

## **Prof. Dr. Sean Allan: „Ein Dorf wird Filmstar“: Conflict, Space and Displacement in DEFA’s Representations of Rural Life in the 1940s and 1950s**

While scholarly attention to space and displacement in DEFA films has, for the most part, focused on urban settings, this paper will explore the presentation of rural spaces in DEFA films of the 1940s and 1950s. Although individual films such as Milo Harbich’s „Freies Land“ (1946), Artur Pohl’s „Die Brücke“ (1949), Martin Hellberg’s „Das verurteilte Dorf“ (1952), and Kurt Maetzig’s „Schlösser und Katen“ (1957) have often been dismissed as crudely propagandistic works, when considered together as an ensemble they constitute an important contribution to the history of post-war German film.

As my paper will argue, far from representing an ideal of unspoiled nature, the post-war countryside—whether in the East or the West (as in *Das verurteilte Dorf*)—is presented in these films as a contested space in which conflicting visions of a future Germany are played out in all their intensity. The natural settings we observe are never “natural” but are always overlaid with (contested and contestable) historical narratives.

To that end, my paper will explore how these films, albeit in very different ways, challenge the very notion of “the natural,” while instead promoting the concept of a socialist landscape as the result of the transformative interventions of socialist individuals. Second, I will compare and contrast the politics of space and displacement in each film in order to show how insider/outsider oppositions reflect shifts in ideology culminating in the events of 17 June 1953 and the impact of Tag X on everyday provincial life. Finally, I will analyse the role of gender and generational factors in the films’ exploration of possible solutions to the challenges of constructing a new form of socialist Heimat.

**Biography:** Seán Allan is Professor of German at the University of St Andrews and holds a Joint Research Professorship at the University of Bonn. His publications include: *DEFA. East German Cinema, 1946–1992* (co-edited with John Sandford, 1996), *Re-Imagining DEFA: East German Cinema in its National and Transnational Contexts* (co-edited with Sebastian Heiduschke, 2016), and a monograph on the East German ‘Eastern film’, *Screening Art. Modernist Aesthetics and the Socialist Imaginary in East German Cinema* (2019). Together with Sebastian Heiduschke he has just published a new volume entitled *Documenting Socialism. East German Documentary Cinema* (2024).