

Watching films in the ruins: Cinema-going in early post-war Berlin¹

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Summary:

Although Berlin was heavily bombed during the Second World War, and subsequently divided into four sectors, the city's cinemas were quickly re-established after the armistice, and were readily and cheaply available to Berliners. This study examines cinema-going under the exceptional circumstances present in the destroyed and occupied city of Berlin between the end of the war in 1945 and the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic in 1949. The difficult living conditions influenced audience habits. Many cinemagoers attended film showings as an escapist means to temporarily forget their miserable everyday lives. The research is based on archival sources: statistics, newspapers, maps, yellow pages, photographs as well as contemporary advertising material. Special attention is paid to cinema locations, along with the motivations and preferences of the viewers and their mobility between the sectors.

Keywords: historical audience research, post-war Berlin, local cinema culture, cinema advertisement

The early post-war period in Germany was an on-going experience of deficit. While food and other basic products were available in exchange for ration coupons, the rest was accessible only on the black market (Steege, 2008). Whereas in other parts of West Germany conditions improved after the currency reform in June 1948, the situation in West Berlin actually worsened, as the reform helped trigger the year-long blockade and airlift. Not only was the city severely damaged, but the allied forces confiscated houses that were still intact (Andreas-Friedrich, 1984, p. 82-3). Living conditions were dismal, as can be seen in reports from contemporary observers. As the British correspondent Victor Gollancz noted: 'The place, which had recently been flooded for four weeks, was inhabited by two women and

five children, belonging to two different families. Every inch of room was crammed with furniture and beds in double tiers.' (Gollancz, 1947, p. 77).

Within four to five years after the war had ended, the Germans re-established a more or less 'normal' life, albeit in two different countries: the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, each founded in 1949. The housing situation, transport infrastructure, and coal and food supplies improved in both the West and East. There are many narratives recounting the Germans' return to their previous routines. It is usually reported from a political and economic terms, from the perspective of the allied forces or of the population itself. Hence, most of the stories of early post-war Germany focus on the allied occupation, the daily hardship of women and children, the soldiers returning from POW-camps as well as the reconstruction of the housing and industry (Glaser, 1985; Echternkamp, 2003; Steege, 2008; Benz 2009).

This study attempts to provide a different perspective on the normalization process, by probing the practice of cinema-going in divided Berlin between 1945 and 1949. Notably, entertainment and diverse leisure time activities continued to play important roles amid the post-war ruins. By the end of the 1940s more than a thousand films were screened in occupied Germany (estimate based on Pleyer, 1956, p. 26-7). In West Berlin, fifty-four per cent of the population attended the cinema regularly (Greffrath, 1995, p. 124), a significantly higher percentage than in the rest of Germany (*ibid.*).

Most of the research on early post-war German cinema concentrates either on film production (Pleyer, 1965; Greffrath, 1995; Brandlmeier, 1989; Shandley, 2001), distribution and censorship (Fehrenbach 1995, Fay 2008) or exhibition practices (Bentele, 1988; Hauser, 1989; Enz, 1982; Bähr, 1995; Hanisch, 2004; Mühl-Benninghaus, 2004). Audience studies focus primarily on their preferences for popular pre-1945 German films (Skopal, 2011; Garncarz, 2013; Shandley, 2001). Apart from Pavel Skopal's essay on cinemagoers in early post-war Leipzig and Sofia Dyak's work on cinemas in Warsaw and Kiev during the same period (Dyak 2006), there is hardly any other study devoted to audiences in destroyed and occupied cities after the Second World War. Dyak's research, focusing on the everyday cinema attendance in ruined Eastern European metropolises, lets us assume that viewers' customs must also have changed in Berlin. The Germans had barely any money or free time, as they spent many hours a day working and organizing their basic needs. Despite their miserable living standards, they still found their way to the few film theatres that had been left intact. This article focuses on their motivations as well as the common practice of cinema-going, since re-establishing a sense of normalcy seems to have been a priority of social life in those days.

Methods and sources

The study is based on a methodological triangulation (Biltereyst et al., 2012a), given that all currently available archival sources relating to post-war cinema-going in Berlin are incomplete. Although many scholars in the field of audience studies refer both to archival materials and oral histories (Biltereyst et al., 2012b; Treveri & Sedgwick, 2014), this research

does not include interviews. In the late 1940s, adult viewers belonged to the generations born in and before the 1920s. Consequently, conducting interviews at this point of time would be informative only in the context of cinema-going as a childhood experience. This project draws information from official reports and statistics, local newspapers, maps, yellow pages and telephone books, photographs and advertising material. However, most libraries and archives possess scant and fragmentary material, as paper was a limited and often recycled resource (Benz, 2009, p. 149). For example, information on contemporary film programmes in Berlin is lacking. We have no information on when or where particular films were screened.² Statistics were collected irregularly and involved different methods and categories in each political zone. Newspapers were controlled by the allies and should be considered propaganda rather than impartial information. Thus, the diffuse character of the sources results in a story that, unless speculative, must remain fragmentary.

Cinema programmes – i.e. flyers and booklets with the current programme of a particular cinema (**Figures 1–4**)³ – are a special type of source. They are of major interest for this research, not only because they supplied core information, but also because they facilitated one of the ‘routine procedures for creating consumer identification of [...] theatres to attend’ (Staiger, 1990, p. 4). Local newspapers, consisting of just four to six pages, announced the repertoire of only eight to twelve of the biggest cinemas in Berlin. An exception was the daily *Nacht-Express*, which in late 1947 began printing weekly programmes of approximately thirty of the largest cinemas in all four sectors, most of them being so called *Premiere-Kinos* – cinemas where the most expected titles were shown first. Nonetheless, the majority of cinemas could not publicise their programmes in the local press, simply because district-level media was non-existent. Therefore, printed programmes addressed the viewers of particular cinemas and were an essential element of film promotion.



Figures 1–2: A typical programme from the Kammerspiele Britz (KSB) cinema, 13-19/06/47, front and reverse side. Source: Schriftgutarchiv Deutsche Kinemathek.⁴



Figures 3–4: Exemplary programme from Corso film theatre, 14-20/01/49, cover and inside.
Source: Schriftgutarchiv Deutsche Kinemathek.

In the late 1940s, cinema programmes were either free of charge or cost a symbolic price of between 10 and 30 Pfennig.⁵ They were usually available in the cinema itself. They functioned alongside other advertising material, such as posters, portraits of actors as well as handbills and booklets devoted to particular films. Their circulation varied widely and depended on the budget of the cinema, access to paper and the cinema owners' marketing strategies. An average print run totalled approximately 2,000 copies.⁶

Early post-war programmes included significantly more advertisements than in any other period, which presumably helped offset the high cost of paper. Advertisements first appeared in German programmes around 1920, yet became less common in the 1930s and early 1940s. After the Second World War, cinema programmes were re-established in some theatres as early as fall 1945 and became widespread again in 1946. From that point on, seldom did a programme not include advertisements. As of the early 1950s, advertisements in cinema programmes became less and less popular until almost disappearing over the next two decades.

Studies on advertising in cinemas usually refer to later periods of film history and focus on advertisements screened before the main film. Scholars emphasise that they are perceived in a special context of entertainment (Amberg, 1956; Allen, 1980; Johnson, 1981; Austin, 1981; Philips & Noble, 2007). Looking at the audiences through commercial material incorporates the concept of film viewers as consumers (Allen, 1980; Hansen, 1991). In the special case of early post-war Germany, however, theoretical models of cinematic consumers and entertainment culture cannot be implemented directly, as this period was marked by its shortage culture, a far cry from typical consumerism. The well-known model of 'film viewer as consumer', introduced by Jane Allen, stresses the cooperation of the film and product industries in the United States. In contrast to her conceptualisation, the present study concentrates on local targets within a shortage culture. These advertising strategies are the opposite of what Janet Staiger called 'campaigns of "mass" appeal' (Staiger, 1990, p. 4). While mass campaigns such as advertisements printed in film magazines aimed at promoting products (diverse brands of cosmetics, food, cigarettes, etc.), cinema programmes contained advertisements for particular shops or service points.⁷ Operating

within very local markets, cinema owners must have had a good idea of who frequented their theatres and could thus take into consideration their viewers' demands and habits. As a result, the advertisements placed in programmes provide useful information on audiences.

Berlin's cinematic landscape after 1945

The re-establishment of cinemas in post-war Berlin must be considered in relation to the occupied city's generally poor options of leisure time activity. For instance, by the end of 1945 there were only seven daily newspapers.⁸ The number of radio stations, theatres, cabarets, etc. was correspondingly low. On 15 May 1945, there were already seventeen working cinemas (Hanisch, 2004, p. 13); two days later the total increased to thirty (ibid.). The first films to be screened were newsreels made by the Red Army, along with masterpieces of Soviet cinema. Within a few weeks the programme was expanded to include films from other allied countries, as well as some German titles; it cannot be overemphasised that only a few Nazi propaganda films were forbidden (Pleyer, 1965, p. 26-7). Most of the popular genres – melodramas, musicals, comedies, etc. – were approved and screened regularly. In the first few weeks after Germany's surrender, foreign films were shown with original soundtracks; yet, dubbed versions would already become standard in the summer 1945. Two years later, 219 cinemas were in operation in the four sectors of Berlin, 133 of which were located in West Berlin (*Berlin in Zahlen...*, 1949, p. 371). Although many scholars stress the quick re-establishment of cinemas in post-war Germany (Glaser, 1985, p. 274), it should be noted that, due to wartime destruction, the number of cinemas in operation in 1947 was only about half the total of ten years earlier (*Berlin in Zahlen...*, n.d., p. 382).⁹

The outstanding popularity of cinemas may have been due to the very cheap ticket prices¹⁰ and the fact that many people were looking for alternative places to spend time. As the winter of 1946/1947 was one of the century's coldest, some scholars claim that the possibility of spending two hours in a warm room was one of the reasons people frequented cinemas (Shandley, 2001, p. 19) (Fig. 5). It even was the case that viewers were requested to bring coal briquettes for the screening (Gleber, 1996, p. 32).

The cinematic experience differed from before the war for yet another reason: screenings were often cancelled or interrupted by power cuts (Mühl-Benninghaus, 2004, p. 210). A reader of the *Berliner Zeitung* complained in December 1946: 'All cinemagoers know that power is being cut off frequently. We got used to that.' (W.O., 1946). This also explains the later proud announcement of the Blücher theatre: 'Blücher screenings as on schedule. No power cuts.' [Blücher, 12-23/12/47].¹¹

A significantly high number of cinemas were located in the densely populated neighbourhoods of Prenzlauer Berg, Friedrichshain, Kreuzberg and Schöneberg (*Berlin in Zahlen...*, 1949, p. 371, *Amtliches Fernsprechbuch*, 1948). Relatively many cinemas re-opened in the British district of Charlottenburg, even though it had suffered high wartime destruction and was thus less populated than the aforementioned areas (*Berlin in*



» ... und draußen steht: Der Film wird wärmstens empfohlen!!!«

Figure 5: '... outside it says: The film is most warmly recommended.' Source: *Film-Echo* (1), 1947.

Zahlen..., 1949, p. 31). Charlottenburg, however, had had a long cinematic tradition. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, large cinemas such as the Astor, Bio, Film-Bühne Wien, Film-Bühne Berlin, Marmorhaus and Gloria were located on the prestigious Kurfürstendamm (also known as Ku'damm). Together with other cinemas in the area, they were called *Vergnügungspaläste* ('pleasure palaces') (Hänsel & Schmitt, 1995, p. 42), and addressed their repertoire to the upper classes and foreigners, who in the late 1940s mainly comprised of allied soldiers. It is striking how strongly the overall cinematic landscape resembled that of the pre-1945 period, albeit with fewer movie houses. Most remained in their previous locations, retained their names and even their original logos.

An interesting aspect in terms of the local character of cinema-going in Berlin were the streets surrounding the Gesundbrunnen underground and railway station. Located in the district of Wedding, in the French sector, close to its borders with the British and Soviet sectors, was one of the city's main transport hubs; by the end of 1947, almost 32,000 people a day frequented the train station (*Berlin in Zahlen...*, 1949, p. 263). Since the beginnings of industrial Berlin, it had been a workers' district, inhabited by people with rather low incomes. Prior to the war, many movie houses were located there, but contrary to the cinemas on Ku'damm they were rather ordinary places, which remained true after 1945. Advertisements in the programmes invited viewers to restaurants, bars and pubs located close to the cinemas (Fig. 6). However, only one-quarter of such establishments offered meals in those days (*Berlin in Zahlen...*, 1949, p. 224). One could have a drink, chat or simply pass a few hours there, which supports the assumption that Berliners were just looking for a reason to escape their homes.

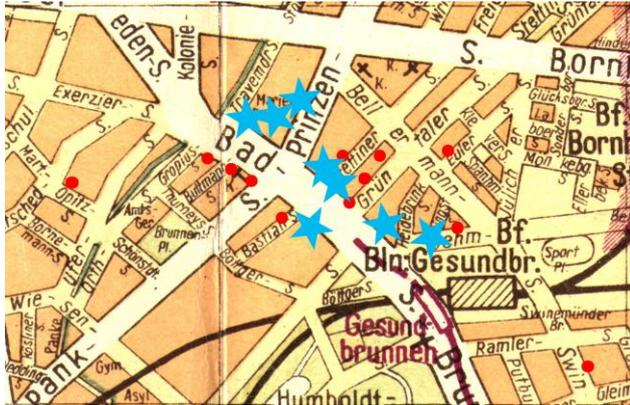


Figure 6: The Gesundbrunnen station. Blue stars mark cinemas and red dots bars, pubs, and restaurants (German: *Gaststätten*). The illustration was prepared using a city map from 1948 (1: 25,000, Richard Schwarz K.G. Landkartenhandlung und Landkartenverlag, 1948) and the yellow pages (*Amtliches Fernsprechbuch*, 1948).

Small cinemas were usually located in backyards or the side wings of buildings. This becomes apparent when comparing their addresses in the yellow pages with a map of the destruction of Berlin.¹² Many of these movie houses did not even have official names. As they were unable to announce their listings in the local press, it was crucial for them to print programmes or to announce them on advertising columns (*Litfaßsäulen*) – a Berlin invention introduced in the mid-nineteenth century by Ernst Litfaß (**Figure 7**).



Figure 7: An advertising column (*Litfaßsäule*) in Berlin, around 1947. Source: Deutsches Historisches Museum. Posters as seen in the photograph were usually printed in blue, green or red, such that they stood out from the persistent grey of post-war Berlin. The column above displays advertisements for cinemas from all over Berlin: the Corso was based in the French sector near the Gesundbrunnen station; the small Blauer Stern cinema was located in the Soviet sector¹³ while the Odeon was in the British sector.

The social and spatial structure of the audience

From 1939 and 1946, the population of Berlin decreased from 4.3 to 3.1 million inhabitants (*Berlin in Zahlen...*, 1949, p. 51) while the city lost about forty per cent of its housing space (*Berlin in Zahlen...*, 1949, p. 185). Since many men had been killed during the war and many others were still prisoners of war, there was a significant surplus of women in the population and hence at film screening (Fay, 2008; Skopal, 2011). In 1946, men made up only thirty-seven per cent of the city's population and an even smaller proportion of those between twenty-one and thirty years old (*Berlin in Zahlen...*, 1949, p. 56). Even if Berliners managed to find life partners, they often had no place to live. A typical announcement printed in a cinema is telling: 'Marriage? Yes! Find the right husband with a flat with the help of the [marriage agency] M. Burkhardt' [Blücher, 23/04/48].

Given the surplus of women, many cinema programmes contained advertisements for hairdressers, beauticians, fashion stores, perfumeries and repair shops specialising in household appliances. Advertisements in film magazines were even more female-oriented than those in typical women's magazines. For example, *Filmpost-Magazin* (West German) and *Film von Heute* (East German) printed many advertisements for personal hygiene products (sanitary towels, body powder), baby food and baking powder – all items that were difficult to procure at regular markets.¹⁴ Companies were reminding readers that these products still existed and anticipating future consumer habits once 'normal' life returned.

The underrepresentation of men in the population also meant a disproportionately high number of children. The 1946 pre-Christmas cinema programme at Kammerspiele Britz (KSB), for example, included an announcement that children would not be allowed to attend the afternoon screenings on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day [KSB, 13-19/12/46], implying that children commonly attended other screenings. This particular ban probably stemmed from the belief that holidays were occasions for children to be at home with their family, if they had one.

Special screenings for children were rare (**Figure 8**). There were many complaints – addressed to the local governments – that children were watching films intended for adult viewers. For instance, a father complained that his son had watched the film *Two-Faced Woman* (USA, 1941, dir. George Cukor) with Greta Garbo, which he found to be immoral and not properly advertised as a film for adults.¹⁵ When the West German children's magazine *Horizont* conducted a survey of favourite movies, no children's films were mentioned ('Was ist? Was wird?', 1948).¹⁶ Concern that children were regularly watching films intended for adults eventually led to the establishment of the *Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle der Filmwirtschaft* (Voluntary Self-Regulation of the Film Industry, FSK), an institution modelled on the British Board of Film Censors (Clemens, 1994).¹⁷



Figure 8: Page from the biweekly magazine *Heute* (American occupation zone), showing children watching American cartoons. Source: *Heute*, 01/02/47. A photograph of children watching movies was also presented on the cover of the women's weekly *Sie*, 01/06/47.

This irregular demographic structure was hardly the war's only consequence in German society. Another typical factor of everyday life was the high level of social stratification. While the vast majority of Germans had lost their homes and possessions, a small but influential minority abused post-war circumstances to enrich themselves, primarily on the black market (Benz, 2009; Steege, 2008). This can be seen in film audiences. For instance, programmes of the Neue Scala cinema at Nollendorfplatz, in the American sector, contained advertisements for luxury products addressed to wealthy clients (**Figure 9**). Furthermore, the advertisement in English proves that both the occupiers and occupied must have looked for entertainment in the same venues. Although there was much negative reaction to German women who dated American or British soldiers (Heinemann, 1996), watching films together seems to have been commonplace in West Berlin cinemas.

With the exception of the few luxurious theatres on Ku'damm, most cinemas catered to less wealthy viewers. Many announcements in cinema programmes contained the word *Ankauf* (acquiring) rather than *Verkauf* (selling), which implies that cinemagoers were people who wanted or needed to sell goods rather than buy them. A notable example is an advertisement printed in the programme of the Palladium theatre: 'Selling on commission: dresses, coats, costumes, underwear and shoes' [Palladium, 6-12/02/48] (**Figure 10**). Even used underwear seems to have been the market for resale. The prevalence of lower class

cinemagoers. Finally, in 1950, advertisements for the Volkswagen Beetle appeared – the very symbol of the West German economic miracle (*Wirtschaftswunder*) [Cosima, 9-12/06/50].



Figure 11: Advertisement for a bartering business in the KSB theatre programme, 13-19/06/47. Source: Schriftgutarchiv Deutsche Kinemathek. See also Figs 1–2.

While many of the aforementioned conclusions on the demographic and social structure of film audiences can be applied to other German cities, Berlin was unique for its division between the four allied powers, the consequences of which were more complex than it may seem at first glance. Until the erection of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, people could move – albeit with some difficulty – between the sectors. In comparison to the pre-war years, only about half of the public transportation network was in operation in 1946 and 1947 (*Berlin in Zahlen...*, 1949, p. 264-6), and there were checkpoints at the sector borders. Nevertheless, Berliners continued to visit remote cinemas, even during the blockade. As a reader of the daily newspaper *Berlin am Mittag* commented enthusiastically: ‘Where else in Germany would you find a city where you can watch Russian, French, British, American or Swiss Films?’ (*Filmparadis Berlin*, 1949). Not only could Berliners move between sectors, there were even special cinemas screening foreign films. For instance, the Mercedes Palast in the French sector showed Soviet masterpieces while the Capitol cinema in East Berlin screened Hollywood movies (Hanisch, 2004, p. 15; Mühl-Benninghaus, 2004, p.214). Many movie houses, in both the West and East of Berlin, printed advertisements for stores located in other sectors. That some advertisements reassured viewers that both currencies were accepted is further evidence of audience mobility.

In summer 1948, a new phenomenon was born: border cinemas (*Grenzkinos*), i.e. movie houses in western districts that offered American and British films for viewers coming from East Berlin (*‘Kalter Kinokrieg...’*, 2011). Their occurrence had both political and economic causes. While a tool of western propaganda, intent on exposing East Berliners to western values such as liberalism, capitalism, etc. (ibid.), they also proved a way to attract new viewers, especially given the fact that all early post-war cinemas were private businesses regardless of the sector.¹⁸ The Allies only supported the distribution and

provided selected films with German dubbing. Thus, after the 1948 currency reform caused a sudden drop at box offices in West Berlin (Bähr, 1995, p. 18), cinema owners sought and found additional viewers in the Soviet sector. Even theatres located in districts further to the west, such as Film-Bühne-Wien on Ku'damm, organised special screenings for East Berliners [Film-Bühne-Wien, 26/08/50].¹⁹

The screenings and viewer preferences

While the political and economic situation had a considerable impact on the re-establishment of cinemas and the social makeup of audiences in the early post-war Berlin, it seems that many viewer habits remained unchanged. As in the years prior to the end of the war, new programmes were introduced on Thursdays. Large cinemas offered screenings twice a day on weekdays and three times a day on weekends. Some movie houses organised additional night screenings, starting at 10 p.m. or later. In fall 1947, the Blücher theatre conducted a survey asking the viewers whether they liked the idea of a daytime cinema (*Tageskino*), i.e. screenings on weekday mornings [Blücher, 28/11/47]. The response was very positive: only nine of 830 respondents were against it. Viewers argued that many people who worked in the afternoons and evenings could not attend regular screenings [Blücher, 6/02/48]. Tickets were not only sold in the cinemas themselves, but also at special sales points, so-called *Theaterkassen* that had been common in Berlin even before the war. However, very popular films often caused queue times of several hours (**Figure 12**).



Figure 12: Photograph by Gerhard Gronefeld, Berlin, 1947. The photograph shows a queue in front of the Tivoli cinema20 before a screening of *Operette* (1940, dir. Willi Frost). Source: Deutsches Historisches Museum.

With the exception of open-air cinemas [Film-Bühne-Wien, 26/08/50], smoking was generally prohibited. Occasional reports of vulgar behaviour or loud conversations in the audience, or even sex in the toilets (Mühl-Benninghaus, 2004, p. 215),²¹ were the exception. Song lyrics were sporadically published in the programmes (**Figure 13**), implying that at least part of the audience might have sung along while watching a musical. After the screenings some viewers continued the evening elsewhere. Many programmes contained advertisements for restaurants licensed for dancing, which opened at 8 p.m. or later and were occasionally located in the same building as the cinema [Melodie-Lichtspiele, 08/1947]. These phenomena were all familiar from the times before 1945. It might be said that, after entering the cinema, the viewers acted as if nothing had changed.

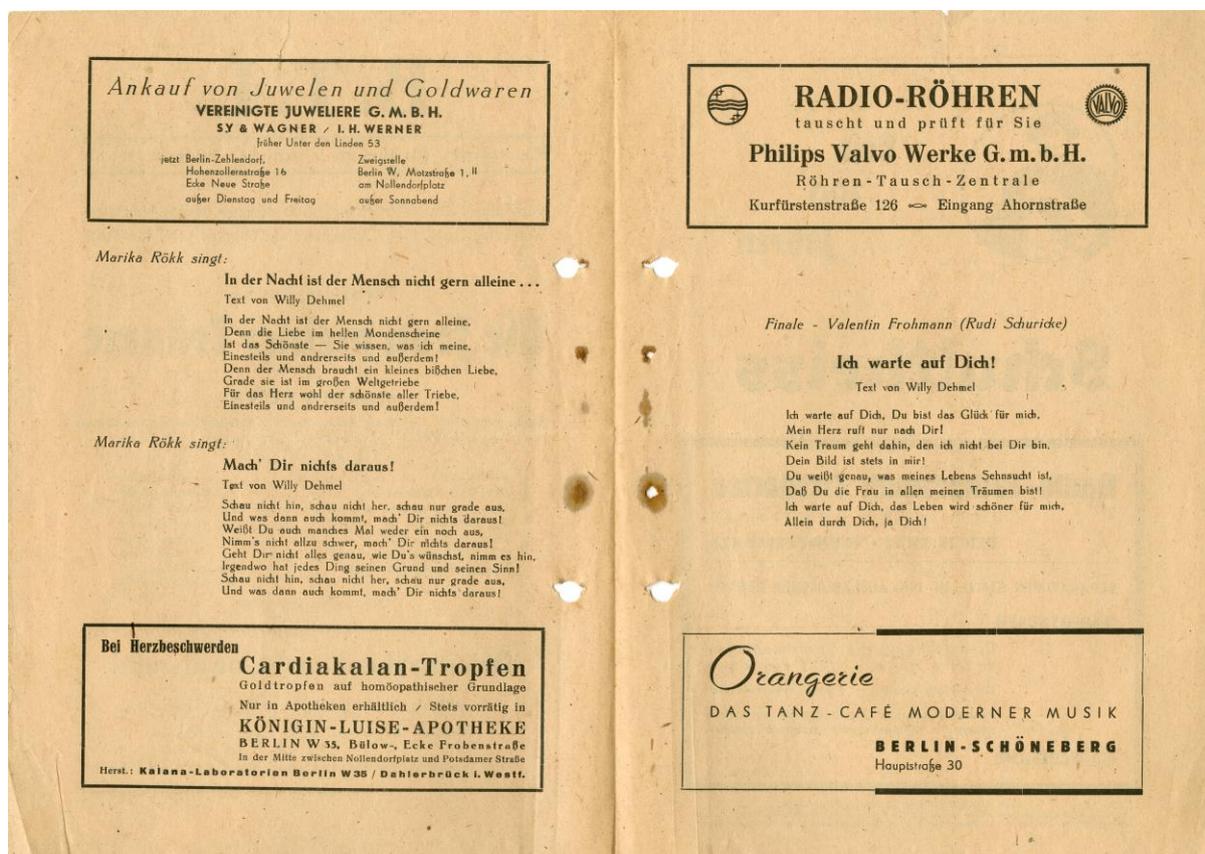


Figure 13: Biophon Lichtspiele-Theater programme (inside), 15-21/03/46, containing song lyrics to the blockbuster *The Woman of My Dreams* (*Die Frau meiner Träume*, 1944, dir. Georg Jacoby). Source: Schriftgutarchiv Deutsche Kinemathek.

The cinemagoer's need for entertainment is plain to see in a 1949 survey conducted by the leftist weekly *Der Sozialdemokrat*. Two thousand West Germans were asked the question 'Why do you frequent cinemas?' ('Warum gehen Sie ins Kino?', 1949). Of note is how many respondents were simply seeking entertainment (**Figure 14**) and how few respondents cared about a film's review or subject matter.

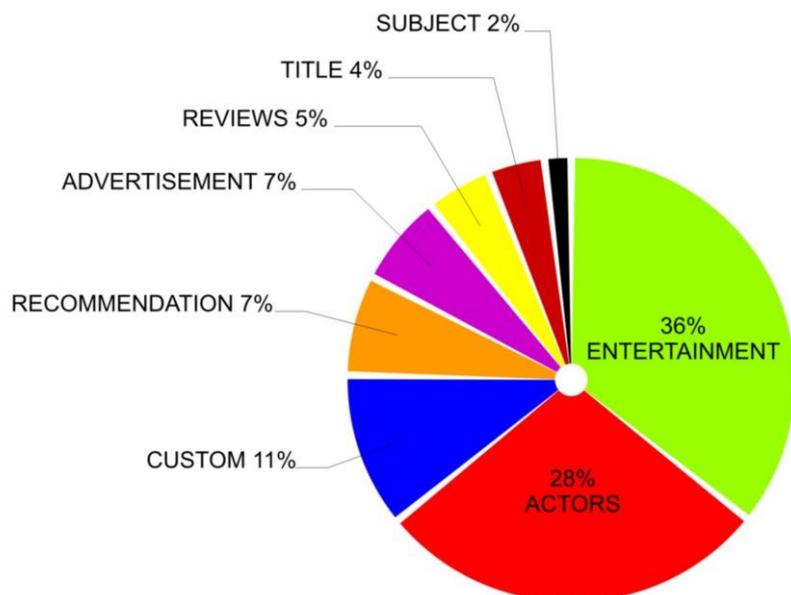


Figure 14: The cinemagoer's motivation, according to a survey conducted by *Der Sozialdemokrat* in 1949. The exact answers to the question 'Why do you frequent cinemas?' were as follows: 'Because of the need for entertainment – 674; because of certain actors who play in the films – 537; by custom – 212; on the recommendation of an acquaintance – 138; because of the film's advertisement – 125; because of good and interesting reviews – 89; because of the film's title – seventy-eight; because of the film's subject – thirty-six.' (Müting, 1948).

These circumstances led to a debate amongst filmmakers and critics. They mostly split into two camps. The first, represented by, among others, the directors Kurt Maetzig and Helmut Käutner, felt that 'films should come to terms with the current reality' (Maetzig, 1947, p. 25) and that 'current problems should become the main issues of the films' (Käutner, 1947, p. 33). The producer Helmut Weiß voiced the opposing opinion and defended the viewers' right to entertainment and illusion (Weiß, 1948, p. 1). This last argument dominated the critical reviews of the so-called 'rubble films' (*Trümmerfilme*), i.e. German films, made after 1945, depicting the hard life faced amid the ruins (Brandlmeier, 1989; Shandley, 2001).²²

Entertainment soon was used as a tool for the allied re-education programme (Wilder, 1979; Willet, 1989; Fehrenbach, 1995; Fay, 2008): The 'U.S. authorities shipped close to two hundred Hollywood films and documentaries across the Atlantic to tutor Germans in the gestures, speech and affect of democratic sociality' (Fay, 2008, p. xiii). Even the Soviets imported some films with light plots, in addition to the expected masterpieces of Soviet cinema (Hanisch, 2004, p. 8). Nonetheless, few foreign films achieved commercial success on the German market. Audience surveys conducted by the U.S. military government 'revealed that ninety-four per cent of the respondents longed to see old German films because they "made more sense, were more beautiful, or were more personal"' (Fay, 2008, p. 151). The situation in Berlin was no different than in the rest of Germany. Concluding a survey conducted among 600 Berliners, journalist Horst Müting stated: 'The ageless pre-war German social films received the most votes [...] Adventure films and musicals followed them. [...] According to the survey, the most favourite actor is Hans Söhnker, followed by Hans Albers and Willy Birgel' (all three of whom had made their careers before 1945) (Müting, 1948). Consequently, many theatres showed old German blockbusters during 'request programmes' (*Wunschprogramme*), which can be interfered from the cinema programmes.

However, the high demand for popular German films was not necessarily reflected in viewers' ratings in Berlin. The only available detailed data comes from the Soviet administration, which monitored cinema capacity. With the exception of special screenings, in the first quarter of 1948, viewers of Soviet films filled fifty-six per cent of available seats and viewers of pre-1945 German films seventy-eight per cent.²³ In the western zones, people often attended British and American films, although they preferred popular old German plots. This can be explained by the fact that most German titles were reprises that had been screened for years, and thus were already familiar to most audiences (Garncarz, 2013, p. 80). Furthermore, pre-1945 German films constituted about half of all the programmes in all four zones (Pleyer, 1965, p. 26-27). Even if average viewer ratings were slightly lower than those of foreign films, we must consider the much higher supply.

It is also worth examining what audiences rejected. This is especially interesting in the case of the abovementioned 'rubble films'. Müting stated: 'Interest for the new German films is clearly lower. Ninety per cent of the respondents rejected them.' (Müting, 1948). Critics claimed that there was no need to show Germany's hard living conditions on screen. However, the reception of 'rubble films' seems to be more complex and requires further research. Although they were not very popular, they reached very high viewer ratings of up to ten million viewers ('DEFA-Filmerfolge', 1951), and the hundreds of reviews also included enthusiastic ones. Obviously, 'rubble films' were often watched in organised screenings, especially in the Soviet zone. They were available in many prints, screened for several months and were accompanied by large advertising campaigns. DEFA (Deutsche Film AG), East Germany's state film production company, gave the following instructions to cinema owners:

Posters should be on display not only in the cinema and the neighbourhood surrounding it, but also in other places in the city, such as railway stations. They should be visible a few days before the premiere. [...] Use the handbills presented in our booklets; we can provide up to 2,000 copies. Berlin shop owners have been cooperative in the past: ask them to decorate their windows with advertisements, film posters and photographs.²⁴

It is therefore not surprising that many viewers attended those films, even if they were disappointed by them in the end.

As a matter of fact, German viewers rejected American re-education programmes that showed evidence of war crimes. 'Among foreign films, they dismiss "tendency films" [*Tendenzfilme*, a pejorative term used by Germans to denote re-education films – M.S.-W.], war films and films about German crimes' (Müting, 1948). Most renowned were the atrocity films, i.e. films made during the liberation of the concentration camps and screened mainly in the American and British zone in late 1945 and early 1946. Although the famous *Death Mills* (1946, dir. Hanuš Burger, Billy Wilder) was seen by almost ten per cent of the population in both zones – a rate comparable to that of the most popular fiction films – it

should be noted that the producers prepared 114 prints, an unusually high number (Weckel, 2012b, p. 49). Ulrike Weckel has recently revised the popular legend about the U.S. military government forcing the German population to watch the film. With a very few local exceptions, attending screenings of *Death Mills* was voluntary (ibid.); yet, during the weeks that the film ran, it was the only film in the cinema. However, as mentioned before, Berliners were able to cross sector borders to watch other films. As a result, viewing rates of *Death Mills* were highly disappointing in the divided city: 'after a promising beginning of approximately fifty per cent of attendance on the first day, the audience has dropped off to the decimal point per cent' (Weckel, 2012a, p. 455).²⁵ In smaller cities and towns, social controls and the atmosphere of moral obligation were much stronger (Weckel, 2012a, p. 341-342), whilst Berliners could feel more anonymous – a fact that may have made it easier to decide not to watch *Death Mills*.

Conclusion

The rejection of re-education programmes along with an unambiguous preference for films providing pleasure and amusement can be interpreted as indications that cinema was predominantly seen as a means of escape. The surveys cited above make it abundantly clear: the main motivations for cinema going were entertainment and star gazing, while a film's subject matter was of only marginal importance. Moreover, viewers' predilection for old German films leads to the conclusion that cinema played an important role in establishing a sense of continuity between pre- and post-1945 times. Only a few films from the Nazi era were forbidden. Thus, watching the permissible films could have provided feelings of coherence and 'normalcy'.

The longing for continuity can be also inferred from advertisements in the cinema programmes. Especially those that offered everyday services and products – like repair work, sweets, or cosmetic products – hinted at a 'normal' life, although what was being advertised was barely affordable for the majority of the viewers. Tickets, however, were relatively cheap which offered most people an escape from the hardships of everyday life. It was one of the few available leisure time activities that provided both the opportunity for entertainment and a chance to have time to oneself in a dark room.

Many cinemagoers who chose their films consciously were determined enough to queue for many hours or to undertake a long and uncomfortable journey through the city to watch their favourite titles. Nonetheless, another group has become visible over the course of this study. Considering that information on film listings was poor and available mainly in the cinemas themselves, many cinemagoers may have chosen films more or less at random. It is easy to imagine that some people visited cinemas on their way home or on their way to work, when changing trains at the Gesundbrunnen station, for instance. After screenings, they also visited nearby bars and pubs, although they rarely served anything to eat. However, they all offered a chance to spend some time away from home, and an opportunity to socialize.

Despite all the local deprivations, Berliners visited cinemas more regularly than other Germans. This was undoubtedly a consequence of the much richer programme enjoyed in Berlin, where cinemagoers were largely free to travel between the four sectors. Although the city was divided, occupied and in ruins, and certain films were inaccessible, Berliners did not cease to seek entertainment at the cinema. Their desire for 'normalcy' proved stronger than the limitations brought on by the political climate of post-war Germany.

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Notes:

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² We can only speculate on the programmes on the basis of the allies’ documentation, a few announcements in newspapers, fragmentary collections of film posters or handbills as well as film reviews. However, preparing such a database would be the task for another research project and more than likely incomplete.

³ The term ‘cinema programmes’ is the equivalent of the German: *Kinoprogramme* (sometimes *Filmprogramme* or *Hausprogramme*), although misleading since the same term usually refers to the practice of combining different films in early cinema (Haller 2008).

⁴ The Deutsche Kinemathek owns about 400 programmes from forty-four Berlin cinemas from the years 1945-1949.

⁵ ‘Pfennig’ is a former monetary unit equalling 1/100 of a Reichsmark (RM), which remained the German currency until June 1948.

⁶ To give an example: the programme of Die Kurbel cinema was printed in a circulation of 1,000 copies, while the similarly large Rheinschloß-Lichstpiele cinema printed its programmes in a circulation of 3,000 copies. The number of copies was printed on the reverse side of the programmes.

⁷ One of the programmes from the Deutsche Kinemathek contains handwritten notes on prices: an advertisement of about twenty-eight square centimetres cost 21.6 RM, yet we can only speculate whether it was the price for a single edition or a longer period of advertising [Blücher, 8-28/08/47].

⁸ The number increased to twenty-three in 1947. In comparison: 127 newspapers were published in 1928 and in 1935, after the Nazis came to power, eighty-three (*Berlin in Zahlen...* 1949: 369).

⁹ While in 1937 there were 4.8 seats per 100 inhabitants, ten years later there were only 2.8 seats (*Berlin in Zahlen...* 1949: 371). The relatively high number of cinemas in the Soviet sector can be

explained by the fact that the Soviet administration was the first to begin re-establishing cinemas (Enz 1982).

¹⁰ Ticket prices varied from 0.60 RM to three RM (Skopal 2011: 510), most of the screenings were available for only one RM (Shandley 2001: 36, Brandlmeier 1989: 34). In comparison, the official average price for a pound of butter was two RM, the black-market price reached 350 RM, a loaf of bread officially cost forty Pfennig and even thirty RM on the black market (Echternkamp 2003: 24). For ticket prices in West Germany after the currency reform see: *Filmwirtschaftskrise...: 1950*.

¹¹ References in square brackets refer to exemplary cinema programmes collected at the Deutsche Kinemathek. The references contain the name of the cinema and the date of the programme. For further explanations see note 3.

¹² Landesarchiv Berlin, Signature: LA F Rep 270/A/399, p. 3446. Many thanks to Andreas Matschenz from Landesarchiv Berlin for providing the map.

¹³ Contrary to most of the cinemas mentioned in this article, Blauer Stern is still in operation.

¹⁴ For a study on magazine advertisements aimed at women, in the context of 1940s Hollywood, see: Renov 1989.

¹⁵ Letter of complaint addressed to the Senate of Berlin, 1949, Landesarchiv Berlin, Signature: LA B Rep 014/351.

¹⁶ In case of press quotations coming from the Archive of the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, much of the bibliographic data is incomplete and it is impossible to give the page numbers or even the names of the authors.

¹⁷ The FSK is still active today in the approval of media content with regard to youth protection laws.

¹⁸ In the Soviet sector and subsequent GDR, cinemas were nationalized in 1953. Cinemas not damaged during the war were usually run by the former owners after 1945, if they had survived the war. Former Nazis, however, were generally forbidden from working in the film industry.

¹⁹ For example, Film-Bühne-Wien, a cinema located further in the district of Charlottenburg, organised special screenings for viewers coming from the Soviet sector [Film-Bühne-Wien, 26/08/50]. Interestingly, the film to be screened was *The Third Man* (UK, 1949, dir. Carol Reed) – a well-known feature about divided Vienna.

²⁰ However, it was not the famous Tivoli theatre in Berlin-Pankow where Max and Emil Skladanowsky presented their first Bioscope moving images, but the Tivoli theatre in Berlin-Tempelhof, [WWW document] URL <http://allekinos.com/berlin.htm> (a website containing basic information on almost all current and historical cinemas in Berlin and many others in Germany) [visited 18/02/2014].

²¹ Mühl-Benninhaus refers to a report concerning Schloßpark-Lichtspiele cinema in the district of Weißensee. It offered film screenings, cabarets and music revues and was usually frequented by Red Army soldiers, which is also mentioned in the report. LA C Rep. 120/1278.

²² The best-known 'rubble films' were: *The murderers are among us* (*Die Mörder sind unter uns*, 1946, dir. Wolfgang Staudte), *Somewhere in Berlin* (*Irgendwo in Berlin*, 1946, dir. Gerhard Lamprecht) or *And the Heavens above us* (*... und über uns der Himmel*, 1947, dir. Josef von Báky)

²³ Report on cinema-attendance in the Soviet sector of Berlin, January-March 1948, Landesarchiv Berlin, Signature: LA C Rep. 120/2420, pp. 67-68, p. 68.

²⁴ Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv [BArch Film.] SG1/13721I.

²⁵ Quotation from a monthly film report, NARA: RG 250/OMGUS, 1945-1949, Box 82.