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Subversive Potential in East German Film for Youth

Almost thirty years ago, the world witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), and less than a year later, the GDR (German Democratic Republic/ East Germany) ceased to exist. Even the last generation of children born into the GDR, has since come of age. With this last generation which was so forcefully thrown into a new nationhood, images of childhood and youth in East Germany gradually disappeared, after youth had played before played an important role in politics. Although literature and film were important tools for both aesthetic and ideological reasons, they could significantly deviate from political lines despite a regulated state-related system of censorship, and proof that overly simplistic politicization of the arts was just not possible. This talk picks up on this ambiguity, and explores the subversive potential of East German film for youth (DEFA) between 1961 and 1989 as a medium that reached for new generation as well as all other demographics across the country. I will ask for specific times, when children's film offered shelter for screenwriters and filmmakers for critical work, address significant cine-poetical forms of subversion, such as the child as critical spectator, and discuss the Brechtian tradition of fragmented reflexive realism as critical tool for socialism itself. With this approach, the talk ultimately asked to what extent children's cinema could serve as "counter art" that aimed to overcome a dictated national identity behind the Berlin Wall for the young.

Ada Bieber, PhD, teaches and researches in the Department of German Literature at Humboldt-University, Berlin. In her research, she focusses on picture books on the Holocaust, literature and film from former East Germany, and downriver narratives in the context of German exile writing. She is the author of a monograph on James Krüss' "Tales of 101 Days" (2012) and co-editor of a volume on modern robinsonades (2009) as well as a forthcoming special issue on political young adult GDR Literature and Film (2019). Ada has worked in Australia (*The University of Sydney*), and by teaching in United States and Europe (*Children's Literature Summer School*, University of Antwerp; *Max Kade Visiting Professor* at Michigan State University, spring 2019). Ada has also served on the jury for the *German Youth Literature Award* (2013-15), on the *ChLA Publications Advisory Board* (2017-2018), and is currently member of the *Academic Advisory Board for the German Yearbook Children's and Youth Literature (GKJF, 2017-21)*. Her recent research appears in the *Australian Yearbook of German Literary and Cultural Studies* and *The Lion and the Unicorn*.