

Socialists in outer space

East German film's Venusian adventure

Stefan Soldovieri

Alien aggressors, flying saucers and cosmic slime are not among the images commonly associated with the films of the now defunct socialist countries. Most Western film scholars would probably be hard pressed to name more than a handful of science-fiction features made in Eastern Europe. In fact, Eastern Europe's nationalised film industries turned out only a relatively modest number of futuristic films. This was a consequence of both the high technological and financial demands such films placed on studios subject to the constraints of planned economies and the precarious status of entertainment films in politicised production schedules. Nevertheless, beginning in the 1950s and 60s, Eastern European movie-goers encountered a number of home-spun, predominantly Soviet, Polish and Czech space adventures. As was the case with their Western counterparts, the spacecraft careening across state-sponsored screens frequently drew their energy from the polarised political imagination of the Cold War.

One such Eastern European science-fiction film was Kurt Maetzig's *Der schweigende Stern* (*Silent Planet*, 1960), a co-production between the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Poland. Relating the story of a mission to the planet Venus, the film was initially slated for release in 1959, the year of the GDR's tenth anniversary. DEFA, as the GDR's centrally managed Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft was known, pulled out all production stops for its first science-fiction effort, delivering a quality product in 70 mm 'Totalvision' format, four-track sound, and satiny Agfacolor.¹ These were high technical benchmarks for DEFA, which assumed most of the financial, organisational and artistic

responsibility for the project. When it premiered after significant production delays on 26 February 1960, *Silent Planet* had become the most expensive DEFA film ever made.

Silent Planet was not just a technically and financially ambitious enterprise. With the race for manned space exploration and the Khrushchev-induced Berlin Crisis raging on in the background, the studio had to contend with a charged ideological atmosphere throughout the production process. Scripting alone lasted nearly two-and-a-half years and involved at least three different scriptwriting teams. Casting difficulties arising from plans to enlist authentically foreign actors for the spacecraft's international crew and disputes with the Polish co-producer over the script and the staffing of the production team contributed to delays. When cultural officials balked at DEFA's pursuit of a French partner and charged that sinister West German film agents were running about unchecked on the Babelsberg studio grounds, the project was nearly derailed altogether.

Silent Planet provides an unusually well-documented and instructive illustration of the multi-layered influence of Cold War politics on the GDR cinema and, significant national, political and institutional differences notwithstanding, other Eastern European cinemas as well.² Made at a time

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when the GDR film industry had not yet abandoned the production of genre films, DEFA viewed *Silent Planet* as an important experiment in a new entertainment form.³ Film officials also supported the project, which was included in a special addendum to the studio's 1958 production plan, citing the 'painfully conspicuous absence of futuristic films and adventure stories in our studio's production schedule'.⁴ In addition to providing a welcome replacement for Western entertainment imports of questionable ideological content, the film was perceived as an effective vehicle for promoting the image of a peace-loving and technologically superior community of socialist nations.

Set in the not-very-distant future of 1970, *Silent Planet* is the story of a daring voyage to peacefully ward off an anticipated attack by the inhabitants of Venus. The mission, spearheaded by socialist nations, is started when excavations in the Gobi desert turn up an enigmatic, spool-like object containing a fragmentary message, which suggests a possible invasion of Earth. Unable to establish communications with the Venusians, a scheduled mission to Mars is quickly re-staffed with an international team of specialists and re-routed to the mist-enveloped planet. On Venus, the members of the crew, composed of its Russian commander and astronauts from Africa, China, Germany, India, Japan, Poland and the USA, discover the scorched remains of an advanced civilisation and a sophisticated technical apparatus whose function is not immediately apparent. Explorations involving a close call with a mass of pulsating ooze cost three lives and reveal the machine to be a disabled atomic weapon that had been designed to destroy the Earth but had turned on the Venusian world instead. The only signs of the planet's exterminated inhabitants are their bizarre shadows, heat-embazoned on crumbling walls. Assembled in front of the spaceship back on Earth in the film's final scene, the remaining crew members offer a warning about nuclear war and call for continued interplanetary exploration.

Silent Planet underwent various incarnations during the course of script development from late 1956 to early 1959. Reaching an acceptable compromise between genre conventions, humour, and adventure on the one hand and a political message on the other, entailed extended negotiations. It also brought into play a dizzying number of state and

party institutions.⁵ An example of a relatively harmless sort: Long before the *Silent Planet* screenplay had been completed, an over-zealous Foreign Office had contacted the Ministry of Culture to confirm press reports that the film was to contain scenes set in the Sahara. Alarmed that DEFA was planning to film in Africa, which was in the throes of decolonisation, the office inquired about the location of the shoot and other specifics.⁶ Although an undoubtedly bemused film official succeeded in reassuring government officials that the studio had no intentions whatsoever of actually filming on location, during the course of script development the setting was diplomatically moved to the politically acceptable Gobi.⁷ Comprising only a single shot in the film, the requisite footage was shot as originally scheduled at the sandy Spreetal less than 40 km from Babelsberg.⁸

By the time the final version of the screenplay had been completed, the story shared only the most general plot features with its nominal literary source. Based on Stanislaw Lem's *Astronautci* (1951), which was published in the GDR in 1954 as *Planet des Todes* (Planet of Death), the script began as an ideologically ambivalent, somewhat dry treatment laden with pseudo-scientific detail.⁹ Early endeavours to increase the story's entertainment value soon encountered objections both within the studio and among film officials and, as scripting progressed, the basic story became increasingly politicised. In the end Lem's universal, largely allegorical warning about the dangers of atomic war had given way to unambiguous references to Hiroshima and Western militarism.

The plan for a film adaptation of Lem's popular novel as a GDR-Polish co-production was conceived soon after the book appeared in East Germany. A first treatment based on the novel was produced by the Polish production unit 'Iluzjon' in late 1956.¹⁰ The main characters comprising the spacecraft's international crew in the treatment, which had been authorised by Lem, corresponded essentially to those of this novel. These were the Russian captain and physicist Arsenjew, the Anglo-American pilot Smith, the French doctor Tarland, the Polish engineer Soltyk, the German communications expert Rainer, and Chandrasekar, a mathematical genius from India. This early version culminated in a dramatic scene fatefully trapping

Smith and Arsenjew in a tunnel below the Venusian surface. Thanks to the Soviet captain's brilliant plan, they succeed in blasting a passage in the surrounding walls. The scene closes with one of the men, whose identity is obscured by the explosion's billowing smoke, carrying the other out of the rubble. Characteristic of the story's even-handed politics at this early stage, the issue of who rescues whom remains open. The scenario ends in a scene back on Earth as Smith recalls the details of the voyage: 'Venus was very beautiful once. It was inhabited by beings similar to us ...'¹¹

Taking recourse to the Polish treatment, Joachim Barckhausen and Alexander Stenbock-Fermor, who had collaborated on numerous scripts for DEFA, drafted a new scenario and submitted it to the responsible studio 'dramaturg'. In the context of DEFA's system of self-regulation, dramaturgs were the readers and editors charged with parleying artistic and ideological issues during production. In addition to overseeing scripting and work-in-progress studio screenings, their responsibilities included helping to navigate films through the Ministry of Culture's censorship procedures. At DEFA, the appointment of chief dramaturg, a kind of film policy director, ranked second only to the studio head.¹²

The lower-tier dramaturg responsible for the 'Planet of Death' project made a number of suggestions for developing the treatment into a script capable of overcoming the regulatory hurdles standing in the way of a production start. Not surprisingly, a primary concern was the way in which the scriptwriters had broached the depiction of the political situation on Earth and the decision to send a spacecraft to Venus in lieu of initiating a preventive nuclear strike. The author-sanctioned Iluzjon treatment had worked around this latter issue with oblique references to a vote by the world's population in favour of peaceful contact.¹³ DEFA's scriptwriters had dedicated considerably more attention to this problem, envisioning a strategic debate between aging military conservatives and the young representative of a 'World Federation'. In an additional scene, a scientific commission including members of the later Venus crew would also opt for talks with the Venusians.

While the dramaturg was generally satisfied with the way in which the scriptwriters intended to

adapt Lem's basic plot, he was concerned with their rendering of the political situation in the story's future time. Aware that too much detail would be likely to cause troublesome discussions with the chief dramaturg and film officials, the dramaturg cautioned the scriptwriters not to overdo the description of Earthly politics. Instead, he suggested simplifying the matter by concentrating on the World Federation, which he pictured as an alliance of peaceful socialist nations and a few reluctant capitalist states favouring a pre-emptive military strike against Venus. In his opinion of the new treatment, the studio reader also encouraged the scriptwriters to fortify the film's pacifist message through a drastic rendering of the remains of the Venusian civilisation.¹⁴

The first script, bearing the sensationalist title of the GDR release of the novel, 'Planet of Death', was completed in mid-April 1957. As outlined in their scenario, Stenbock-Fermor and Barckhausen had installed a group of silver-haired generals representing the hawkish Cold War attitudes of the West. Debating the course to be taken given the possibility of an attack from Venus, the generals criticise the policies of previous decades that have left the Earth defenceless against the emergence of an alien threat. In keeping with the dramaturg's recommendations, the scriptors had avoided an extended ideological discussion of the pros and cons of a preemptive bombing and had even given the scene a mildly humorous touch, with one general ironically exclaiming that it figures that aliens would attack just when the Earth had disarmed itself.¹⁵

A crucial novelty as compared to the Polish treatment was the addition of the young astro-biologist 'Marina' as a romantic interest to inspire a rivalry between 'Higgins', the American pilot, and the German crew member, 'Brinkmann'. As work on the screenplay proceeded, the character of Marina was ultimately transformed into that of 'Sumiko', a Japanese child of Hiroshima victims. As a consequence of this change, the coquetting banter between Higgins and Marina in the April 1957 screenplay gave way to an unfulfilled relationship between Sumiko and Brinkmann. In later drafts the Sumiko character and her traumatic experience of Venus's radioactive wasteland provided a convenient way of raising the matter of



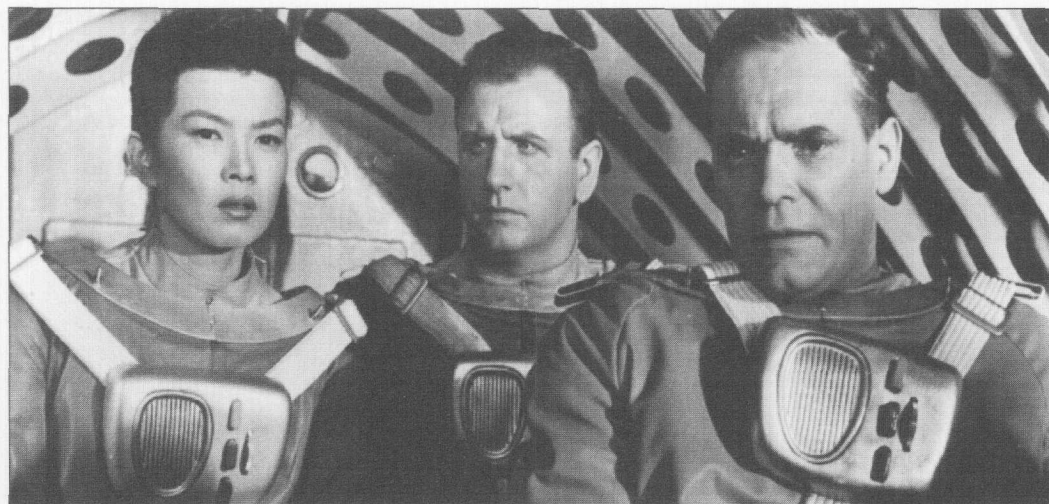


Fig. 1. Brinkmann casts a concerned glance at Sumiko as Hawling peers into space. From *Der schweigende Stern* (DEFA, 1960). [Courtesy of DEFA-Waltraut Pathenheimer, Berlin.]

deployment of the atomic bomb. In the film the American astronaut, now going by the name 'Hawling', subtly acknowledges his nation's culpability when the crew is interviewed before take-off. As Sumiko speaks about her personal loss through Hiroshima, Hawling reacts with an apologetic glance at his shoes.

In addition to supplying amorous tensions, the scriptwriters had taken other measures to increase the story's overall attractiveness. This was apparent in numerous scenes scripted to exploit opportunities for lightening up dialogue and characterisation. Recalling the tone of many a 1950s Hollywood science-fiction film, in the new rendition a technician jokes that the mysterious, message-bearing spool looks a lot like a chicken bone; Brinkmann quips that the uninvitingly shrouded planet 'ain't no Venus de Milo'. In a lark worthy of *Abbott and Costello Go to Mars* (1953), whose comic duo incidentally also end up on Venus, a bear-sized yet timid Dutchman becomes a reluctant space traveller when he dozes off aboard the ship before lift-off.¹⁶

Director Maetzig had serious reservations about the inflection that Stenbock-Fermor/Barckhausen's work had lent the story. The script's unabashed appeal to situational humour was likely to have been an element especially alien to the author of celebrated anti-Fascist films and the monumental

two-part epic based on the life of German working-class hero Ernst Thälmann.¹⁷ Demonstrating even less sympathy for the story's new romantic intrigue, Maetzig also objected to the flirtatiousness surrounding Marina. In his comments on the script, he wrote: 'The figure of Marina must be elevated. She must not appear as a simple laboratory assistant or stewardess ... Marina and Brinkmann should be a couple from the beginning and she must be dedicated to him.'¹⁸

Other deficiencies specifically cited by Maetzig included poor character development and motivation, continuity lapses, wavering dramatic pull and a hotel scene which he felt inappropriately featured black waiters serving white guests. Given the fact that the Venus crew was to include a black African astronaut, possibly a science-fiction first, Maetzig argued that a racial mix would better suit the film's egalitarian ideals.¹⁹

Although the judicious dramaturg had advised against superfluous attention to politics, Maetzig also felt that the script needed to more clearly depict the ideological climate on Earth at the time of the Venus mission. In making his point, he argued that the science fiction genre ought not to be exempt from the basic aesthetic specifications of realism. At least in the expertise he supplied to the dramaturg after reading Stenbock-Fermor/Barckhausen's screenplay, the director insisted that even in the

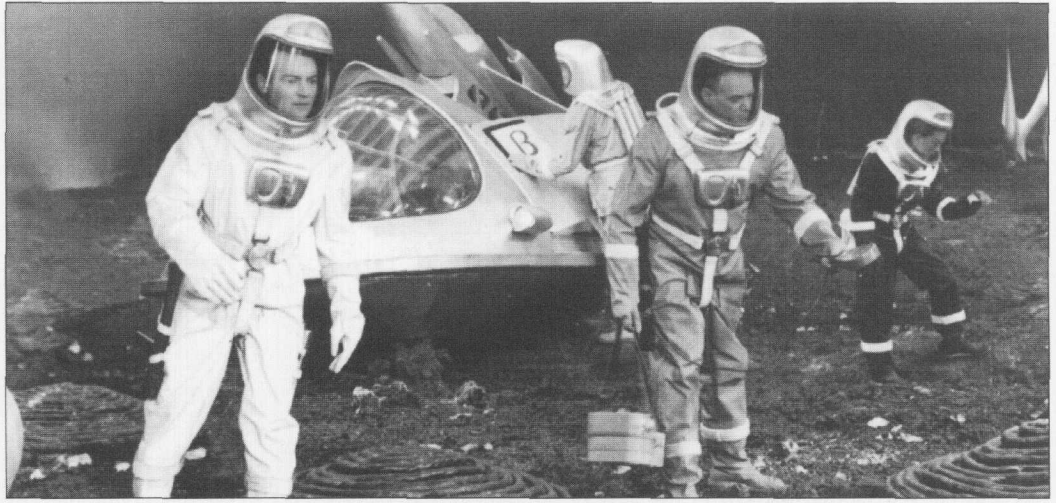


Fig. 2. Measuring radiation in the atomic wasteland of Venus. DEFA's production designers did their best to create a credible future technology. [Courtesy of DEFA-Waltraut Pathenheimer, Berlin.]

film's future setting, opposing political camps would certainly still exist on Earth. He wrote:

The film's genre is that of the realistic-technological utopia. All of the technology shown in the film should correspond to the real potential of the various sciences, but political and social elements must also be probable. For this reason it is impossible to assume widespread harmony on Earth, but rather two separate groups within the 'World Federation'.²⁰

Maetzig's far-reaching criticisms of the script's frivolous aspects led to a break with the script-writers. Although they were willing to adopt the director's definition of the relationship between science-fiction and realism, they feared the kind of heavy-handedness that would jeopardise the film's mass appeal. As a tactful Stenbock-Fermor wrote:

We agree with your characterisation of the film genre (realistic-technological utopia). Of course it is important to strike the right balance between humour, reality and fantasy. The affair should not be too weighty – this wouldn't sit well ... To the extent that the basic humanistic plot allows, the story should be light and humorous.²¹

Maetzig's conviction that the film should antic-

pate conceivable social and scientific developments informed the research that would later go into the design of sets and costumes. As the 'Planet of Death' project evolved, the studio made numerous inquiries to GDR factories in the electronics and other industries regarding the latest technical advances.²² In casting about for prototypes for the astronauts' portable communications equipment and other gadgets, for example, DEFA solicited a brochure for a modern-looking 'Tonor' hearing aid being developed by Kölleda Radio Works. A faint echo of this four-transistor, gold-oxidised accessory may be found in the design of the chest-mounted panels adorning the Venus crew's space suits.²³

DEFA's endeavours to create an aura of advanced yet credible space technology ran into rather mundane obstacles in a few instances. The construction of a remote-controlled robot, for example, put the studio in the potentially awkward position of having to seek out a Western electronics supplier for parts not available in the GDR. Without the Western currency needed to purchase the required Siemens-manufactured relays, DEFA had to place an official request with the Ministry of Culture's Foreign Currency Office and the Ministry of Foreign and West German Trade.²⁴ The fabrication of the crew's anti-radiation suits posed related difficulties. This time it was not a matter of circuits but

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synthetics. After being turned down by the Ministry of Culture, the studio's business office was compelled to approach trade officials for help in obtaining a certain compound in the 'Westzone'. Stressing the project's importance as a major co-production with an international cast, the studio explained:

Since part of the action takes place on the planet Venus, so-called 'radiation suits' have to be made for two actors. These radiation suits are composed of a synthetic material that is nonetheless very heavy and inflexible. Thus the flexible parts of the suits, such as arms, legs, neck etc., have to be made of a material that is light and elastic yet strong. All of our attempts to produce these components with a material made in the GDR have failed.²⁵

Returning to the mechanics of scripting, by September 1957 Stenbock-Fermor/Barckhausen had been released from their scripting duties and replaced by DEFA's Günter Reisch and Iluzjon's Jan Fethke.²⁶ Having just finished *Spur in die Nacht* (A Trace into the Night, 1957), a detective-type film centred around the disappearance of a young girl on the German-Czech border, Reisch was a director with recent experience with genre films. His *Junges Gemüse* (approx: Tender Vegetables, 1956) had ventured a comic look at bureaucratic thinking in the realm of agricultural production, and his attempt in the film to address a topical issue in an entertaining way made him a plausible candidate for taking over a script fraught with related tensions between pleasure and politics. At the time, Maetzig and Reisch were also co-directing *Lied der Matrosen* (Song of the Sailors, 1958), a film commemorating the 40th anniversary of the November Revolution.

Despite the resistance to previous bids to make 'Planet of Death' more captivating, the screenplay composed by Reisch/Fethke did not abstain from amusing dialogue and the titillations surrounding Marina. Instead, the scriptwriters had sought to gather together a number of loose narrative ends and to heighten the drama of the voyage by emphasising the significance of Venus's destruction at the hands of the proponents of atomic weapons. The corresponding elevation of the role of political issues was apparent in the new script's considerably more earnest final scene. In the previous ver-

sion, Arsenjew had signed off with a politically innocuous affirmation of scientific progress: 'Venus was only the first step. We shall push further and further into the universe and discover ever-new wonders.' Marina made a closing appeal to the power of love, which was comically mirrored as the Dutchman and the ship's robot make up after a spat on Venus.²⁷

In the final scene of the September 1957 script, on the other hand, Marina solemnly concludes the log of the French scientist and reporter, who had heroically sacrificed himself for his Chinese crewmate after an accident on Venus's surface. Instead of expounding on love's cosmic force, she justifies the great sacrifices demanded by science in the name of peace and draws the connection between the tragedy that had befallen Venus and, in a transparent allusion to the Cold War, the danger that had once also threatened the Earth.²⁸

The characterisation of recent human history also gained a sharper political edge in a scene featuring the re-christened Indian mathematician Sikarna. Whereas the prior draft had referred generally to a grave menace to Earth, in the September 1957 script Sikarna points specifically to the risk of an atomic first strike:

Didn't the Earth experience the most terrible wars? Did there not exist only a few decades ago on Earth the terrible temptation to try to take possession of the world with the help of nuclear technology?²⁹

The screenplay by Reisch and Fethke was sent to the Polish partners and approved with some qualifications by the Iluzjon unit.³⁰ DEFA dramaturgs, too, still considered a number of issues unresolved. Sensitive to the political hierarchies among the Eastern European countries, one studio reader faulted a newly revised script of 2 October 1957 for unduly accentuating the role of Soltyk, the Polish engineer, at the expense of the Russian captain.³¹ One of the points at stake was the vital question of which character should conduct the tests of the spacecraft's engines. Despite such jurisdictional disagreements, which reflected the strained relations between the co-producers, this script provided the basis of the preliminary partnership contract between DEFA and the Polish filmmakers which signed two days previous to the Sputnik launch on 4 October.³²

By this time another producer, the French company Pathé, was poised to enter the scripting process. DEFA had been pursuing a number of Western partners from the very beginning of the project, although these efforts would fail in the end. In addition to Pathé, the studio director had instructed DEFA's Paris contact to take up negotiations with Procinex and Franco-London Film.³³ Closer to home, DEFA had once again enlisted the services of Erich Mehl, a West German film businessman with good ties to DEFA and a political background that mollified skeptical culture functionaries. Mehl had already demonstrated his sympathy for DEFA's concerns through his help in arranging for the controversial 1957 West German release of Wolfgang Staudte's *Der Untertan* (The Loyal Subject, 1951), a satire tracing the opportunistic rise of a subaltern in Wilhelminian Germany.³⁴

Contracting a foreign co-producer for 'Planet of Death' was attractive to the DEFA studio for economic and political reasons. It promised access to foreign currency and distribution outside the countries of Eastern Europe and thus helped to enhance DEFA's international reputation. Importantly, it also opened the door to the GDR's special West German rival. Still over a decade away from normalised diplomatic relations, the government of the Federal Republic had interfered with the display of films made in the GDR and frustrated co-productions between the two countries.³⁵

Improving production values through foreign actors was another appealing aspect of the prospect of a deal with Pathé. DEFA had already successfully collaborated with the company in a just-completed adaptation of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953), entitled *Die Hexen von Salem* (The Witches of Salem). Directed by Raymond Rouleau, with a script by Jean-Paul Sartre, the critically acclaimed film featured Simone Signoret and Yves Montand as Elisabeth and John Proctor. Signoret received the British Academy's 'Best Foreign Actress' for her performance.

Although he recognised that a repeat by stars like Montand, for the role of Higgins, and Signoret, for Marina (a francophone name change was planned), was something of a long shot, director Maetzig had set his casting sights high. Other models for the role of the American, the one character beside the Indian for whom the studio did not

first seek to enlist an actor of the matching nationality, included Marcello Mastroianni; a popular British actor would also have done. Maetzig regarded Ingrid Bergman, Ulla Jacobsson and Hildegard Knef as appropriate models for Marina in the event of Signoret's unavailability. For the role of Talua, the crew's African communications officer, the director imagined an actor with the poise of Harry Belafonte.³⁶

When in early 1958, film and party officials pressed DEFA to give up the planned partnership with Pathé, prospects of signing Western actors evaporated. The part of the American astronaut was eventually cast with Czech actor Oldrich Lukes;³⁷ the African astronaut was played by a Kenyan medical student enrolled at the time in Leipzig. In terms of casting, the only hint of the failed French partnership in the completed film was actress Yoko Tani, a former cabaret and variety dancer. Born in Paris as the daughter of a Japanese diplomat, Tani would play the role of 'Sumiko', the character that replaced that of Marina as the script evolved. No Signoret, DEFA nevertheless boasted of having signed the relatively well-known actress in various film dealings on behalf of the project.³⁸

There were a number of problems with the kind of co-production being pursued by the studio, however. Since Western actors insisted on being paid in Western currency, the studio was compelled to enter into disadvantageous arrangements with its foreign partners. This usually meant forfeiting a significant share of the distribution rights outside the GDR toward compensation for the actors, a trade that significantly limited DEFA's profits in such undertakings. As the example of *The Crucible* adaptation showed, in which DEFA supplied only Hanns Eisler's score and a few minor roles, co-productions with Western partners could lead to a loss of control over film projects. To DEFA's annoyance, unscrupulous foreign distributors had been known to bill GDR-French co-productions as solo French efforts.³⁹

In the case of *Silent Planet*, DEFA was prepared to offer Pathé full distribution rights for France, the French colonies and French-speaking regions of North Africa and to relinquish 50 per cent of the film's earnings in Belgium, Belgian Congo and Luxembourg. Switzerland would have remained in DEFA's possession. According to a list of DEFA's



Fig. 3. DEFA's casting of the international crew was driven by commercial concerns as well as political imperatives. [Courtesy of DEFA-Waltraut Pathenheimer, Berlin.]

demands dated 13 January 1958, in return the French side was to furnish actors for the roles of the American and the black astronaut's wife and recording time at a Paris sound studio. Pathé would also assume the costs of negative processing and provide the services of their scriptwriter L.E. Galey.⁴⁰

Had it gone into effect in this form, a separate contract would have granted Mehl qualified distribution rights for West Germany in exchange for actors for the roles of Marina, the African crew member, approximately 10 minor roles, 50–70 'exotic-looking' extras, and 12,000 Swiss Francs or West German Marks earmarked for miscellaneous props and materials.⁴¹ With Signoret having in the meantime proven unavailable for the part of the doctor, the studio hoped to contract the popular Swedish actress Ulla Jacobsson, the star of conventional genre films including Wolfgang Liebeneiner's rags-to-riches *Die Heilige Lüge* (The Saintly Lie, 1955).⁴² Mehl rejected the studio's offer on the grounds that paying Jacobsson's customary salary would wipe out his profits. His counter-offer was B-movie starlet Anneliese Kaplan of *Sonne über der Adria* (Sun over the Adriatic, 1954) fame.⁴³

DEFA in turn balked at Mehl's offer of Kaplan, proving more willing to concede another country of

distribution than to settle for a less-accomplished actress.⁴⁴ Already insulted by DEFA's insistence that the most important production posts be staffed by its own people, the Polish side had its own quibbles with this proposed arrangement with the West German producer. Although they had no fundamental objections to the participation of Mehl, they suspected him of inflating his projected investment in the film. Boasting of its own Western connections, the Polish co-producer also insisted that if Mehl was to receive the rights to the USA, he should be required to share the profits and guarantee a major American distributor.⁴⁵

By November 1957, complaints were mounting in the GDR Film Bureau that the studio was disregarding official policies prohibiting unauthorised transactions with foreign entities. In a letter to studio head Alfred Wilkening, the Film Bureau specifically warned DEFA about pursuing a business partnership with Pathé:

We cannot approve of these steps. Our position is not based solely on the formal objection that the studio is engaged in specific independent negotiations. We are also of the opinion that it is essentially impossible to enter into a constructive working relationship with a pri-

vate Capitalist company on this subject. This is precisely the kind of film that requires a clear and firm political foundation and a solid and resolute class position.

It ought to be apparent to you that a co-production of this sort ... would necessarily lead to unacceptable ideological concessions.⁴⁶

Ignoring the Film Bureau's demands that all talks be immediately broken off, the studio continued its negotiations with Pathé. DEFA's Wilkening defended these actions by pointing to the political benefits of securing a Western partner:

We consider this film to be extremely important in the fight against the destructive use of atomic energy ... This was also the reason why we tried to attract interested parties from Capitalist countries – in order to ensure that the film would be shown in these countries.⁴⁷

Following meetings with the French firm, DEFA's contact in Paris, Ruth Fischer, familiarised the studio head with the state of negotiations. According to her report, the French had shown a keen interest in the project, but were insisting on extensive revisions by one of their own writers, L.E. Galey, who had already read the most recent version of the script and had prepared an internal critique for Pathé's board of directors. According to Fischer, Galey's criticisms centred on the lack of 'une histoire'. In essential agreement with Pathé's script-writer, she wrote:

Where is the conflict? How can it be that nothing exciting and unexpected occurs between eight people, among them a beautiful woman, trapped together for forty days on a dangerous and exciting mission?

Despite Pathé's reservations about the script, Fischer assured Wilkening that the French company was interested in the project and advised inviting Galey to Babelsberg to explain his ideas to the filmmakers.⁴⁸

Galey met with Maetzig, script collaborator Reisch and dramaturg Dieter Scharfenberg at the DEFA studio on 6 November 1957. At the meeting, the French scriptwriter detailed his plans to add coherence to the story and to make it more engaging. His recommendations included dramatising the

threat emanating from Venus and hence the monumental significance of the mission for the fate of the Earth. Toward this purpose, Galey suggested emphasising Sikarna's crucial role in the undertaking. Unfortunately for the mathematical genius, this meant a near-lethal injury threatening the survival of the rest of the crew. Branding them 'uniform boy scouts', Galey also identified the need to add depth and emotionality to the individual crew members. Marina was singled out as an 'iron virgin'.⁴⁹

Galey's comments on the screenplay by Reisch/Fethke once again drew attention to the conflict between entertainment and politics that had marked the story's development from the onset. Although previous efforts to take advantage of the science fiction genre's frivolous side had been dampened, DEFA was anxious not to endanger a possible Western collaboration and responded positively to Galey's views on the screenplay. Studio representatives clearly felt that the proposed changes could be reconciled with the film's politics despite their sweeping character. Correspondingly, DEFA's protocol of the story conference played down Galey's criticisms: 'The French colleagues are in basic agreement with us on the project, with the structure of the plot, with the characters and the film's philosophy.'⁵⁰ A subsequent meeting of German and Polish set designers to address the substantial staging changes implied by Galey's script suggests how far DEFA was willing to go to accommodate Pathé's concerns.

By 1 January 1958, a freshly revised script listing Galey as a co-writer had been bound and a copy distributed to the Film Bureau for approval.⁵¹ In keeping with Galey's intentions to make the film more attractive to film audiences, the script marked a return to the very first screenplay's attempts at humour and tempered sexual intrigue. While the American had been somewhat flippant since the early script, for instance, he was now to spout one-liners and English phrases and pursue the biologist Marina with added zest. Sikarna rematerialised not only as a brilliant intellect without whom the mission was doomed to fail, but as an absent-minded professor. Although this trait had already been introduced by Stenbock-Fermor and Barckhausen, the new script contained a scene in which the distracted scientist fails to observe that the mission's doctor is a woman even after performing a physical. This was

a gag written for special effect considering the attractive actresses that DEFA's casting department was seeking for her role.

In an bid to improve the story's flow, a problem that had accompanied the script throughout, Galey had also introduced a framing narrative set in the year 2000. Later rejected, this contrivance had Arsenjew, as the crew's last surviving member, relate the Venusian adventure to a youthful audience assembled to celebrate the new millennium. Made possible by the recent Sputnik launch, his address included a reference to the deployment of the first artificial satellite.

Minister of Culture Erich Wendt fired back a devastating critique of the screenplay soon after perusing it. Directing his comments just as squarely at the uncondoned French partner as at the script itself, Wendt was particularly irritated by the depiction of the various astronauts, which he regarded as politically retrograde national caricatures. He complained about the Indian's portrayal as a dispassionate and world-shy 'fakir of science' and the gum-chewing American's 'hey baby attitude'. The high-ranking cultural official also took issue with the 'half-feudal forms of politeness' ascribed to the Chinese scientist. Alluding to the westward advance of Mao's Red Army in 1934–35, he bristled, 'Shouldn't he bear at least a trace of the Long March?'⁵²

According to Wendt, the script amounted to little more than a 'superficial attempt to politicise' the basic story and, more grievously, a scandalous misinterpretation of the tenet of 'peaceful coexistence'. Intended to ease tensions between the US and the Soviet Union, the policy of peaceful coexistence was first propagated by Khrushchev in 1956 at the twentieth Communist Party Conference. Wendt wrote:

The script avoids all social aspects. Peace on Earth has been instated in 1978. How? What social transformations played a role? What is the dominant social order? This remains open. At one point there is a passing reference to intellectuals having helped to create peace and that this is why they want to initiate peaceful relations with Venus's inhabitants. The fact that there can be no peace without socialism – this remains unsaid. What's more, the word

socialism does not even occur. This is inconceivable in 1957 or 1958, during a period of bitter struggle for peace. Perhaps the authors mean that by 1978 the principle of peaceful coexistence will have established itself. Then they have misunderstood this principle and the conditions upon which it is based. Coexistence is founded on the strength of socialism!⁵³

Pointing to the emerging race for manned space expeditions in the wake of Sputnik, he urged that all the scriptwriters needed to do was to take the present as their point of departure. This would necessarily lead to the conclusion that the first space voyages will be the focus of intense conflicts between socialism and imperialism.⁵⁴

As opposed to the dramaturg, for whom a scorched Venusian landscape was to serve as a forceful admonition about the dangers of nuclear armament, Wendt maintained that the sight of a completely devastated planet would send the wrong message to the public and would contribute to widespread pessimism about the state of the world. While it was true that an atomic war would result in immense losses and suffering, said Wendt, it was important to champion the view that 'humanity cannot be defeated and socialism will ultimately triumph'.⁵⁵

In the small world of the GDR film industry, personal relationships and reputation played an important role the politics of filmmaking. As a respected director with ties to party functionaries, Maetzig lost little time in taking his case to a higher authority when he heard that the script had been panned in the Ministry of Culture. Seeking to garner support for his film in the Central Committee, the director addressed a personal memo to the head of the Culture Section (Abteilung Kultur), Alfred Kurella. In his defence of the script, Maetzig cited the resonance the project had already enjoyed in the West German press and its importance in terms of GDR foreign policy.⁵⁶ Hoping to impress the high-ranking cultural official, Maetzig sent along a copy of the script.

In this case, Maetzig's efforts to put pressure on Wendt by way of the Central Committee failed. On 11 January 1958, Wendt met with representatives from DEFA and declared a halt to the project pending the studio's submission of a com-

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Fig. 4. Underscoring the role of the mission's Russian commander, the GDR program, featuring actors Yoko Tani and Gunther Simon, emphasised the threat to the Earth: 'Is humanity threatened by destruction?' Progress Film-Programm 14/60. [Courtesy of Progress Film-Verleih, Berlin.]

prehensively reworked script.⁵⁷ Matters worsened still when a special film industry watchdog in the Central Committee's Culture Section upbraided Wendt for a lack of political conscientiousness in the handling of DEFA's negotiations with West German film producers, particularly the West Berlin film businessman Erich Mehl. As the vigilant official in question wrote:

... we are under the impression that it was very easy for Herr Mehl and a number of other people from the West to repeatedly access the studio grounds, to freely meet with everyone and to make contacts and exert influence.⁵⁸

Bending to such high-level pressures and following renewed conflicts with the Polish Iluzjon unit

over the course the script's development had taken, the project was relaunched with two new scriptwriters, Wolfgang Kohlhaase and Günter Rucker, who in mid-February devised a detailed strategy for rewriting 'Planet of Death'.⁵⁹ Familiar with the criticisms that had been directed at previous versions, their four-page sketch dealt primarily with three related and lingering points of contention; namely, the political situation on Earth at the time of the Venus mission, the characterisation of the American Higgins, and the circumstances of Venus's self-destruction. Right down to specific formulations, Kohlhaase and Rucker strategically tried to accommodate all of the issues raised by earlier readers of the script.

Recognising that they would have to make considerable concessions to political concerns, their suggested alterations transported a heightened degree of Cold War antagonisms into the story's depiction of the future. The character of their recommendations, not all of which actually found their way into ensuing drafts, would have a lasting effect on the political tenor of the script and the film itself. Describing how they foresaw shaping the film's global politics, they wrote:

The socialist states have surpassed the capitalist states in all domains. The principle of coexistence has prevailed in this struggle due to the strength of the socialist camp.

Atomic weapons have been outlawed for years. Reason is only just beginning to reign everywhere on Earth. One generation after Hiroshima – only now has fear begun to subside among the world's peoples. A socialist lunar station exists serving peace and not war. Scientists from all nations work there. In the USA there is still a group, shrinking daily but still powerful, that opposes coexistence. This group no longer rules, but still owns some production facilities and has considerable means to employ scientists and technicians. The world must remain watchful.⁶⁰

With the exception of the conspicuous mention of Hiroshima, this point of departure corresponded largely to previous demands to plainly name the

ongoing conflict between peaceful socialist nations and Western militarism. What was different was the way in which the new scriptors intended to reframe the role of the American astronaut. In their outline for revamping the story, Kohlhaase and Rucker imagined morphing Higgins from a pilot most conspicuous for his libido and off-the-cuff manner into 'Hawling', a respected physicist with a suitably sober bearing. The American's transformation would not only more convincingly motivate his inclusion in the mission in the first place, it would prevent him from upstaging his wooden-featured Russian commander.

According to the scriptors, the new American character would also provide a way of initiating a critique of 'bourgeois science' and its ignoble role in the development of the atomic bomb.⁶¹ To establish the latter connection, Kohlhaase and Rucker envisioned placing Hawling in the service of the cited group of retrograde American industrialists – later christened the 'Consortium'. A key scene would set up the conflict between Hawling's desire to pursue his apolitical scientific interests and the reactionary Consortium's demands that he forego the Soviet-led mission to Venus. In this scene, the members of the Consortium go so far as to suggest that the report of a potential Venusian attack could be nothing more than a Communist ploy concocted to provoke global unrest. In response to Hawling's defence of the mission's integrity, Kohlhaase/Rucker's Consortium head paints an exceedingly cynical Cold War scenario:

All right, let's assume it's true. Then there are two possibilities. The strike hits the socialist hemisphere – that's good; or it hits us – this is also good. Then we'll propagate the rumour of a Russian attack and the specter of coexistence will disappear for ever. For then there will be retaliation. Whose side are you on, Hawling?⁶²

Rhetoric of this caliber never found its way into a surviving script variant and was probably a tactical manoeuvre on the part of Kohlhaase/Rucker to persuade the project's detractors that they were prepared to take the proper ideological measures. A considerably more subtle way of raising ethical issues surrounding Hawling's previous work in the service of the Consortium, was the creation of the

character of 'Weimann'. Hawling's teacher and the remorseful developer of the atomic bomb, Weimann was to provide Hawling with moral support in his decision to ignore the threats of the Consortium and to join Arsenjew and the international expedition. To ensure that the intended allusion to the director of the Manhattan Project would not be lost on the readers of their brief, Kohlhaase and Rucker helpfully supplied the name 'Oppenheimer' in parentheses.⁶³

Paralleling the political polarisation of the Earth, the scriptwriters envisioned Venus as a divided world pitting a peace-loving bloc against the evil creators of the nuclear device that had been aimed at the Earth. In Kohlhaase/Rucker's proposal, which hearteningly suggested that the universe was not populated entirely by evil beings, the benevolent Venusians manage to send a warning to Earth – the foundling spool – and to prevent the complete destruction of their own planet. Accommodating the minister of culture's complaints that the story would have a demoralising affect on the audience, the story was to close on an optimistic note, with the ship returning to Earth bearing 'a message of life, not death'.⁶⁴

By mid-May 1958 Kohlhaase and Rucker had concluded their rewrite and submitted it to the studio's dramaturgy department.⁶⁵ In accord with their plans, the script contained a long Consortium sequence, but it also included a subsequent telephone conversation between Hawling and his eminent teacher Weimann. This second scene painted the picture of a repentantly philosophical scientist struggling with his role in the developments leading up to Hiroshima. The conversation between Hawling and his teacher, which cast a mildly sympathetic light on Weimann's dilemma, was eliminated from ensuing drafts before shooting finally began in early February 1959.⁶⁶

No longer listing Galey as a co-author, the May script, which had been freed of whimsical dialogue and any hint of sexual tensions between the American astronaut and the female doctor, was approved by studio dramaturgs and administrators and was sent once again to the Film Bureau and the Minister of Culture for approval. In July, director Maetzig and two studio dramaturgs met with film and cultural officials to discuss the latest version. While the officials sanctioned the script, they once

again stressed that the historic flight to Venus had to be plainly shown as an initiative of the socialist nations. Despite the studio's comprehensive endeavours to motivate his inclusion in the mission and to rework his character, officials also continued to oppose the characterisation of the American astronaut. The memo recording the results of this meeting noted the Minister of Culture's insistence that the film at least imply that the American government disapproved of Hawling's participation and supported the interests of the evil Consortium.⁶⁷

Never inordinately harmonious, the relationship between DEFA and the Polish co-producer had been deteriorating ever since Pathé's involvement in the project. The Iluzjon unit had objected both to the conditions of the contract with the French company and Galey's rewrite of the existing script by Fethke and Reisch, which had been a joint German-Polish effort and had already been authorised by both sides. Despite a series of talks in Warsaw and Babelsberg beginning in January 1958 regarding the specifics of the co-production, a number of financing, staffing and other issues remained unresolved.

Tensions reached a new height in June when the Iluzjon team rejected Kohlhaase/Rücker's thoroughly reconceived version. Threatening to leave the project and take the film rights to Lem's novel with them, the Polish filmmakers claimed once again that DEFA was trying to usurp the production and confronted DEFA with an ultimatum: Either the film was to be produced on the basis of the Fethke/Reisch script or the Polish side would take over the production 'as the legal and moral owners of the rights to Lem's story'.⁶⁸

In order to avoid what would have been a 'political defeat for both sides', the Central Committee directed GDR film officials to maintain the co-production and the appearance of good relations between the two countries. Somewhat less in the spirit of socialist internationalism, party functionaries cautioned against making any ideological concessions to Iluzjon, which they suspected of ideological laxness.⁶⁹ The ensuing meetings in Warsaw in September 1958 led to an agreement on the changes to be made to the latest draft. In a gesture to the co-producer, it was also decided that Iluzjon's Fethke would return to work on the screenplay with DEFA's Günter Rücker. The resulting 'final version

by Jan Fethke and Günter Rücker', which recorded the title change to the tamer *Silent Planet*, was completed by mid-November 1958.⁷⁰ Although this 'final' script would suffer two additional rewrites and last-minute dialogue-sheet revisions before dubbing, the co-production had been saved.

As it was experienced by GDR movie-goers, *Silent Planet* revealed few signs of the contentious negotiation of political and entertainment issues that had characterised much of the film's production history. Warm Agfacolor tones, respectable special effects, and extravagant sets only sporadically succeeded in upstaging the political message that had been increasingly foregrounded during the scripting process. Excessive dramaturgical tampering had also yielded exchanges of a more declarative than dialogic nature and characters lacking the emotionality and humour, however conventional it may have been, that had distinguished early versions of the screenplay. In the end the film's commendable warning about the dangers of atomic war suffered both from ideological overkill and one-dimensional characters unable to convincingly convey the human drama of the threat to Earth.

Silent Planet appeared in GDR cinemas on 26 February 1960 in an uncommonly large 61-print release that reached by official and not always reliable accounts over 200,000 spectators in its first 13 weeks.⁷¹ Although the US import *Sitting Pretty* (Walter Lang, 1948), released in the GDR shortly before *Silent Planet*, drew almost as many spectators in a week with only 42 copies, this was a very respectable draw for a DEFA film.⁷² Widely praised in Eastern Europe, it was also one of the few DEFA features to find commercial distribution in the West, where it opened to mixed but mostly unfavourable reviews. Criticisms in Western Europe ranged from justified frustration with stiff dialogue and acting to inflated tirades against the film's anti-West polemics.⁷³

The film even found its way into American cinemas, premiering on 31 October 1962 in an 80-minute copy.⁷⁴ Distributed by Crown International as *First Spaceship on Venus*, this dubbed and edited version was some 14 minutes shorter than the GDR release.⁷⁵ Among other alterations made for the English-speaking market, the name of the mission's Russian captain was changed from 'Arsenjew' to 'Durand' – no doubt with the intention of

shielding the Western public from his true national origins.

Silent Planet did not turn out to be the answer to DEFA's problems in the category of entertainment features. Although it could hold its own with many films in its genre, with nearly triple the budget of an average DEFA film, the studio did not rush to tackle a new science fiction project. Developing a 'diverse socialist film programme ... without displaying Western sex and horror films and *Heimat* tear-jerkers' would persist as an unresolved dilemma for DEFA and the makers of GDR film policy.⁷⁶Ω

Notes

1. Comparable to Cinemascope, Totalvision was the anamorphic wide-screen system used at DEFA. Agfacolor was developed by the Wolfen company in 1938 and was known for its soft hues. Improved after the war, it was one of the fastest colour stocks available for a time. The name was changed to ORWO colorfilm in the mid-1960s.
2. This article draws on material from the DEFA studio, Socialist Unity Party (SED) and GDR Ministry of Culture collected in the holdings of the Stiftung Archiv der Parteien- und Massenorganisationen der DDR (SAPMO) in the Bundesarchiv. The author would like to thank Herr Müller at the Federal Archive for his help in locating documentation on *Silent Planet* in the studio files.
3. DEFA also tried its luck with the musical during this period. Hans Heinrich's *Meine Frau macht Musik* (My Wife Sings, 1958) was a major production in this genre. The studio's most successful entertainment venture was the action-filled 'Indianerfilm'. An ideological response to the Hollywood Western, the first of these films, which took the side of the native North American peoples over the white colonisers, appeared in 1966. These extremely popular films starring Yugoslavian actor Gajko Mitic, the previous hero of West German productions in the genre, were shown throughout Eastern Europe. Initiatives to ensure an adequate supply of indigenous genre films ultimately failed, however. The role of entertaining GDR film audiences was increasingly left to imports, which were screened and procured by official delegations.
4. Stellungnahme zum Antrag auf Aufnahme in den Thematischen Plan für den Stoff 'Planet des Todes', undated, SAPMO: DR 1 4433.
5. In addition to the Film Bureau and the Central Committee's Culture Section (Abteilung Kultur), these institutions included: the USSR Ministry of Culture; USSR Film Bureau; GDR Embassy in the USSR; GDR Embassy in China; Chinese Embassy in the GDR; GDR Foreign Office (Ministerium für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten); GDR Foreign Office, China Bureau; Ministry of Foreign and West German Trade (Ministerium für Außen- und Innerdeutschen Handel); Ministry of Culture, Budget and Foreign Currency Department (Ministerium für Kultur, Sektor Haushalt/Valuta); GDR World Peace Council (Weltfriedensrat); Urania – Society for the



Fig. 5. The West German promotion of the film, which was released as *Raumschiff Venus antwortet nicht* (Spaceship Venus Does Not Respond), abstained from any reference to the Soviet Union and replaced Simon, the star of epic anti-Fascist films, with the Polish actor Ignacy Machowski. *Illustrierte Film-Bühne* no. 5397. [Courtesy of Verlag für Filmschriften, Christian Unucka, 85239 Herbertshausen, Germany.]

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- Promulgation of Scientific Learning (Urania – Gesellschaft für die Verbreitung von wissenschaftlichen Kenntnissen).
6. Letter from Simons to Karsch (28 November 1957), SAPMO: DR 1 4433.
 7. With hardly a trace of irony, film official Schauer wrote: 'Important scenes in this film do in fact take place in the Sahara. But we are not of the opinion that the exteriors actually need to be shot in the Sahara. This would be irresponsible from an economic point of view, not to mention the fact that it would hardly be acceptable in terms of foreign policy ... We hope that this information will suffice and has convinced you that there is no need or reason for the Foreign Office to intervene in an advisory or a regulatory capacity at this time.' Letter from Schauer to Simons (4 December 1957), SAPMO: DR 1 4433.
 8. Produktionsbericht (Production Report), entry 128 (28 July 1959), SAPMO: DR 117 1048e.
 9. Stanislaw Lem, *Der Planet des Todes* (Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1954).
 10. Like their colleagues at DEFA, Polish filmmakers were organised into production units during the course of the film industry's nationalisation following World War II. The relative independence of these units in the different Eastern European studios varied. Reform-minded DEFA administrators looked to the more liberal Czech and Polish models when the studio briefly increased the autonomy of its own production units in the early 1960s.
 11. Citation from the German translation of the Polish treatment. 'Planet des Todes' (13 October 1956), SAPMO: DR 117 RD 81 Bd.2, 99. Where available, references are made to scene numbers as opposed to page numbers.
 12. In the GDR film industry, screenplays went through a procedure of internal review at the studio and had to be sanctioned by Film Bureau employees in the Ministry of Culture before production could begin. Completed films were required to pass a state certification board attended during the late 1950s by film officials, the studio head, DEFA dramaturgs, and invited members of the film's production unit. While the meeting of the state certification board was not a mere formality, film officials rarely encountered real surprises in completed films, since they regularly attended studio screenings and sought to exert influence at early production stages.
 13. 'Planet des Todes' (13 October 1956), SAPMO: DR 117 RD 81 Bd.2., 21.
 14. Expertise by Wallstein (5 March 1957), SAPMO: DR 117 1048g.
 15. 'Planet des Todes', SAPMO: DR 117 Sz 12 A Bd.1, scene 24.
 16. *Ibid.*, scenes 7, 37 and 65 respectively.
 17. Maetzig's Thälmann films are *Ernst Thälmann – Sohn seiner Klasse* (Ernst Thälmann – A Son of His Class, 1954) and *Ernst Thälmann – Führer seiner Klasse* (Ernst Thälmann – Leader of his Class, 1955); *Ehe im Schatten* (A Marriage in the Shadows, 1947), is one of the director's well-known anti-Fascist films.
 18. Allgemeine Bemerkungen zum Drehbuch 'Planet des Todes' (28 June 1957), SAPMO: DR 117 1048g.
 19. *Ibid.*
 20. *Ibid.*
 21. Letter from Stenbock-Fermor to Maetzig (30 June 1957), SAPMO: DR 117 1048g.
 22. DEFA also planned to send one of the film's set designers to West Germany to attend a Hamburg exhibition of modern design and futuristic architecture. Reisebescheinigung für unseren Mitarbeiter Willi Schaefer (8 December 1958), SAPMO: DR 117 1048.
 23. The reference is to VEB Funkwerk Kölleda. 'VEB' abbreviated the term 'Volkseigener Betrieb', a form of economic organisation. SAPMO: DR 117 1927.
 24. Letter from Wege and Krips to Ministerium für Außen- und Innerdeutschen Handel (Ministry of Foreign and West German Trade) (8 January 1959), SAPMO: DR 117 1048.
 25. Letter from Wege and Krips to Ministry of Foreign and West German Trade (6 December 1958), SAPMO: DR 117 1048.
 26. During the Weimar period, Fethke collaborated with Willi Döl on the scripts for Phil Jutzi's *Mutter Krausens Fahrt ins Glück* (Mother Krausen's Trip to Heaven, 1929) and Leo Mittler's *Jenseits der Straße – Eine Tragödie des Alltags* (Beyond the Street – An Everyday Tragedy, 1929).
 27. 'Planet des Todes', SAPMO: DR 117 Sz 12 A Bd.1, scene 126.
 28. 'Planet des Todes', SAPMO DR 117 RD 81 Bd.4, scene 126.
 29. *Ibid.*, scene 123.
 30. Letter from Starski to Maetzig (17 September

- 1957), SAPMO: DR 117 1927. The Polish team claimed that Lem had also given his approval.
31. Opinion by Brückner (2 October 1957), SAPMO: DR 117 1048g.
 32. Letter from Staat to Volkmann (2 October 1957), SAPMO: DR 117 1927.
 33. Letters by Wilkening (18 September 1957), SAPMO: DR 117 1927.
 34. Ralf Schenk, 'Mitten im kalten Krieg', in *Das zweite Leben der Filmstadt Babelsberg* (Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1994), 96.
 35. The existence of a US government-sponsored 'Special Motion Picture Project', which had a hand in the production and financing of a handful of West German films from 1951–54, attests to the hotly contested arena of Cold War film politics in East and West Germany. Michael Borchard, 'Spielfilme gegen den Kommunismus', *Deutschland Archiv* 2 (March/April 1997): 221–230.
 36. Letter from Maetzig to Wilkening (23 September 1957), SAPMO: DR 117 1927; Letter from Maetzig to Wilkening (4 October 1957), SAPMO: DR 1927.
 37. At one point in the negotiations between Pathé and DEFA, French actor Jean Claude Pascal was considered for Higgins's role. Paired with Romy Schneider, Pascal played in the West German comedy *Die schöne Lügnerin* (The Beautiful Liar, 1959) by Axel von Ambesser.
 38. Finding actors for the Chinese astronaut and the Russian captain was also extremely complicated and involved the intervention of the GDR's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the GDR Consulate in Peking, the Chinese Consulate in Berlin and the Soviet Ministry of Culture. SAPMO: DR 117 1048a. After protracted negotiations Maetzig eventually settled for Michael Postnikov, an actor conveniently engaged at the Soviet Army Theatre in Potsdam. SAPMO: DR 117 1048d.
 39. Schenk, 96.
 40. Film 'Planet des Todes' (13 January 1958), SAPMO: DR 117 1927. The Paris studio referred to by the Iluzjon group is likely to have been located at Radiodiffusion et Télévision Française, where composers Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry had developed a concept of 'musique concrète'. This involved the processing of recorded human and environmental sounds as opposed to electronically generated sounds.
 41. *Ibid.*
 42. Ulla Jacobsson had also appeared in BRD films such Hans Deppe's *Der Pfarrer von Kirchfeld* (The Pastor of Kirchfeld, 1955) and Rolf Hansen's *Die Letzten werden die Ersten sein* (The Last will be the First, 1956).
 43. This by all accounts forgettable BRD/Yugoslavian production was directed by Karl Georg Kalb.
 44. Memo (21 December 1958), SAPMO: DR 117 1927.
 45. Memo from Volkmann to Wilkening (10 January 1958), SAPMO DR 117 1927.
 46. Letter from Schauer to Wilkening (13 November 1957), SAPMO DR 1 4433.
 47. Letter from Wilkening to Schauer (2 January 1958), SAPMO: DR 117 1927.
 48. Letter from Fischer to Wilkening (28 October 1957), SAPMO: DR 117 1927. Fischer also reported on the film projects *Hexen von Salem* (*The Witches of Salem*, 1957) and *Die Elenden* (*Les Misérables*, 1959). The film version of *Les Misérables*, directed by Jean-Paul Le Chanois and produced with Italian participation, was released in the GDR in 1959. Filmed before the construction of the Berlin Wall, the final French-GDR collaboration was Louis Dacquain's *Trübe Wasser* (*Clouded Water*, 1960), released in France as *La Rabouilleuse*.
 49. Aktennotiz betr. 'Planet des Todes' (6 November 1957), SAPMO: DR 117 1927.
 50. *Ibid.*
 51. In addition to Galey, the cover cited Maetzig and all of the previous scriptors as authors. SAPMO: DR 117 DB 005 Bd.1.
 52. Letter from Wendt to Ackermann (2 January 1958), SAPMO: NY 4109 FBS 188/18195. For an interesting consideration of character stereotypes and information on the film's reception, see Gerhard Wiechmann 'Leit- und Feindbilder im Science-fiction-Film', in *Leit- und Feindbilder in DDR-Medien, Schriftenreihe Medienberatung* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1997), 9–27. Archival documents show that character and plot transformations were considerably more complicated than Wiechmann could anticipate on the basis of his comparison between Lem's novel and the film. Similarly, whereas Wiechmann sees the film as an example of the conflict between Maetzig's artistic aspirations and the demands of studio administrators, the details of the film's production suggest a far more complex intersection of ideological, economic and genre-related issues.
 53. *Ibid.*
 54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*
56. Memo from Maetzig to Kurella (7 January 1958), SAPMO: DY 30/IV 2/2.026/82.
57. Aktennotiz (14 January 1958), SAPMO: NY 4109 FBS 188/18195.
58. Letter from Wagner to Wendt (25 January 1958), SAPMO: DY 30/IV 2/9.06/204. The Minister of Culture responded that precautions had been taken with regard to the 'Planet des Todes' project and that Mehl no longer had a permit for unrestricted travel between East and West. (The GDR did not seal its borders until 13 August 1961). Letter from Wendt to Wagner (5 February 1958), SAPMO: DY 30/IV 2/9.06/204.
59. Among the alterations agreed upon by both sides were changing the Sahara to the Gobi or a Soviet location, eliminating purportedly pessimistic elements and underscoring the leading role of the USSR. A new treatment was to be drafted and approved by both parties before work could be taken up again. Protokoll (15 February 1958), SAPMO: DR 117 1048g.
60. Bemerkungen zur Bearbeitung des Drehbuches 'Planet des Todes' (13 February 1958), SAPMO: DR 117 1927.
61. *Ibid.*
62. *Ibid.*
63. *Ibid.*
64. *Ibid.*
65. In submitting their script, Kohlhaase and Rücker defended their efforts and claimed that they had done their best given the constraints of the literary source: 'A close look at the story shows that the political objections that have been raised are objections to Lem's basic plot. But one can only really relate that which the plot permits – the previous eight script versions provide sufficient evidence of this. The version that we have produced on the basis of the last one is thus necessarily a compromise. With respect to fundamentals, in our opinion it is impossible to arrive at a different result. Lem's plot is not only limited in political terms, it also contains political risks. We have tried to avoid these risks and to emphasise that which is useful to us.' Memo from Kohlhaase and Rücker to Schwalbe (13 May 1958), SAPMO: DR 117 1048g.
66. Szenarium 2 (13 May 1958), SAPMO: DR 117 Sz 12A Bd.2, scenes 12 and 17–19.
67. Memo from Wallstein to Brückner, undated [circa July 1958], SAPMO: DR 117 1048g.
68. Letter Starski to Maetzig (31 July 1958), SAPMO: DR 117 1927.
69. Letter from Schwalbe to Wilkening (21 August 1958), SAPMO: DR 117 1927.
70. Der schweigende Stern (Der Planet des Todes) 'letzte Fassung von Jan Fethke und Günter Rücker' (15 November 1958), SAPMO: DR 117 DB 005 Bd.2.
71. Planung und Statistik, Ur- und Erstaufführungsergebnisse, undated, SAPMO: DR 1 4463. The Italian production *Tre Stranieri a Roma* (Three Strangers in Rome, 1958) by Claudio Gora drew over 100,000 spectators in a one-week, 42-print run.
72. *Ibid.*
73. For brief reviews of the film's reception see Wiechmann (note 52) and Goswin Dörfler's entry in *Enzyklopädie des phantastischen Films*, vol. 5, Norbert Stresau and Heinrich Wimmer, eds. (Meitingen: Corian Verlag, 1996).
74. The film probably made its way across the Atlantic via Interfilm of Liechtenstein, which had been sold the rights for Britain and a number of other countries by DEFA's foreign distributor, DEFA Außenhandel. In exchange for the distribution rights for *Silent Planet*, DEFA Außenhandel received a synchronised English-language copy of the film, GDR distribution rights for the British film *Blind Date* (Joseph Losey, 1959), distributed in the GDR as *Alles spricht gegen Van Rooyen*, and \$17,000. Using Interfilm as a kind of credit institute, DEFA Außenhandel hoped to relinquish this money to Munich's Exportfilm, which also did business with the Liechtenstein firm. Exportfilm would in turn supply DEFA's foreign distributor with Kurt Hoffmann's *Das schöne Abenteuer* (The Great Adventure, 1959). This arrangement, which illustrates the currency-related problems experienced by the GDR film industry in doing international film business, avoided the bureaucracy involved in foreign currency transactions. Letter from Schlotter to Görgner (15 November 1960), SAPMO: DR 1 4185.
75. The author was unable to locate documentation at Crown. Thanks nonetheless to Mark Humphrey at Acquisitions.
76. Memo (18 March 1960), SAPMO: DR 1 4423.