

Crime shows in East and West German television

Some comments on the crime genre on television

It is a well-known fact that at the very beginning of the occidental Christian-Jewish history we find a narration whose dramaturgy is carried by norm violations. Stories of the genre „sex and crime“ are dominant there.

One of the first stories deals with a seduction: Ever since then no man can accept an apple from a woman without hesitation, and no woman can give away an apple just like that, especially, if there is a snake nearby. The symbolism of this scene is clear, and, in our culture, consistently visually coded with „apple“, „snake“, „naked woman“ and „naked man“.

A little bit later in the course of the narration the book of the books tells the story of another norm violation. We learn a lot about envy (as a motive) and about hatred (as trigger) and about pretension as an attempt to avoid ostracism and punishment. The story deals with murder in the kinship. The convict is known from the beginning, his guilt is enormous, his punishment infinite. He has no chance to escape, because there is a meta-observer, who sees everything. Also this story has unfolded a strong symbolic power: white and black smoke, the mark of Cain on the fore-head...

*There can be no harm in remembering these images in the visualized culture at the end of the 20th century if – as in our case - dealing with crime films and particularly crime films on television. Because from a media-historic perspective, „sex and crime“ are **the** dominant narrative genres, **the** dominant motives and topics that have moved people for centuries, both authors and readers, both text producers as well as text recipients and that still continue doing so.*

It may well remain open, who has more fun: those, who invent those stories again and again, or those, who listen to others telling and showing those stories again and again.

In our culture television has become the medium to satisfy such lust. While „sex“ more than crime has been tabooed in the video-tape libraries or in the apparent privacy, „crime“ coins

the schemes of all major public broadcasters: this holds true for the public as well as the commercial stations. Television programmes without crime stories would make a dominance of high-culture offers apparent with the first ones. Television programmes without crime stories would leave nothing than commercials with the latter ones. This is only slightly exaggerated. However, it clearly indicates that the crime genre on television is the terrain where you find the major battles between public and commercial stations. In the last few years the crime genre has become an ever-present genre. The genre has the potential to provide the programme suppliers with reusable programmes, high ratings and reputation. The recipients seem to like the genre well enough to watch it with measurable perseverance. The extensive and long-lasting success of the genre is one of the major secrets of the current media landscape. The success is even more surprising as the genre strictly follows an immovable scheme so that even its wildest variations are transparent right from the beginning.

This volume of Halma collects two recent presentations and a bibliography from a ongoing research project on the crime genre in television situated at the Martin-Luther-University in Halle, fostered by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. The presentations - originally presented at the international conference „La fiction policière dans les télévisions européennes”, October 9-10th 1997 in Dijon, France - have been slightly reworked. They describe and analyse historic and recent changes and developments of the genre. The adoption of a comparative perspective between the police shows produced by the GDR television and the West-German police shows allows for additional research aspects. Such „derivations” are only indicated here. They will be published as further constituents of a history of the crime genre on television.

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Crime genre and television

From *Stahlnetz* to *Tatort*: A realistic tradition¹

1. The crime genre

The long lasting tradition of crime narration in print, theatre, film and radio-play has undergone an increasing modification of its basic structure when television was established as a new mass media in Germany during the fifties. At that time the social context in Germany was determined by the disastrous end of World War II. A specific net of mental ambiguities, socio-cultural ups and downs, new political orientations imposed by the Allies, and especially the admiration of all new techniques which came from outside created an atmosphere into which TV seemed to fit like a perfect stimulation. This kind of atmosphere established the breeding ground for the emergence of a new generation of crime narration, which was now adapted for the new medium of television.

Before going into that specific matter, we would like to start off with some remarks concerning our understanding of the genre concept.

The conceptualization of genre in a positivistic approach leads to a classification and typology of narrative or textual items that by no means may overcome trivial lists and accounts. In contrast to that, we regard genres as a result of a communicative interaction between producers of mass media products and their recipients. Therefore, a genre is established by human interaction. This means there is no reason to define the meaning and social function of a particular genre beyond that interactional frame. Bound to each other by the rules of communicative interaction, producers, directors, actors, dramatic advisers, writers and so on create mass media products for contemporary recipients with regard to special cultural conventions of narration. Since fictional worlds are constructed by literary and aesthetic

¹ This study is part of a project supported by a grant of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (Vi 95/2-7).

genres, these genres have been clustered into groups of interactive rules, codes, and special textual markers that usually trigger recipients to the right genre-expectation. Socialized into the contemporary world of mass media and its use, people of today usually know how to handle news, soap operas, sports and any other recent TV genre. Each of these genres is featured by its own relation of telling and showing, its own form and also its own genre tradition. It is the reference to that kind of cultural knowledge that allows people to act cooperatively, adequately, and in concert with each other.

The construction of fictional worlds outside our own „reality“ exemplifies and shapes perhaps a better world than ours, but at least an alternative one. This might become an even stronger force if those worlds are taken as realistic scenarios by the recipients. By performing this very pattern, the crime genre focuses on the question of how and to what extent crime fiction mirrors our world, i.e. how the genre questions the reference of fiction and reality.

In order to understand the development of this genre, we first of all, would like to take a look at the emergence of the police serial in the fifties. Afterwards, we would like to explore how the serial *Tatort* fits in or deviates from that realistic pattern that was established in the early days of television.

2. Television in Germany and the emergence of the crime genre: from *Stahlnetz* to *Tatort*

As is well-known, the official start of West German television was on December 25, 1953. Since the very beginning there have been programmes, in which crime is portrayed using the narrative and descriptive traditions of the novel, the theatre and the film. Apart from documentaries, crime films and plays were broadcast. As early as 1954 the serial *Die Galerie der großen Detektive* started. It transformed detectives from the literary tradition for the small screen: Sherlock Holmes, Auguste Dupin, David Wilson, Pater Brown, Inspector Bucket, Sergeant Cuff and Hercule Poirot. *Der Richter und sein Henker*, based on the novel by Friedrich Dürrenmatt, became the first ninety-minute movie. In short, this first stage was characterised by the fact that traditional forms of the genre were imported into television.²

At that time in Germany, it was „mentally“ not possible to rely on the own traditions of world representation (as far as the continuation of Nazi norms and values was concerned), since they were denounced by fascism. Therefore, genres which had been successful in the United States became a major basis for transformation and adaptation. The first West German police

² Cf. Brück 1996.

serial *Stahlnetz* (1958-1968), adapted from the American radio play and television serial *Dragnet*, became the forerunner of the German crime genre on television.

Not only the well-established dramaturgical patterns led to the success of the serial. The socio-cultural climate prevailing in West Germany in the fifties became a basic condition for the profound impact that *Stahlnetz* had on its audience. This particular climate was influenced by the post-war situation, the loss of confidence towards state organs and their norms of law and order (which were among others represented by the police), as well as by the situation of reconstruction. The evolution of television as a new medium was part of this. And certainly the fact that the crime genre was well-known with producers and recipients of this new medium was a convenient factor.

In the fifties, television incorporated two dominant functions: visualisation of actuality and immediacy. Every viewer could be an „eyewitness“ of real events at any time because of television.³ Live-programmes and reports emerged as the typical genres that would satisfy those demands. The brochure *Kleine Fernsehfiibel für Jedermann*, published in 1953 by the North West German Broadcast Corporation, highlights this point: „Fernsehen ist kein Film. Fernsehen ist Gegenwart. Wirklichkeit.“ (Television isn't film. Television is presence. Reality). Expressions like these stood for the contemporary debates concerning the demarcation of film and television.

2.1. *Stahlnetz*

As opposed to film, television as a reality medium shows directly and immediately, what is happening. Therefore it is ideally suited to take up traditions of the realistic representation of crime and to adapt them. The serial *Stahlnetz* with its 22 episodes broadcast between 1958 and 1968, opened up new perspectives because of its documentary style.⁴

In all regions of the mother country Germany, state despotism was, to some extent, left behind by the reality of *Stahlnetz*: Policemen always acted correctly, personified law and order and radiated honesty. Policemen were reliable and did their jobs patiently and tirelessly. This attitude became apparent to all viewers because of *couleur locale*, which was further characterised by dialect and well-known buildings such as the cathedral in Cologne, the Brandenburger Tor in Berlin and so on.

³ Cf. Hickethier 1990.

⁴ Cf. Peulings 1995.

„Dieser Fall ist wahr.“ (This case is real.): The phrase, which was used as the opening ritual of each *Stahlnetz*-episode, illustrated that the viewers could trust whatever was presented to them. Above all, this ritual served the purpose to distinguish the new medium television from the old medium film. This distinction aimed at the difference between real things (that were shown on television) and merely invented things (that were made up for movies).

The quasi-documentary approach to crime of *Stahlnetz* is above all created by the means of a voice-over narrator.⁵ He creates „reality signals“ in the way, that he mentions real existing towns and regions, street-names, days and time, similar to police files as a proof of what really happened. On the other hand, by explaining investigative strategies and forensic science, the voice-over narrators comment on what is happening. The report-style of *Stahlnetz* is complemented by didactic comments, such as this one:

The very first minutes after an attack are the most important ones. We have to attack at once, we must try to make up for advantage of the criminals immediately in the first round. Sometimes we are lucky. But in case we are not successful, if the criminals escape, it does not mean that they have reached their aim. The race covers a very long distance. My name is Opitz. I'm head of the local criminal investigation department which is responsible for holdups. - Today is the 11th of June. This was our day. If the criminals escaped today we would have to set a trap for them to get caught. (*E 605*, 1960)

To give one more example:

The aim of the analysis of the scene of the crime is the clearing-up of the objective and subjective state of the criminal act. The securing of evidence is one of the main tasks of the police records department. - The trace mentioned in the paragraphs 81c and 103 of the code of criminal procedure is according to the technical terminology of the police officials all that a criminologist has to see and all that he is able to use somehow in a criminological way. The trace can give hints about the details of the criminal act and about the criminal. (*In der Nacht zum Dienstag*, 1961)

Signals pointing to the actuality are constructed in the episodes. They convey an impression of immediate presence at the scene to all viewers. Particular aspects of the Post-war era are being dealt with. This implies among others: housing shortage, soldiers coming home from the war, the striving for material goods during economic upturns, the re-integration in the Western world by collaborating with Interpol.

Stahlnetz places itself in the centre of the everyday life of its viewers: the small bank nextdoor is robbed, the department store around the corner is broken into, the owner of the petrol station on the other side of the street is killed. The victims are average and „ordinary“-type-of-people: Mr. and Mrs. Everybody. It is in this seemingly close and direct world of television that the viewers experience norm violations which they are afraid of in their own „authentic“ world.

⁵ Cf. Buxton 1994 concerning the function of the voice-over commentary in American police series.

Money is the motive for all crimes depicted in *Stahlnetz*. The most frequent crime shown, however, is murder. What can we conclude on that basis?

1. The criminals are after the savings of the audience (compare bank around the corner).
2. In order to reach this goal, they don't shy away from murder.
3. Crimes are committed by cold-blooded gangsters who act intentionally.

Psychological and social emergencies are not the ultimate cause for people to become a criminal. There is no emotional relationship between the criminals and their victims.

This simple explanatory scheme for the evolution of crime (the construction of a criminal reality) leads to a very simplistic good-and-evil-scheme. The one-dimensional representation of the criminal and his motives apparently has the function to construct an unambiguous position for the police, which is also constructed rather clearly. Policemen are honest and eager, as has been mentioned before, but above all: always successful! The message is: „Crime doesn't pay“.

The demand for realism in *Stahlnetz* is not accomplished in terms of a reproduction of crime statistics, but in terms of the placing of the fictional action in the present reality of the viewers. By doing this, *Stahlnetz* illustrates the legitimacy of the battle against crime for the viewers.

2.2. *Tatort*

In November 1970, two years after the last *Stahlnetz*-episode was broadcast, the new serial *Tatort* was first aired on German TV. Neither contemporary critics nor directors or producers expected that this police-serial would become such a longstanding success.⁶ For the last three decades, *Tatort* has been one of the most prominent steady-sellers on German TV.

In the seventies the critics doubted the effectiveness of the conception, especially its recurrent elements, i.e. the local embeddedness of each play in various cities in German speaking countries. It is this local embeddedness, however, which always has been and still is one of the key factors of the ongoing success-story of *Tatort*. Due to the regional, i.e. federal constitution of the ARD, the first and biggest German TV-network, and due to the ARD's co-operation with the Austrian and Swiss TV, each episode, although introduced by the same opening credit, is furnished by a special local setting, mostly that of the city where the main

⁶ Cf. Witte 1983.

producers are located: Munich for the Bavarian TV (Bayerischer Rundfunk), Hamburg for the North-German Broadcast Corporation (Norddeutscher Rundfunk), Duisburg or Cologne for the West-German Broadcast Corporation (Westdeutscher Rundfunk), and so forth. As constituted by the forerunner *Stahlnetz*, reality and authenticity of telling and showing received an equally important role in *Tatort*. In comparison to *Stahlnetz*, however, we can find a few modifications which need further observation.

To what kind of genre evolution do these modifications belong to?

1. *Stahlnetz* claims to mirror reality the way a police document mirrors it, and likewise, sticks to the obsession to give any information as if a police-report was read. These features were dropped out by *Tatort*. As a consequence, the more or less didactic approach of *Stahlnetz* concentrated on things such as how people lived their everyday lives depressed by the difficulties of supply, or how the police itself had to respect the law, was cancelled. We believe that the reason can be found in a change in social life itself. While in the fifties the knowledge of these pragmatic themes, contents and rules was as important as to get a roll for breakfast, in the seventies it was somewhat strange to stick to those trivial events. TV itself represented an important and widespread daily experience for everybody. In the seventies the forms and styles TV crime narration has undergone, have been well known. Additionally, television has a much more established position among the recent mass media than twenty years before. This leads to a change in genre, too, because from the seventies onwards the TV-serials don't need to limit themselves to a comparison with the former medium of visualization, film.

2. The crime takes place at various cities, and the murderers are hunted by various detectives; this idea is kept alive as a basic concept of *Tatort*. In contrast to *Stahlnetz*, *Tatort*, however, doesn't change the actors of the detectives permanently, but constitutes a steady connection between the local place (Hamburg, for example) and the detective (Kommissar Stöver, e.g.). The history of *Tatort*, therefore, is mainly made up by these detectives and their personal and often bizarre characters. Until now more than sixty *Tatort*-detectives have lived their TV-lives. Some became prominent - Kommissar Schimanski, for example is one of the 'big shots'⁷ - others have completely fallen into oblivion.

3. Taking into account current problems of social and political life is a prominent part of the *Tatort* screenplay. The serial digs deep into the brute crimes of current events in downtown

⁷ Cf. Villwock 1991.

districts - drugs, economic robbery, rape, and each kind of plain violence. In opposition to the tradition of *Stahlnetz* it is explained by what kind of oppression the characters are forced to do what they do. The rather boring contradiction of good and evil, which was the preferred plot in *Stahlnetz* some years before, has been overcome by now. Uni-dimensional and clear-cut explanations are out, pluralistic views to crime and „bad things“ are in. In consequence, even the police itself is questioned. Rather than presenting law and order, detectives in *Tatort* stand as characters for their own private life, with all its black and white.

This change in the basic structural concepts of crime presentation in TV - from *Stahlnetz* to *Tatort* - has been influenced mostly by the stormy evolution, provided by the opening of so many windows in the seventies. Many basic constructions were replaced by new ones. Key concepts of the post-war period like authority, determination by conventions, conservative habit and so forth were destroyed by radical criticism. Who was to be seen as a bad guy and who as a good one was often defined in full contrast to its understanding a year (and twenty years) before.

The producers and directors of *Tatort* were affected by those changes in social values. It is not very surprising that the main concepts of the fictional worlds in *Tatort* are burdened and illustrated by these „marks of authentic presence“: anti-authoritarian behaviour, pluralistic views to every social event, non-conservative political orientations and so forth.

Let us illustrate this change, taking *Stahlnetz* as the background, by referring to the first *Tatort* in 1970, i.e. an episode called *Taxi nach Leipzig (Taxi to Leipzig)*. The detective is Kommissar Trimmel, a well-known figure popularised by his author Friedhelm Werremeier through various books before he became the TV-detective. - In this respect we want to underline:

- Trimmel doesn't rely on rules and duties a commissioner usually is obliged to do. He does not accept the rule that a detective is strictly bound to act in a well-defined district, and not beyond.⁸
- Trimmel is as smart as a detective should be: steady in hunting, successful in combining and imagining what could have happened, and so forth. However, he doesn't represent the perfect picture of a German police officer when he decides, at least, to let the murderer

⁸ Cf. Radewagen 1985.

escape unpunished. He is convinced that he has made the right decision because he gives a broader explanation of all the motives why „bad guys“ were driven into their crime.

- Trimmel points at the German political situation in the seventies: he personally explores the fact that on the eastern side of the iron curtain people are still living with the same problems as on the western side. For the first time in police series, *Tatort* includes that contemporary German reality.

3. Closing remarks

Since the seventies, the history of *Tatort* has been structured by this evolutionary concept which can be generalised to so many basic elements of the genres. In summing up:

- It is true, of course that detectives are tools of justice and jurisdiction. In *Tatort*, however, it often seems more important that they are real living people with as many problems as each of us has.
- It is true, of course that criminals should be punished for their crime. In *Tatort*, however, it often seems undecidable who the real criminal actually is and who should be punished. Anyway, it is true in *Tatort*, that the legally punished criminals who are not the ones who should be punished from a moral point of view.
- It is true, of course, that detectives are trustworthy, reliable and morally guided people who have many ideas, of course only legal ones, concerning their lives and the world. In *Tatort*, however, often the opposite seems to take place and things are twisted around. This implies that a detective in *Tatort* could be a criminal as well.

The point we would like to stress here is that the genre evolution from *Stahlnetz* to *Tatort* might best be regarded as an evolution from determination to contingency, a change from uniformity to plurality, from the promise of a secure life to the plea for a life in a changing world.

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Polizeiruf 110: The transition from socialism to capitalism

Introduction

The GDR police serial *Polizeiruf 110* is a very special case for research: It is the only programme in re-united Germany's television that has survived the transition from socialism to capitalism. We would like to analyse the history of that particular programme from its emergence until today. We are interested in the question of how the specific production context has shaped the serial. In this study we will focus on the detectives.

Polizeiruf 110 - A Socialist Police Serial

The history of *Polizeiruf 110* began on the 27th of June 1971. On this day the state-run East German television, the „Deutscher Fernsehfunk“, broadcast the first episode. Its title was: „Der Fall Lisa Murnau“. What, however, were the political and mediahistorical circumstances that influenced the emergence of a new police serial? I want to mention here only the most important aspects: At the end of the 60s the audience research department of GDR television conducted several studies concerning the preferences of the viewers. The findings were: The major part of the interviewees expressed a wish to have more police serials in the programme. And although GDR television had broadcast several ones before, many viewers switched over to West German media to supply their demand for entertaining and thrilling programmes.

Being aware of this competition, the former general secretary of the SED (United Socialist Party of Germany) Erich Honecker defined the future standards of East German television at the party congress in June 1971: The programme should become more interesting and entertaining. It is no coincidence that the emergence of the West German *Tatort* took place only seven months before the emergence of *Polizeiruf 110*.

Let us now briefly comment on the concept of *Polizeiruf 110*: The dramatic adviser in charge in 1981, Lothar Dutombé, defined the general standard of the genre „Gegenwartskriminalfilm“ (literally translated as „contemporary crime drama“) as follows:

„With regard to contemporary crime drama it is our task to contribute to the prevention of crime and the exploration of its origins, to support the solution of crimes and to represent the executive power of the state, both in order to strengthen the people’s notions of government, state and law and to convey a feeling of security to our citizens.“⁹

And it was the role of the detective to embody the notions of government, state and law.

The police serials of GDR television - especially *Polizeiruf* - were produced in close and continuous cooperation between their producers and the East German police. „Genuine“ detectives consulted the dramatic advisers, authors and directors in political and technical issues at every stage of the production.

However, it would be far too simple if one relied only on official documents in order to recognize the significance of *Polizeiruf*. For the people directly involved, the serial became a niche in the conditions of state-ruled and controlled television.

Thomas Steinke, who was in charge of *Polizeiruf* after the wall came down, casts a retrospective glance:

„In the state-ruled and centralistic television of the former GDR the artists and filmmakers were fighting for niches, because the list of taboo topics was long. [...] Those topics that really shaped everyday life in the East did usually not emerge in the so-called contemporary dramas, and if they did emerge, the productions ended up in the poison cabinet. However, because there was no crime without criminals, and because these criminals offended the norms of society, the freedom in *Polizeiruf* was greater than in the contemporary drama. *Polizeiruf* became more and more of a niche in which one was able to work, in which realism had its place.“¹⁰

The viewers also appreciated *Polizeiruf*, because the serial portrayed real life and dealt with ordinary people. The serial pointed out conflicts and social problems which were very rarely mentioned in East German media: the abuse of alcohol and drugs, juvenile delinquency and sex crime, antisocial behaviour and miserable housing conditions.

Thomas Steinke wrote in 1994:

„If one tries to understand today what the everyday life of the so-called ‘ordinary people’ in the former GDR really was, the 153 episodes of *Polizeiruf 110* that were produced until the closing of the GDR television tell us a lot more about it than the costly and prestigious productions that were produced on request of the Politburo.“¹¹

We would like to continue with some remarks about the central characters, the detectives. In the first decade, the following three protagonists dominated the serial:

⁹ Dutombé, Görner, Mosblech (1981:3).

¹⁰ ARD (Ed.) (1994:1).

¹¹ ARD (Ed.) (1994:1).

Hauptmann Peter Fuchs (played by Peter Borgelt) is the senior: He represents the experienced, the sensible, the fatherly, but also the strict detective; he conveys a feeling of security and confidence; he is the undisputed leader of the group.

Leutnant Vera Arndt is played by Sigrid Göhler. According to the concept she had to be the incarnation of the self-confident, working woman. At first sight, she seems to represent equality of women in East German society. But if you take a closer look, you get a more complex impression: She is less competent regarding professional aspects, but more sympathetic, emotional, intuitive than her male colleagues. She rather stands for a general human competence and frequently takes over the function of listening to the confessions of witnesses and criminals.

Oberleutnant Hübner (played by Jürgen Frohriep) is the dynamic and spontaneous detective. He is present in the very few action scenes in the serial.

And now to the second decade: With the exception of some detectives, who appeared only sporadically, in the 1980s only one other characteristic detective emerged:

Leutnant Grawe, played by Andreas Schmidt-Schaller. He is young, intelligent, friendly, open-hearted, but sometimes slightly rebellious and less conventional.

The configurations of the detectives are an especially telling sign of the differences between the production team and the police consultants. As well as providing expert opinions on every script, the latter ones also implemented their idealistic view on what a detective should be and how he should act. And thus the typical socialist detective in *Polizeiruf* was correct, rational, disciplined, acted logically and did not make any mistakes. He was a model for socialism, nearly always behaving in conformance to regulations. Coffee and cake were taboo on duty. The detective did not smoke, did not consume alcohol and had a rather joyless life altogether. The ideal detective had hardly any private life; his whole life revolved around his job.

Only in the Mid-Eighties, the character of the newly established Grawe was enriched with some background. He lived together with his girlfriend, married her, had a daughter, divorced his wife and had a new relationship afterwards.

Nevertheless it was characteristic of *Polizeiruf* that the detective's private life never affected his professional life: no private crisis hindered the socialist detective from fulfilling his duty and he was certainly never personally involved in his case. This ideal detective has to be interpreted against the political and ideological background. In a socialist system like the GDR, crime was incompatible with the notion of society. Accordingly, the detective in a

socialist police serial had an important dramaturgic function: He was the one who restored the temporarily disturbed paradise of socialism.

Because the depiction of the detective was so restricted, the victims, the criminals and their environment were portrayed multi-faceted and more individual.

The most significant features of *Polizeiruf 110* in the time of GDR television were:

- The detectives of *Polizeiruf* act not only in Berlin but also in the entire GDR. They act as a universal team responsible for all kinds of criminal offences such as, for example, theft and blackmail. The team is not merely a homicide squad.
- One team is sufficient to fight against the crime in East Germany.
- Crimes are always solved.
- Criminals are prosecuted and sentenced in all cases.
- Criminals are morally scolded by the detective.
- The fact is also alluded to that the criminal will be re-integrated into society after serving the sentence
- In short: the consensus of society is re-established at the end of each episode.

This moral creed remained stable for nearly two decades. However, it was radically transformed when the wall came down in autumn 1989.

***Polizeiruf 110* in DFF: The transitory stage after the fall of the wall (November 1989 until end of 1991)**

As a result of the fall of the wall on 9 November 1989, reforming and re-structuring processes took place at all levels of television. New projects dealing with taboo topics or co-productions with West German stations were started almost immediately. Movies that had never been aired before were taken out of the poison cabinet.¹² People in leading positions in television were replaced and GDR television (Fernsehen der DDR) took on its old name „Deutscher Fernsehfunk“.

¹² For instance, *Geschlossene Gesellschaft*, *Ursula* and *Monolog eines Taxifahrers* (Hickethier 1992:75)

Generally, in the first few months after the tearing down of the wall, GDR journalists opened up to the West and „felt like the freest journalists in the world“. This rather euphoric stage was slowly transformed into a phase of deep disillusionment in 1990, especially when the treaty of German unity decided to shut down GDR television for 1991. Although from autumn 1990 more and more people were made obsolete, the Deutsche Fernsehfunk continued to produce a large number of programmes.

In the section where *Polizeiruf 110* was produced, the collaboration with the police quickly broke down. New projects were started almost immediately; existing scripts were rewritten. In June 1990, the dramatic adviser Thomas Steinke became the new head of the section „Polizeiruf 110“. He opted for a continuation of the series, although he supported the idea of a new concept.

Due to the rather long production processes of television drama the first visible changes could not be seen until a year after the fall of the wall and were, at first, merely cosmetic ones: Protagonists stopped using East-German titles and „socialist“ forms of address such as „lieutenant“ or „comrade“ and started referring to each other by using West-German titles and more neutral forms of address („Mr.“, „Mrs.“). This is turned into a little joke in the following example from the episode „Ball der einsamen Herzen“ (02.09.1990):

Grawe:

After this dance I'll take you back to your table. Alright?

Lady:

Alright, *comrade*.

Grawe:

(shakes his head, signalling „no“). *Mister*.

The lady's answer to Grawe's attempt to correct her is „Wendig, wendig“. This is a nice pun pointing at the socio-political circumstances of the time. It has a double meaning: The term „Wende“ refers to the political changes taking place between 1989 and 1991. The adjective „wendig“ translates also as „agile“ or „nimble“. The term „Wendehals“ is alluded to, a new term coined for former socialists who changed their political perspective very quickly after the wall came down.

With the episodes that were broadcast in and after autumn 1990, more profound changes can be observed.

All in all, the detectives lost their function of being an example for socialism. So, for the first time ever, policemen were presented as uncontrolled and ridiculous. The episode „Unter Brüdern“ (28.10.1990) is the ‚re-unification‘ of the West German serial *Tatort* and *Polizeiruf*

110. Here, the detectives Schimanski and Thanner from *Tatort* co-operated with Fuchs and Grawe from *Polizeiruf* in a case of border-crossing crime. In this episode Fuchs and Grawe are not only drinking alcohol for the first time ever, but several times they are shown absolutely drunk and staggering through a revelrous night.

This collaboration was repeated in a later episode („Thanners neuer Job“, 22.12.1991), which again mirrored the fast-changing reality. Here, detective Thanner came back to Berlin to be the new superior to Fuchs and Grawe.

The detectives were presented as inwardly torn characters: This became most explicit in the episode „Das Duell“ (04.11.1990) which deals with the role of the police during those demonstrations in Leipzig in October 1989 that eventually led to the breakdown of the GDR. Here, detective Beck has to decide which side he is on: While initially he still supports the fading idea of socialism, his world view becomes crucially shaken when he suddenly meets his son with the demonstrators. The police are presented as cruel, corrupt and coniving. Because his son is taken into custody, Beck is temporarily suspended from his job. It is a novelty that his private life (i.e. his son and his wife) are given so much time in the episode and that their discussions at home affect his work and beliefs and vice versa. While at the beginning he still sympathises with the former government which is his past, he slowly realises „that we have been fooled“.

The detectives no longer act as a universal team responsible for all types of crimes but become situated in specific locations in East Berlin. From this one may conclude that crime is no longer presented as an exception.

New detectives are being introduced: Detective Raabe no longer represents the socialist ideal of a detective having instead a rather sloppy appearance.

The detectives are allowed conflicts that are not resolved at the end: In the episode „Mit dem Anruf kommt der Tod“ (01.09.1991) Beck and Grawe try to set a trap for a mentally disturbed child murderer. When they manage to track him down, detective Beck - very much against the will of detective Grawe - hesitates for a long time to give the order to the police to arrest him because he wants to make sure that they will catch him in the act. This scene is a tightrope-walk and very nerve-racking. Finally, Grawe cannot wait any longer and gives the signal to arrest him:

The last scene shows the detectives: Beck's plan has worked, the murderer has been arrested but Beck and Grawe have nothing to say to each other. Grawe only mentions that he will never work with Beck again.

Grawe:

I won't work with you again.

Beck:

I have never risked that much before. Do you think I would have let the boy bite the dust? You have no nerves.

(translated into English by the author).

Beck tries to take hold of Grawe's arm, who withdraws from him and leaves the room without saying a word.

The closing scene of „Thanners neuer Job“, the last episode shown by the GDR television in 1991, shows Fuchs, the former „father“ of the team ever since the beginning of the serial. After having suffered all the effects of being kidnapped, he is looking out of the window and not talking to any of the others in the room. He is shown clearly alienated from the rest of the team, who sit at the table. When he leaves the room it is indicated that he will leave the police force. When this episode is aired shortly before the closing down of the DFF, the future of *Polizeiruf 110* is still uncertain.

Apart from the episodes that contain obvious changes, a number of episodes shown in the period between autumn 1989 and end of 1991 were shot before the wall came down or were very far in the production process and therefore do not reflect the changed reality. Also, some episodes whose production were started after the fall of the wall end up being outdated because reality is changing so rapidly. When they were broadcast they were sometimes announced almost apologetically as attempts to deal with the past.

After the last episode had been aired and the GDR television was officially closed, it seemed that after 20 years *Polizeiruf 110* had come to an end. However, some members of the former production staff were already busy preparing new episodes.

***Polizeiruf 110* in the ARD (1993-today)**

As compensation for the loss of their own television system, two new regional stations were established in East Germany: The Mitteldeutsche Rundfunk (MDR) and the Ostdeutsche Rundfunk Brandenburg (ORB). They are both part of the ARD-agreement. The very Northwest part of the country was annexed to the West German Norddeutsche Rundfunk (NDR).

With the exception of the childrens' programme *Sandmännchen*, all GDR programmes have disappeared from re-united Germany's television. Partly due to the commitment of some

former DFF-people that were now being employed by the new East German stations (Thomas Steinke, Karl-Heinz Staamann, MDR) and in order to provide some continuity for the East German viewers, the ARD agreed to continue *Polizeiruf*.¹³

In 1993 four episodes of *Polizeiruf 110* were aired which represented a somewhat limbo stage. All four were produced by the two new East German stations (three by the MDR, one by the ORB). They had new opening credits consisting of some highlights of the particular film to come. But it was not until February 1994, that the ARD officially promoted the revival of *Polizeiruf 110* with a new concept. This concept scheduled the series for the well-established 90-minutes time-slot on Sunday night, alternating with *Tatort* and another police series, *Die Männer vom K3*. The placing of *Polizeiruf 110* in that very time slot can also be regarded as an attempt to promote the Sunday as „crime day“ in the ARD.

Similar to *Tatort*, the individual contributions to the serial were from now on produced by various regional stations of the Federal station ARD, the so-called „Third Programmes“, which roughly correspond to the division of Germany into „states“ (*Bundesländer*). However, all episodes were to be aired by the nation-wide ARD all over Germany. The stations were to focus on specific regional aspects and problems of that particular region. In contrast to *Tatort*, episodes of *Polizeiruf 110* were to be situated in the country rather than the city. They were to deal with ordinary people rather than with high society (it doesn't have to be the doctor, it can also be the doctor's receptionist¹⁴). The stories were mainly meant to explore the psychological origins of crime and the relationship between the criminal and the victim rather than the traditional scenario of the detective solving his case (*who-dunnit-scheme*). Accordingly, the detective was not necessarily the focus. Also, contrary to *Tatort*, the serial allowed for „smaller“ crimes than murder and objected to the portrayal of organised crime. Furthermore, the concept explicitly emphasised the distinction between *Polizeiruf 110* on the one hand and other German series (in particular *Derrick*, *Der Alte*) and the tradition of American crime-story-telling on the other hand.

Eight of the eleven stations of the ARD (the two East-German stations MDR, ORB, the mixed SFB, NDR, the West-German BR, SDR, WDR and the Austrian ORF) decided to contribute

¹³ Another argument for the continuation was probably the fact that the episodes broadcast in 1991 and 1993 had achieved good ratings with West-German viewers, too.

¹⁴ Cf. Peitz (1993:21)

episodes to *Polizeiruf 110*. All individual films are co-ordinated by a team of four rotating representatives of the ARD.

Due to the large number of stations contributing to the serial in 1994 there were numerous detectives who fought against crime. The MDR continued all of the old detectives (with the exception of detective Fuchs), but they appeared on screen only sporadically from time to time. Their outer appearance and their ways of acting were considerably changed. They all got a more up-to-date appearance: For instance, in „Grawes letzter Fall“ (29.10.95), Grawe wore a trendy leather jacket and had short, spiky hair. His attractive girl-friend kept him company. The detectives were also allowed more action-loaded scenes.

However, by now all of the old detectives have disappeared from the series for various reasons: The actor of detective Hübner died, the actor of detective Grawe did not want to be confined to the detective genre and preferred playing other roles.

The other stations opted for new detectives: With Tanja Voigt, the East German ORB introduced a female detective. The mixed NDR built up a team consisting of detective Groth (played by the famous GDR actor Kurt Böwe) and his much younger boss Hinrichs (played by the comedian Uwe Steimle) for the small city of Schwerin in the north of Germany. Both represent clichés in the new East German states: Groth is old, slow, talks little, but has much empathy and is considerably wiser than Hinrichs. As a consequence of the re-unification he has been down-graded in his position. Hinrichs is also East German, but of a different generation. He represents the yuppie-type of East German, who after the re-unification quickly adapted to the new circumstances. Hinrichs is very ambitious, loves technology (computers, mobiles etc.) but lacks experience and tends to overestimate his abilities. Their involuntary team-work and their little drolleries have become a major source of humour.

As a consequence of the de-centralized production of the serial the various detectives of *Polizeiruf 110* no longer work together in one team as in the GDR-episodes but are spread all over Germany (both in the west and in the east). Small cities, boring towns and empty areas in the country become their major field for action.

The detectives have deep links with the regions in which they solve their cases. They are generally no longer presented as omnipotent but as very human and sympathetic. Frequently, they stand helpless in the face of the often desolate problems in their regions (e.g. high unemployment, poverty, problems with adapting to the new system). They suffer with the people. But they also make mistakes: In several episodes people commit suicides which might

have been prevented if the detectives had acted differently.¹⁵ In a few episodes, the detectives let people get away with crimes („Totes Gleis“ 11.09.1994, murder („1A Landeier“, 09.04.95; „Über den Tod hinaus“, 11.05.97). However, crime only pays here because the people are not really bad guys.

Generally, in 1994 and 1995 a rather wide spectrum of detectives¹⁶ and different scenes of action and different ways of solving crimes were portrayed,. It was a phase which allowed for creative experiments. Since, however, the serial contained differences which prevented it from been seen as an actual, flowing serial – and since the ratings began to drop – the concept was partially revised. The modifications were concerned with the portrayal of the detectives and the exposition of the films.

One point of criticism was that the large number of detectives would not offer enough potential for audience identification. Because of this the beginning of each film was requested to be more gripping and faster.¹⁷ The new concept suggested that each participating station should continue with only one detective and should strengthen him or her as an identification figure. And one mode of story-telling, e.g. who-dunnit, should be chosen. Several stations dropped out after one or two productions (SFB, SDR, ORF and BR) which further reduced the number of detectives.

Conclusion

In 1996, *Polizeiruf 110* celebrated its 25th birthday. Its 200th jubilee took place in May 1998. So the *Polizeiruf 110* is the only GDR programme which has successfully survived the reunification.

Interestingly enough, the new episodes of *Polizeiruf 110* get better ratings in the West than in the former East-Germany. This shows that the serial only partly managed to fulfil its aim to contribute to a unified German identity. While it no longer claims to be didactic, different

¹⁵ The wrongly accused prime suspect in „Alte Freunde“ commits suicide before detective Hinrichs can correct his error. A farmer in „Bullerjahn“ commits suicide after his cattle have been stolen and Hinrichs does not listen to him.

¹⁶ Many of them appeared only once.

¹⁷ Audience research has shown that the viewer decides in the very first minutes whether he/she will stay tuned or not.

attempts to standardise the serial illustrate that it had to make concessions to the laws of the capitalist market.

Nevertheless, many episodes have continued to be refreshing and have opened up new possibilities.

Facts and Figures about *Polizeiruf 110*

- 03.01.1956 Official start of the „Deutscher Fernsehfunk“ in East Berlin.
- 03.01.1972 The „Deutscher Fernsehfunk“ is renamed „Fernsehen der DDR“.
- 27.06.1971 First episode of *Polizeiruf 110* „Der Fall Lisa Murnau“.
- 09.11.1989 The wall comes down.
- 14.03.1990 The „Fernsehen der DDR“ takes back its old name „Deutscher Fernsehfunk“ (DFF).
- 28.10.1990 The episode „Unter Brüdern“ ‘unites’ the two serials *Tatort* and *Polizeiruf 110*.
- 04.11.1990 The episode „Das Duell“ deals with the actions of the police and secret police during the demonstrations in October 1989.
- 13.09.1991 The Treaty of German Unity (Rundfunküberleitungsgesetz) chooses to close the Deutsche Fernsehfunk at the end of 1991.
- 17.07.1991 The episode „Das Treibhaus“, produced by the DFF, is broadcast in the ARD („godfathership“).
- 28.08.1991 The episode „Todesfall im Park“, produced by the DFF, is broadcast in the ARD („godfathership“).
- 31.12.1991 The „Deutsche Fernsehfunk“ is officially closed.
- 01.01.1992 The two new regional stations MDR (=Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk, for Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia) and ORB (= Ostdeutscher Rundfunk Brandenburg for Brandenburg) start broadcasting.
- 1993 Four episodes of *Polizeiruf 110*, all of which have been produced by the new stations MDR and ORB, are aired in the ARD.
- 1994 *Polizeiruf 110* is officially revived with a new concept. Similar to *Tatort*, the contributions to the serial will come from various regional stations of the ARD and will reflect the variety and cultural problems of those areas. Both the East-German stations MDR and ORB, the ‘mixed’ NDR and SFB, as well as the BR, the SDR,

WDR and the Austrian ORF agree to produce *Polizeiruf 110*. In contrast to *Tatort*, the series focuses on ordinary people; the crimes take place in the country and small towns rather than in the city.

- 1995 Reformulations of some points in the concept; some stations (BR, ORF, SFB and SDR) decide to drop out.
- 22.06.1996 *Polizeiruf* celebrates its 25th anniversary.
- 24.05.1998 *Polizeiruf* celebrates its 200th jubilee.

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