

## (Re-)presentation of Everyday Heroes in German Post-war Newsreels (West-East)

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### **Abstract**

In the post-war period, life was challenging and required people to stand up for the community. In the two German states, however, different views of community were propagated by the media. In the 1950s and 1960s, film coverage of the cinema newsreels offered moving images for people who had no access to television. Reports underscored by music and commentary allowed political interpretations. In the GDR, persons and groups were honoured by the narrative of the newsreel *Der Augenzeuge*: for example, when students and administrative staff helped the farmers during harvest time. In this way, a 'heroic sense of community' was transferred to all 'labourers' in the community. In the West German newsreels, heroes took action in traffic or at work in dicey situations. They are role models too, but they are not meant to instigate the communities' imitation but serve education. The article aims to show the patterns and intentions of the filmic presentation of 'normal people' as heroes in Germany.

**Keywords:** Newsreels, Germany, 1950s/1960s, Cold War, Memory

## Introduction

Heroes are needed when and for as long as social or political unrest prevails (cf. Lehmann 2009, 772). They hold up the mirror to society: Where others look the other way or seem uninvolved, these individuals or groups intervene in a selfless way. Even in the post-war period, when most people had very little, and everything had to be rebuilt, there were helpers and supporting institutions, e.g. for uprooted refugees, disoriented young people or marginalised people who had been disabled as a result of war. The circumstances dictated that everyone needed to work on the behalf of marginalised groups and the community as a whole. In the two German states, however, different ideas about community and 'heroic' action were propagated by the media.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the cinema newsreel was an important part of the media system. The film coverage that was shown as the 'news part' of the pre-program in cinemas, offered moving images from Germany and all over the world for those who did not yet have access to television.<sup>1</sup> Diverse visual (film, photo, graphics) and acoustic elements (music, sound, speech) were used to attract the attention of the audience. Image and sound enabled an authentic, but also strategically designed presentation of personalities and their achievements – embedded in current contexts or flashbacks. Of particular interest is the comparison between East and West German newsreels, which reveals the contrasting state models of capitalism and socialism and raises the question of how the two states differed in their representation and attribution of meaning for the concept of 'heroism' (in terms of attitude or behaviour). By definition, 'heroes' are distinguished by special deeds in daily life (Reichholf 2009, 836). According to Allison and Goethals they have eight essential qualities ("The Great Eight"): "[...] being Caring, Selfless, and Inspiring" [...], Resilient, Reliable, Charismatic, Smart, and Strong" (Allison and Goethals 2011, 63). Not all of these traits can be assumed, but only some – and some can be stronger or weaker than others. Due to their special status, heroes can polarise or become polarised in discourse. The hero figure stands out and can therefore be either admired or mocked. Thus, heroism is to a certain extent a phenomenon of attribution and interpretation: individual or collective expectations want to be fulfilled.

I will reveal how the cinema newsreel contributed to the cultivation of 'heroic stories'. The differentiated (re-)presentation of extraordinary people and their achievements in everyday contexts will be shown in exemplary newsreels.<sup>2</sup> The selection of topics, presentation (of current events) and representation (of past events) show the different 'types of heroes' formed by the newsreel. Examples from the 1950s to 1965 (presentation) and one each from the East and the West from 1948, which were apparently also taken up in the following decade and had high relevance (representation), are used for this purpose.

The analysis follows the theoretical approach *Visual History* by Gerhard Paul (2012). According to Paul it is not a method, but an scientific attitude: Paul understands images (including film) not only as sources, but also as research objects – not only their content should be considered, but also their design – so I will deal with the aesthetics of the reports. Secondly, I refer to the approach *New Film History* by Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery (1985), which highlights the various influences on film: e.g. economy, technology, and sociology. In this sense, not only were the films used for the studies, but also various contextual material – for example reports about cinematographers, film reviews, letters from viewers, and magazine articles, which embed the visual sources into a cultural discourse. However, the methodology of film analysis is mainly *hermeneutic* whereby for exemplary interpretation, the filmic elements and their interaction in narrative strategies must be considered in the context of the history of film and newsreels (cf. Hicketier 2012, 32-35).<sup>3</sup> Following, the establishment of post-war newsreels is explained.

### **Characteristics of the post-war newsreel**

After the Second World War, the Western Allies and the Soviet Union set up newsreels in their occupation zones according to their own specifications in order to re-educate the German population. The Germans had lost their 'war heroes', something which was brought to their attention by the British-American newsreel *Welt im Film*.<sup>4</sup> The Federal government, however, wanted to present the situation in Germany, to Germany and abroad, in a way that was independent of Allied influence. The *Neue Deutsche Wochenschau*

(NDW) was produced in Hamburg from 1950 onwards – in the first issue the narrator clarified the newsreel’s claim:

We want to be interesting by presenting not only current events and sensations but also a picture of the deep seriousness of our lives and our centuries-old culture. We want to be up-to-date by making the present real and true to life according to the classical laws of our European tradition.<sup>5</sup>

The aim was to bring the audience not only closer to successes, but also to the everyday through forging connections with familiar culture. The *Welt im Film* and the *Blick in die Welt* (a newsreel influenced by France) continued to exist after 1949, then under German control. Competition on the West German newsreel market was further intensified by the fast cut American *Fox Tönende Wochenschau*. In order to ensure that the NDW was accepted by the public and cinema owners,<sup>6</sup> it was essential to avoid any heroic pathos in the reports that was all too familiar from the propaganda instrument *Deutsche Wochenschau* in war times and therefore not seen as credible. In the 1950s, West German viewers clearly articulated in letters their aversion to having to deal with political issues in the cinema: At best, a little politics at the beginning of the newsreel was acceptable.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, Heinz Wiers, managing director of the NDW, assumed that the newsreels had “political significance in every respect”, that they were “potentially truly dangerous tools”. It depends “on personality, character and moral attitude”, on the “awareness of the obligation within a social community and towards other peoples” – which applies to newsreel producers especially (Wiers 1954, 38).

In East Germany, from 1946, the newsreel *Der Augenzeuge* was produced by the state film production company DEFA (Deutsche Film AG) (cf. Jordan 1996, 275). The claim of the first editor-in-chief was that this production should act as an “educator of the people” (Jordan 1990, 102). The newsreel productions were in a worldwide exchange; West and East German newsreels also exchanged film material<sup>8</sup> – but mostly in order to present each other’s political and economic systems as unsuitable for a united Germany. Due to the common film and newsreel tradition (since the 1910s/1920s), the

East and West German newsreels did not differ significantly in their structure i.e. they both consisted of about eight to 15 reports, which had a total length of about ten minutes (300 m film). Each newsreel production had a trademark: a specific melodic underscored picture at the beginning and at the end of a weekly issue. The reports within an issue were intentionally positioned and often linked by linguistic, pictorial or musical associations. Like the 'lead story' of a newspaper is given special significance in the first report, for example. The topics ranged from politics, economics, culture, fashion to animal stories to sports.

### **The role of the newsreel for hero mediation**

With the beginning of public film screenings in 1895, the theatre was not the only place that heroic stories were told – this meant heroes, both fictional and real, began to be presented to a wider public. Film, as a component of collective memory (Maurice Halbwachs 1985),<sup>9</sup> illustrates excerpts from the past and the present which means that the structures of meaning for different discourses can be explored (cf. Finke 2007, 602). This also applies to the weekly newsreel. Before the establishment of television, film reports had an even higher potential of impressing the viewer with their moving image on a big screen – they complemented newspapers, magazines and radio. Heroic stories could be conveyed in various forms of reporting, not only in personal portraits, but also in reports or interviews. The editing made it possible to create a variety of designs – e.g. ellipses (omissions) to trace a life in one or two minutes, and close-ups to emphasize the hero's humanity. The identification with an exemplary person or group was controlled by the montage, because it makes one forget that the film is not an "image" but a "narrative about reality" (Finke 2007, 582-583).

The pathos of the heroic soldier as conveyed in the media during the National Socialist era has made the term 'hero' almost unspeakable from a moral point of view (cf. e.g. Lehmann 2009, 772). According to Ulrich Bröckling, Sociologist of University of Freiburg, Germany, the war hero was "totalized" in National Socialism. "All Germans should become heroic in this sense, be prepared to make sacrifices until death, until their downfall if necessary" (Leusch 2016). While in the GDR the 'label' of hero was still in use (e.g. for awards and honorary titles), and newsreel reports on 'heroic' sacri-

fices for the socialist state were intended to guide workers to increase production, in the West German newsreels 'heroism' was conveyed in a more subtle, even humorous, way. In the West German newsreels, for example, there are people in 'precarious' or challenging situations in traffic or at work who are trying to work their way through. They, too, are role models, but are not always meant to be seen as heroes, but to serve educational purposes and show viewers 'how to do better'.

As was to be expected, research in content indexes and narrative texts in the archive has revealed that the term 'hero' is found sparsely in Western newsreel productions and if heroes are mentioned then it's often in connection with sporting performances, bullfights and ironic linguistic or pictorial twists, which makes the clear and precise identification and definition of 'heroes' difficult. On both sides (East and West), however, entire parts of the world's population were stylised as heroic – especially in the context of the Cold War.

### **Types of heroes in the newsreels**

Newsreels do not define the 'hero', they do not set up generally valid criteria for 'heroes', but heroes are 'made' by the media (possibly repeated and always told in the same way), by offering the recipient interpretation or suggesting a certain interpretation. The collectively identical interpretation results in a collective attribution (von den Hoff et al. 2013, 8). Just like authenticity (Weixler 2012, 1-32) heroism becomes an attribution phenomenon. The definition of what a hero is, is the result of an interplay of media mediation and interpretation by the recipient, who, for example, is also looking for possibilities of identification or orientation (von den Hoff et al. 2013, 9).

The ideology of the GDR, the myth of the communist working hero found its way into this ideology in order to encourage people to join the ranks and secure Soviet support for the establishment of a socialist state. The types 'collective hero' and the positively connotated 'work hero' emerged (cf. Immer and van Marwyck 2013, 18). With regard to West Germany however, one can rather speak of 'economic heroes', whose companies played decisive roles in improving the social market economy. They invested time, original ideas and private energy to improve life in post-war Germany, e.g.

mail-order companies were set up that brought low-priced products to remote places (cf. Hank 2009, 827). The young Federal Republic of Germany needed a 'clean' image in order to establish itself as a market power and to join the Western world – marking an explicit departure from media propaganda<sup>10</sup>.

Basically, two types of 'heroes' can be identified in the newsreel reports: 'normal' citizens, whose exemplary behaviour is presented in everyday life, and personalities who use their special abilities, skills, talent and knowledge on a public stage or to fulfil a certain mission, such as sportsmen and politicians or scientists and astronauts. The image of both groups was of great political, social and economic benefit, as these people were also recognized abroad, and their deeds were reflected in the entire state (at least in the Western or Eastern part). Types of everyday heroes, on the other hand, stood for social values and norms, the fulfilment of which was regarded as exemplary in the 1950s and 1960s. At the same time, social vacancies in society and the needs of the population were revealed. So, what distinguishes a depiction of heroes in the East German and West German newsreels? According to the observations and analysis of the newsreel editions from both West and East, the focus is on performance and supply, security and identity, as well as self-confidence and courage to (politically) resist. The latter, the political resistance, is in conformity with the respective concept of the state, i.e. the East German newsreel is about resistance against a postulated 'neo-fascism' and 'imperialism' of the West and for the West German newsreel it's about the defence against the communism and socialism of the East. These are complicated constructs, but the complexity could be reduced with the help of living models, i.e. heroes.

### **The industrious hero of the working world**

The number of awards for work heroes in the GDR grew inflationary.<sup>11</sup> Newsreel reports not only show the ceremony by heads of state and the presents for the workers – the tenor of the entire staging rather certifies that they contributed to the construction of socialism and took responsibility for progress. But these were incentives for increasing productivity with the aim of alleviating the shortage of daily consumer goods among the population. The understanding of classical heroism was used to motivate all 'working

people', i.e. the cinema-goers – people, who were watching the newsreel at that moment (cf. Frevert 2009, 810).

The miner Adolf Hennecke, who exceeded the standard for coal production by more than 300 percent in one shift on 13 October 1948, is a 'phenomenon' already described in detail in the literature. The (well-prepared) performance of the activist could not be communicated other than by the media<sup>12</sup>: A simple worker became a hero. Especially for the following generations, who were further away from his history (cf. Finke 2007, 623-624), he shows that anyone can become a hero. In keeping with this myth, miners were also the focus of reporting in the following years – they were stylized as the 'engine' of coal supply and thus of industry in the socialist economy. The East German newsreel *Der Augenzeuge* No. 28 from July 1952 shows miners who come out of the pit cage with blackened faces after their shift.<sup>13</sup> One of them is presented as Hanns Kramer, who was awarded the title 'Merited Miner', as the commentary explains. The scene is embedded in photographs of a ceremony held in honour of all miners of the GDR. In his speech in the festival hall, Prime Minister Otto Grotewohl praised the great achievements of "our miners", as the commentary paraphrases. For seconds, the camera lens focuses on Adolf Hennecke, who was always present at such ceremonial acts as a representative symbolic figure. The report also shows a woman operating a conveyor cage machine, introduced by Ruth Dombrowski. She also received an award, as the commentary says, which suggests an apparent equality of working women in the GDR<sup>14</sup>. Kramer was appointed head of the "Kollektivbrigade Fortschritt" (brigade "Progress"), which had "undertaken numerous commitments in honour of the second party conference of the SED [...]" – this commitment is said to have given new impetus to the shaft's workforce. Only later does it become clear that Kramer served the purpose of personification, as 30 miners were honoured on the stage of the festival hall. At this point, the traditional march *Glück auf* or *Steigerlied*, which is used to underscore this report, becomes more prominent. The efforts of all miners to accomplish further goals are emphasised – "in the struggle for unity and peace" and "in close friendship" with Soviet miners. Thus, it becomes obvious that this is about the 'Kollektiv' (collective of working people) – whereby the worker is the 'emissary' that enters the politicised stage of the event.



*Der Augenzeuge* No. 6 of February 1950 proceeds similarly – but the dramaturgy is less sophisticated. The report about the awards for doctors begins with a long shot of the building and the banquet hall, both of which are dominated by a banner with the inscription “Merited Doctor of the People” – the ‘monument’ that is set to be erected here is announced in this way. The female commentary voice emphasises the considerable number of 25 doctors receiving the award and documents the international attention through stating the number of guests coming from other socialist countries. The pictures, which show the audience in a long shot and the award itself in a close-up, are accompanied by the original sound of President Wilhelm Pieck’s speech. The physicians are introduced by name and the female speaker announces their specialty. The speaker also explicitly mentions the government’s financial support for public health. It follows from this that medical care is only possible if and as long as the government supported it. This implies that the workers should therefore be grateful to both the government and the collective of doctors. The cut-in orchestral music is not a march, as in the report about the miners, but a festive violin piece in keeping with the occasion and Intelligence portrayed on screen. The medal, which the camera captures with a close-up, adorns the profile of Robert Koch. In this way, a caring hero of the past is connected with current ‘medical heroes’ of the GDR.

### **The hero in times of deprivation**

At the time of the blockade of the land route to West Berlin by the Soviet Union in 1948/1949, British and American pilots became ‘heroes of the Airlift’. The narrative of the strong ‘Berliners’ was also supported. The *Welt im Film* shows the continuous use of airplanes to the supply the sealed off West Berlin. Pilots are honoured with publicity, as in *Welt im Film* No. 166 of 30 July 1948. One of the British pilots, without being named, receives a bouquet of flowers from a young woman – presented as a token of gratitude. But this is only an interruption of routine, as the commentary says – and it makes clear that the heroes continue to fly without interruption, and that their help will not stop. More than ten years later, during the construction of the Berlin Wall, the ‘Heroes of the Airlift’ were celebrated again. The *Ufa-Wochenschau*<sup>15</sup> No. 265 of 23 August 1961 shows how John F. Kennedy’s vice President Lyndon B. Johnson came to

Berlin. After his speech, in which he assures the West Berliners' sovereignty, he pushes the initiator of the Airlift, Lucius B. Clay, into the foreground on the balcony of the Schöneberg City Hall. Clay thus acts as a representative and confidante – a kind of guarantor of West Berlin's independence and freedom. The heroism of Clay is expressed just implicitly.

Whereas the 'Hero of Labour' medal was awarded<sup>16</sup> in the GDR, the 'Federal Cross of Merit' was shown in the West German newsreel. In NDW No. 87 of 25 September 1951 the first bearer, a young miner received the award for rescuing colleagues, is shown in the third report (i.e. without special placement). The report has a length of less than one minute and shows first the Order and then the ceremony by Federal President Theodor Heuss. The commentary explains that the award should be presented in the future for "extraordinary achievement". In contrast to the reports of the East German newsreel, no heroic pathos can be perceived. The award-winner is named by name, but not exuberantly praised. No mention was made of any significance of his achievement for the nation. The NDW No. 208 of 19 January 1954 reports on a doctor who had voluntarily remained in captivity in Stalingrad (Russia) in the Second World War to help fellow prisoners. This was only a short report and stood in fourth place of the edition, i.e. apparently without special meaning due to its length or positioning in the report. Just like the awards of the first Order, the report begins with a picture of the Cross of Merit; accompanied by a festive polonaise, the Federal President places the order on a ribbon around Dr Ottmar Kohler's neck. The commentary also mentions that Kohler was called the "Angel of Stalingrad", thus linking the deeds to a Christian value – instead of heroism.

### **The hero of the (political) resistance**

In the East German newsreel, border police officers were given hero status solely for their job, especially if they died during their deployment. *Der Augenzeuge* No. 3 of 1953 reports on Helmut Just, who was shot at the sector border on 30 December 1952. The rally is monstrous and reminiscent of a state funeral. A huge portrait of the 19-year-old is emblazoned above the grandstand of the Schauspielhaus in Berlin, above it the slogan "The murder of the People's Police officer warns us to: Strengthen the willingness to defend the



Fig. 1: Hero worship for a GDR border police officer

homeland” (cf. Fig. 1). In front of the building a crowd had gathered with flags, flames blazed in a bowl on a column, soldiers salute.

The commentary complains that the Volkspolizist (People’s Police officer) was murdered by “fascist bandits” (although the perpetrators could never be identified, cf. Sälter, Dietrich and Kuhn 2016, 263). The camera pans from the grandstand over the crowd onto an army vehicle with the coffin of the dead border guard on the loading area. The commentator just refers to the dead soldier as a “young patriot”, which illustrates the dead hero’s importance for the state.

The West German newsreel also shows the heroes of the resistance. In connection with the workers’ uprising on 17 June 1953, the group of GDR citizens became heroes who opposed the Soviet tanks. The NDW No. 177 of 16 June 1953 was delivered with an additional piece of film called “Sonderdienst” (special service)<sup>17</sup>. This film shows the “Hexenkessel” (witch’s cauldron) in East Berlin, where after a demonstration by construction workers against “Normerhöhungen” (increases of working standards) in front of the government building, there was a clash between “SED functionaries and workers”.<sup>18</sup> The crowd is said to have proclaimed the “general strike” in order not to be “slaves”, as the commentary explains. His voice and the music with fanfares sounds dramatic. The pictures show burning parts of buildings and a large number of people

standing by, apparently watching the hustle and bustle and appearing disoriented. The commentary identifies the counter-power as “Russen” (Russians) and “Volkspolizei” (People’s Police) ready to fire; the tanks, that have been driven up, illustrate the dangerous nature of the situation. Gun salvos can be heard as people walk across the square. The pictures of stone throwers against the tanks, which are still often shown today on commemoration days on television, express the fight of ‘David’ against ‘Goliath’.

“The Hungarians” are depicted as similarly brave, who are reported about in the *Ufa-Wochenschau* No. 15 of 7 November 1956. The report as a lead story begins with protests in America and other western countries. With banners in English: “Hungarian Heroes who died for freedom” – women and men demonstrated against the intervention of the Soviet Union in the conflict. The speaker explains how a student protest rally in Hungary developed into a revolt against communism – also supported by parts of the Hungarian army that had joined the revolutionaries. In the film, which is composed of reports from several international newsreels, the perspective of the shooters is taken, among others, so that the danger was felt by the viewers. Although there were Soviets among the dead, the Hungarians were assigned heroic status. The pictures show how the insignia of power – the Soviet stars – were removed from buildings. The fronts are thus clarified – especially, since the report shows, through a leap in time, that the Soviet army again stood against the revolutionaries ten days after the revolt and how the population fled. It’s the refugees who are shown as the suffering heroes. The music changes from whipping trombones and fanfares to violins that convey a sad mood. In contrast to the fighters, the refugees – especially women and children – are shown in emotionally charged close-ups.

### **The preserving and supporting Hero**

In order to rule out times of deprivation in the GDR, to secure supplies and to replace workers who had fled – students, administrative staff and Volkspolizei troops, amongst others, were called upon to help the farmers during harvest times. *Der Augenzeuge* No. A69 of 1958 reports on how these individuals coming from other professions responded to the call of the government and the Nationale Front (National Front)<sup>19</sup>. The enthusiasm of the people who collected

the crops and transported them on conveyor belts for loading the harvest wagons is shown in the film. The commentary explains the alleged reason: Due to unfavourable weather conditions, the rural population had fallen behind, the “rich harvest” had to be reaped and “bread for all” had to be secured – so everyone was helping. The music is reminiscent of traditional dances, light-footed and driving. The camera captures the entire process, from the crops to the grain sacks – this acceleration of time suggests that the work is done quickly. The report’s design supported the presentation of the heroic helping hands.

In West Germany, too, the labour force was scarce in the 1960s – but this was a result of the flourishing economy. Although she was committed to the homeless, a marginalised group in society, Sister Bertha Kaiser, founder of the Street Mission in Hamburg, was only implicitly honoured in NDW No. 688 of 5 April 1963. Due to the high demand for labour, there was apparently a lack of understanding both for the unemployed and the homeless and for their helpers. The report is the first in the edition and thus receives outstanding significance as a ‘lead story’. The commentary of the report sounds pejorative and cynical: The mission is described as a “curiosity of Christian charity”. The homeless would come to the mis-



Fig. 2: Sister Bertha praying with homeless people

sion “to sing, to pray and sometimes to repent”. The “reward” for praying is a warm meal. The commitment of the 94-year-old Sister Bertha would indeed do justice to the need, but hardly correspond to the “Sozialpädagogik” (social pedagogy), because normally many of the mission guests “could and should” work for the bread they receive.

Only at the end of the report did Sister Bertha (cf. Fig. 2, centre) receive some recognition as an “extraordinary woman”. She is described as having the “tenacity and steadfastness of a person who believes” and realizes “the word of love for one’s fellow man” – whether they deserve it or bought it through prayers. A heroic status was not assigned to her in this way.

### Heroes and Antiheroes

The West German newsreel also explains when it’s better *not* to be a hero. In road traffic or at work, role models appear in dangerous situations. In an obviously staged scene in NDW No. 194 of 14 October 1953, pedestrian Florian Beyer makes his way to the office in the morning and hands over his will to his wife and child. Through film trick, he comes out as a ‘knight’ in armour behind an advertising pillar and has to get through the inhumanly confusing and dangerous traffic. With difficulty he saves himself by getting onto a traffic island where he finds himself at the feet of a policeman. Subsequently, real documentary footage was used to illustrate the dramatic consequences of increasing traffic. The report ends with a warning to order the traffic fatalities to ‘stop’ – without, however, clarifying how this could be achieved.

In the series “Clever und Schussel” (“Clever and Scatterbrain”), which was produced on behalf of the Worker’s Compensation Board and was inserted in newsreel editions in the years 1956 to 1958 and 1960, two protagonists can be seen in sketches: one is the antihero (“Scatterbrain”), who despite warnings puts himself in danger, and the other is the hero (“Clever”), who can always prevent serious consequences and explains his behaviour to the antihero. In “Scatterbrain” the viewer should possibly recognize himself from case to case and seek to develop into “Clever”. *Der Augenzeuge*, on the other hand, does not show misadventures, but rather satiric short films by the DEFA production group “Das Stacheltier” (“The Hedgehog”) gave negative examples as guide-

lines for behaviour of each individual in public and socialist society such as the ruthless behaviour of pedestrians towards car drivers, rubbish being left in train compartments or harassment due to transporting bulky objects in the subway. The presentation of Anti-heroes in West and East German newsreels is purely entertaining – but the essential qualities are recognizable as well as they are with serious heroes.

### Conclusion

The characteristics of the western and eastern hero as offered to the newsreel viewers reflect the different views of community and thus the relationship of the individual hero figure to the collective. Two orientations can be observed. The western hero is usually conveyed as a lone warrior and serves as a role model to spur on further individual commitment, which is supposed to drive the economy. The East German hero is emphasized as an individual who embodies the socialist collective, which is considered with every achievement, serves the state's demands and exceeds fixed labour standards as far as possible. The state or 'the party' is the judging authority, even the authority for which a great achievement was performed as a 'favour' and as a gift. It's also here that the 'work hero' is celebrated who is missing entirely in the West German newsreel. Although the market economy is based on the earning intentions of each individual through decentralisation, NDW and *Ufa-Wochenschau* usually show working people as a mass or surrounding large group (e.g. during factory visits by politicians) – without emphasizing any one of them.

The propagation of the socialist work hero is necessarily linked to the conveyance of optimism (cf. Finke 2007, 582), i.e. the heroes and their deeds justify an optimistic view of economic conditions in the GDR. This optimism would be contradicted by the portrayal of the plight of one's own population. The existence of rescuers, however, presupposes the existence of a certain deficit, which is publicly articulated. The 'rescuing hero in times of privation' can be observed in the West German newsreel – but there are no superhumans. It is fitting that the West German newsreel allows the game between strong heroes and weak antiheroes. The contrast to the antihero makes clear that heroes can also be charismatic, inspiring and "smart" (cf. Allison and Goethals 2011, 63).

In the West as in the East, there are reports of ‘supporting heroes’ who working for the community in the sense of long-term economic or social benefits. The “Great Eight” (cf. Allison and Goethals 2011, 63) particularly attribute the caring and selfless qualities of the preserving, supporting and saving heroes. Also to be found on both sides, are the ‘heroes of political resistance’ – they reflect the Cold War particularly clearly. As fighters and at the same time victims, they embody the self-assertion of the respective German state in a world divided by superpowers. The resistance hero shows great resilience and strength in the film coverage. These heroes were obviously particularly important for the political influence of public opinion in the Cold War. The topic of heroes reveals that newsreel films should not only be read as pictorial media but should also be regarded as research objects in the sense of the *Visual History* approach through their characteristics. Depending on the degree of sensation, curiosity or severity of the consequences, heroic stories were not only edited once in the weekly newsreel, but actually return in annual reviews, too. Then as now, the memory of ‘great heroic deeds’ also takes place as part of a commemorative culture on anniversaries in television documentaries – often by using materials from newsreels (e.g. about the uprising of workers on 17 June 1952 in the GDR). The pronounced ‘heroes of everyday life’, i.e. achievements in daily life, are hardly emphasized in this way – their deeds may only be rediscovered by chance through the media. Film and television ensure that the memory of a hero remains alive – but if he is no longer mentioned, he is forgotten.

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### Endnotes

- 1 It was not until 1957 that the number of one million television subscribers was reached. Those who did not have their own television set watched at friends' or neighbours' homes or in restaurants or in front of the shop windows of equipment dealers.
- 2 **Research for the period from 1950 to 1965 in online film libraries:** For the West German productions *Welt im Film*, *Welt im Bild*, *Neue Deutsche Wochenschau*, *Ufa-Wochenschau* and *Zeitlupe*: [www.filmothek.bundesarchiv.de](http://www.filmothek.bundesarchiv.de); for the East German production *Der Augenzeuge*: <https://progress.film/>. **In addition to 'Held', other catchwords were used: Patriot, resister, helper, fighter, leader, liberator, benefactor, patron, protector, donor, supporter, rescuer, better, award winner, defender.**
- 3 Hermeneutic film analysis is intended to uncover certain principles (also patterns, frames) by way of example. Behind the "semblance of comprehensibility" of the film, the structures of the design are to be emphasized and the levels of meaning as well as potential for meaning are to be uncovered. The ambiguity of the cinematic works becomes apparent. It is a circular process that allows for a variety of connections, in which the text of the film is questioned and confronted with individual findings and interpretation results.
- 4 *Welt im Film* No. 6 of 22 June 1945 shows how officers are first searched for poison and taken away. They cross their hands behind their heads. The commentary states that they fought a hopeless battle until Germany lay in ruins.
- 5 *Neue Deutsche Wochenschau* Nr. 1 from 30.01.1950. BArch Bestand Film. <https://www.filmothek.bundesarchiv.de/video/585897>.
- 6 The cinema owners booked the newsreel with a film distributor. In the choice of the newsreel, the cinema owners were relatively free and were partly guided by audience criticism.
- 7 Spectators apparently spoke out against the cinema owners, who in turn complained to the distributor or directly to the NDW editorial staff, cf. questionnaires for cinema owners and correspondence, archived in files Beurteilungen bis 1952, NDW Bestand, Film- und Fernsehmuseum Hamburg.
- 8 Already in 1948, a contract with the *Blick in die Welt* was concluded, was stopped, and was renewed in 1953, in 1954 a contract with the NDW (cf. Jordan 1996, 283).

- 9 "Social thinking" is a memory that consists only of "collective memories," but of which only that remains "which society can reconstruct in every epoch with its present frame of reference" (Halbwachs 1985, 360).
- 10 In the sense of intended political persuasion and agitation: "Propaganda is aimed at generating, confirming, strengthening or weakening, shaping or transforming opinions, attitudes, attitudes, value architectures, ways of perception and interpretation, long-term behaviour or action (or omission)" (Zywietz 2018).
- 11 The Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk (MDR) has compiled a list of awards. Accessed February 27, 2019. <https://www.mdr.de/zeitreise/artikel75686.html>.
- 12 Hennecke arrived one hour earlier than usual at work, had selected the best tools and the site before (cf. Gries and Satjukow 2002, 41-42).
- 13 In the following example analyses, quotations are taken from the newsreels cited or from the formal information in the online film libraries (see Note 8).
- 14 In the GDR, women had to work and were therefore more autonomous, but not completely equal, although this was claimed by the SED and presented accordingly in the *Wochenschau* (cf. Würz 2016).
- 15 British-American newsreel *Welt im Film* became in 1952 the *Welt im Bild* under German responsible management and in 1956 it became the *Ufa-Wochenschau*.
- 16 Awarded up to 60 people each year of the 1950s, cf. Verleihungsliste zum Ehrentitel „Held der Arbeit“ der DDR von 1950 bis 1989, by Dirk Hubrich. 2013. Accessed November 24, 2019. <https://www.deutsche-gesellschaft-fuer-ordenskunde.de/DGOWP/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/HdA-1950-1989.pdf>.
- 17 It was a film that was attached to the normal weekly film reel, as the report could no longer be integrated into the current issue after the editorial deadline. However, the event was so significant that the effort for a "Sonderdienst" was unavoidable.
- 18 In fact, units of the Kasernierte Volkspolizei (KVP) and Soviet military (cf. Grau et al. 2016) participated in the operation against the insurgent workers.
- 19 The National Front was a mass organization and union of different parties.