

Dr. Victoria Rizo Lenshyn: Bearing Witness through Film: Günter Lippmann's Farewell Beautiful Forest, the Anthro(s)cene, and Censorship

One of the most pressing topics challenging East Germany's closed society was the urgency of the man-made environmental crisis in the 1970s-80s. This paper examines a particular cinematic engagement with this subject as depicted in Günter Lippmann's 1990 documentary film, *Farewell, Beautiful Forest... or How a Film Was Censored*. Confronting severe forest dieback in the Ore Mountains on the Czech-German border, the film focuses on three important components: policy failures and human impact on our environment; the scope of this ecological crisis that transcends national boundaries and communities; the mobilization of humans across generations and borders to confront the devastating transformation of environment, *heimat*, and the human relationship to nature. This catastrophe, though locally manifested, was in itself a crisis "without borders," and Lippmann's film responded in kind as a DEFA film that also could not be restrained by geographical and ideological political lines. Lippmann's bold filmmaking faced eight rounds of censorship and was only released after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1990. This story of censorship and compliance that his team experienced is as prescient today as ever: How do individuals such as the subjects of the film, as well as the filmmakers, resist the pushback from an authoritarian state that denies the facts and our ability to address them? I am motivated by the concept of the „anthro(s)cene" as originally put forth by poet Tsveta Sofronieva, and as it was applied by Seth Peabody, in which the "cinematic world is always already a world that bears physical witness to human activities" and film is "both visual archive and creative catalyst for infrastructure developments in the physical world" (Peabody, 2023: 12). Building on this I will examine the developing filmic environment that transforms through censorship and then is rebuilt to invite conversation and unpack the complicated entanglements of people, communities, state policies, and the natural world.

Peabody, Seth. *Film History for the Anthropocene: The Ecological Archive of German Cinema*. Boydell & Brewer, 2023.

Biography: Victoria Rizo Lenshyn is Associate Director of the DEFA Film Library at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her research has primarily focused on GDR cinema with concentrations in Film Studies, Star Studies, and Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies. Her current research is a multimedia environmental humanities project that looks at how the physical barrier and political line of the Berlin Wall created a critical situation in the East that was shaped by socialist ideology and economic imperatives, but also how environmental groups collaborated with West German activists and journalists, resulting in the exchange of ideas, media and the flow of people across the border, ultimately contributing to the grassroots movements that led to the fall of the Berlin Wall.