once put it). Küchenmeister wrote that, after 1990, Carow told him, "I'd like nothing more than to burn the film"; he also commented, "He [Carow] was serious." But Küchenmeister had a much better idea—he suggested showing both films back-to-back, "in order to illustrate how self-censorship works," stating, "These films would truly be worth an essay."⁴¹

Originally, the intention had been to compare *The Russians Are Coming* with another film: Konrad Wolf's autobiographical production, *Ich war neunzehn* (*I Was Nineteen*, 1968). In 1945, Heiner Carow was sixteen, and Konrad Wolf nineteen. While Wolf depicted the wartime experiences of a minority, Carow wanted to portray the sentiments of the majority of Germans. The two films thus showed different perspectives on the end of WWII and were, in some way, supposed to function as counterparts. To this end, the two directors had agreed in 1968 that they would show the films together at the Academy of Arts in Berlin, in order to present entirely different experiences of the end of the war in Germany. This double screening obviously never came about after Carow's film was denied state approval; instead, their plan could only be implemented two decades later.⁴² In the meantime, Konrad Wolf had passed away, so Carow dedicated his film to his former colleague by including Wolf's name and the following sentence in the credits of the 1987 version: "When I look back on my distant childhood, it is as if I were seeing images from an old film."

In closing, let me make one last observation about the two birthdays of *The Russians Are Coming*, 1968 and 1987. A major reason that it took two decades before Carow's 1968 antiwar film was made available to the East German public was the changing political climate in the Soviet Union. After General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev took charge in Moscow in 1985, he began talking about "new thinking," "openness" (*glasnost*) and "restructuring" (*perestroika*). It sounded like another Prague Spring, or even better: like a Moscow Spring! Soviet films that had previously been kept under lock and key were finally shown both in the USSR and abroad. It was in this context that the delayed premiere of *The Russians Are Coming* took place in December 1987. The film was still current, or, as Heiner Carow put it in 1987, "The life of films is measured in terms of their inner topicality."⁴³ Just like in 1968, the "old men" at the head of the SED wanted to keep everything under wraps; but the times had changed, as they always do. *Panta rhei*—everything flows.

Translated by Kate DeVane Brown.

³⁸ Küchenmeister, "Es war schlimmer."

³⁹ Carow, Interview.

⁴⁰ *Karriere*. Film database, DEFA-Stiftung (DEFA Foundation), www.defa-stiftung.de/DesktopDefault.aspx?TabID=412&FilmID=06UJ9A002LGP&qpn=0. Accessed May 30, 2016; Richter 56; Habel 311-312.

⁴¹ Küchenmeister, "Es war schlimmer."

⁴² "Filme des Monats."

⁴³ Ibid.

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