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NEW RESEARCH ON EAST GERMANY

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Guest Editor – Marc Silberman
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NEW RESEARCH ON EAST GERMANY: AN INTRODUCTION

MARC SILBERMAN

Over a quarter century has elapsed since the end of the Cold War and the unification of Germany, enough time for writers, artists, scholars, and the general public to have both remembered their pre-1990 experience and witnessed a series of controversies in the retelling or rewriting of that past. Now we are in the process of a generational shift, not only in the sense of a young adult generation with few of their own memories of divided Germany but also of a younger generation of scholars whose knowledge about the two Germanys has been mediated by their older mentors. I am one of those older mentors and suspect that the next-generation scholars are developing new approaches, sources, and methodologies for research on the German past and present. I have repeatedly considered and reconsidered my own scholarly trajectory vis-à-vis East Germany both before and after unification.[1] But I am convinced that our younger colleagues, who—for reasons of their own—are drawn to the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and what since unification is known as eastern Germany as an object of interest and even fascination, have important things to communicate.

As co-chair with Janet Ward (University of Oklahoma) of the Interdisciplinary Committee of the German Studies Association (GSA), I was in a position to help develop focused networks of scholars within the organization. In 2014 I took advantage of the position to establish a GSA Network on German Socialisms that would explore "GDR studies"—GDR-specific memory studies, close readings of "texts" from the GDR including literature, cinema, art, music—and the broader context of socialist traditions and resistances in Germany from its 19th-century roots to its 20th-century thinkers such as the left libertarian Rosa Luxemburg or the Frankfurt School intellectuals. The idea was to create not only interdisciplinary collaborations but also synergies that go beyond a single state or geopolitical focus. The three coordinators—art historian April Eisman (Iowa State University), literary scholar Benjamin Robinson (Indiana University), and historian Eli Rubin (Michigan State University), all members of that younger generation and all represented in this issue with contributions—went to work immediately and developed a series of linked panels for each annual fall GSA conference since then. I was impressed with the breadth of participation as I monitored these successful panels and decided to organize a small workshop at my home institution, the University of Wisconsin in Madison, to provide a forum for the next generation of GDR scholars, specifically those not in Germany, to discuss their experiences and their own new research from the outsider position of being once-removed.[2] This yielded the idea for the current issue of *Imaginations*.

Without stealing thunder from the contributions featured here, let me briefly summarize some of the trends that I introduced as a point of departure for the workshop and others that emerged in the course of our intense discussion and the subsequent process of revising the essays for publication. First, East Germany has become a historical entity, and GDR studies has acquired a history of its own, one that has bifurcated into German and non-German (especially Anglophone) scholars, with somewhat different objects of interest and critical approaches, mediated not only by distance but also by our respective scholarly cultures.[3] Let me detour slightly into my own history as a scholar of GDR culture. My first real encounter with East Germany was in summer 1967 when I arrived as a 19-year-old undergraduate student for a year's study at the Free University in West Berlin. East Germany for me was a vague place behind the Wall, a tantalizing but risky attraction concealed by the Iron Curtain. In retrospect I recall that my studies in German up until this point in the mid-1960s had never introduced literature from East Germany or even mentioned much more than the fact of Germany's postwar division. Indeed, I'm not sure I had read anything in German that had been written after 1933 except texts by those Germans who had been exiled during the Third Reich, something I soon discovered I had in common with fellow students at the Free University. Moreover, until the early 1970s West German and American literary scholars tended to see GDR literature exclusively as political propaganda produced by state scribes.

This began to change for a number of reasons, and in the course of the 1970s attention turned increasingly toward literary production in East Germany owing to lack of access to other kinds of information or encounters with the "other Germany." Literature was regarded as an accessible document, a reflection of or window on social reality. One reason for the shift was that postwar literature more generally became an object of interest with the passage of time. If my own education in the 1960s had focused exclusively on pre-1933 developments, by the 1970s both scholarship and the teaching of contemporary West German literature was on the agenda, and the interest in contemporary West German literature opened the door for a comparative glance at postwar developments in the GDR as well. Moreover, the New Left culture initiated by the student movements in West Berlin, Paris, Milan, Berkeley, and New York provided the seed for alternative approaches to cultural life, including that of East Germany. Finally, in 1972 the politics of détente or Ostpolitik led to the mutual recognition of East and West Germany as sovereign states, followed by the international community of Western countries opening diplomatic relations with the GDR. This recognition, together with the regime change in East Germany in 1971, sparked considerable interest in the West about GDR culture and politics in general, even among political scientists and sociologists. This interest in fact grew and continued more or less unbroken through the collapse of the East German regime in 1989 with West German and Anglophone scholars sharing similar perspectives in fairly regular give-and-take.[4]

The dissolution of the GDR in 1990 changed the dynamics of the discourse about this state and its culture and, in a curious sense, made the discourse more real(istic) as the process of figuring out *was bleibt* (what remains) sharpened our investigation of how it became what it was and why it failed. Furthermore, because the GDR as a state configuration no longer existed, social-science interest migrated into historical scholarship. Nothing illustrates better this dynamic process of narrativization than the consequences for German historiography and the politics of memory after the fall of the Wall. History and memory are distinct but related concepts, both based on narratives and subject to change as time passes and attention shifts. After decades of division and Cold War competition, something like a German identity was on the agenda. German unification was suddenly postulated not only on the level of political affiliation but also as a shared identity: for the first time since the end of the Second World War being German emerged as a national mission. There were attempts to rewrite the literary history of both East and West Germany; political theories of modernization and totalitarian governance were reconsidered; a wave of *Ostalgie* (the sentiment of nostalgia for the loss of East Germany) and sometimes even *Westalgie* (the counter-sentiment for the loss of a distinct West Germany) washed over the cultural discourse; and perhaps most significantly the vanishing point of 20th-century German history began to shift from 1933 to 1989, with normalization and united Germany's integration into a larger European Union now the guarantee that *nie wieder Auschwitz* (never again Auschwitz) would endure. I have also worked on Holocaust memory in Germany, which has taught me first that how Germans remember their past is an object of deep scrutiny, and second that the process of remembering is more important than the product, with competing views about the past rarely yielding satisfying results. I suspect a similar vigor may emerge for research on Cold War Germany.

For GDR scholars, a second significant change in approach concerns access to information and people. First and foremost I am referring to archives. Although it has taken years to sort things out, the GDR was a bureaucratic state in the

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German tradition, which means that written documents were produced in multiple copies, filed away, and saved for posterity. Beyond the issues of data protection, privacy, and of course the files of the secret police or Stasi, this has produced a mountain of documentation that gradually became accessible after 1990 and provided insight into the often contradictory processes of decision-making that characterized all cultural (not to say political) activity. As a result, the negotiations that had distinguished East German life in all domains become ever clearer: straining against the National Socialist past, against the capitalist other of the omnipresent West closed off by the reinforced border, and against an increasingly ineffective party-state. Indeed, we found in our workshop discussions that we often returned to the concept of *Eigensinn* (literally "obstinacy," but referencing the exercise of soft power by the regime that sought the consent of its subjects, who were *eigensinnig* or insistent about their autonomy), a concept popularized by historian Alf Lüdtke (1991) but also one that we saw as uncritically framing every discussion about the GDR within the confines of power politics and accommodation.[5] The fetish of power in GDR historiography—especially that surfacing among colleagues in Germany, who tend to ignore non-German-language scholarship—clamors for a different conceptual space with its own temporality to grasp the reality of life experience between ideals and reality or between centre and margins.

The fall of the Wall and the dissolution of the intra-German border brought not only mobility in both directions but also the possibility of spontaneous face-to-face communication with East Germans; for scholars, this means access to potential informants and witnesses. With the end of the Cold War and what we call the Ossi/Wessi-mentality and its ensuing identity competition, a new kind of privilege emerged for the non-German scholar. Suddenly we, as outsiders, were interrogators and conversational partners whom the East Germans often preferred precisely because we were not West Germans—possibly because we were seen as less prejudicial toward them, or perhaps because we had a different sense of fairness and respect. On the other hand, some of us also encountered more recently the opposite: members of the older East German generation who resist sharing their knowledge and insights possibly out of fear that they are being exploited because of their identity as GDR witnesses—in other words a circle-the-wagons defensiveness to protect the memory of "our GDR."

Access to archives and to individual citizens of the GDR has produced to some degree the bifurcation of German and Anglophone scholarship mentioned above, a third insight that concerned us in the workshop. The essays gathered here share an interest in everyday life that emerges both from careful examination of primary source material and from encounters with those who experienced life in East Germany. Oral-history interviews, visual archives, or ethnographic excursions aim at retrieving the notion of autonomous agency from the claws of totalitarianism. While post-Wall historiography in Germany—including in the fields of literary, cultural, cinematic, and art history—has been dominated by a focus on totalitarian control, power differentials among elites, and dissidence, this new research by a group of outsiders registers a commitment to pursuing questions about the microstructures of accommodation, East-West exchanges, and quotidian behavior below the level of official media and political claims. By examining the ambiguities and complexities of everyday life, these contributions enrich the concept of *Eigensinn* and explore instances of how people in the GDR—real, fictional, cinematic—engaged in everyday life through solidarity and indifference, participation and opposition. A shared goal among these contributors is to expose traces of this life experience: accumulations and remnants of the past, aesthetic structures of layering and re-inscription, and cultural practices that became habits. This endeavor also points to an issue that may characterize future work on the GDR, that is, the need to attend to variant temporalities that typified East German experience: the desire to rule over time, the need to escape from (present) time, the function of temporal nonsynchroneity (Ernst Bloch's concept of *Ungleichzeitigkeit*). Less obvious but equally distinctive: we GDR researchers are also teachers outside of Germany, and conveying our ideas to students who have little or absolutely no knowledge of Germany as well as to colleagues from other fields who are not German studies specialists forces and invites us to develop a less provincial and more international approach to the material we study.

A final consideration, one that did not dominate our workshop discussions but that strikes me as a *sine qua non* for the direction of future research: globalization and migration have led to a shift in social structures and historical consciousness. Germany is now an in-migration nation, and hyphenated Germans can no longer be pressed into a once unquestioned national category. The plurality in the means of access to the GDR past are going to undermine any attempt to establish a master narrative of the Cold War and East and West Germany's role therein. A national approach to German unification that sees it as an exclusively German issue—which dominated the discourse of the 1990s and still to a large extent today—ignores the European and global practices of power politics, economics, and culture. There are obviously national differences in the reconstruction of the past, but we will be encountering increasingly parallel and overlapping accounts, which may bring about a paradigm change in the way we construct the postwar German narrative. GDR culture was not an island unto itself, and certainly since the end of the Second World War the idea of autonomous national cultures has been on the retreat. While the GDR may seem to be an exception, with its boundaries having materialized into fences and the concrete of the Berlin Wall, it too was subject to dialogue, exchange, and competition both internally and externally.

Shifting attention from the national suggests a counterstrategy to the epistemology that established and has sustained GDR scholarship since the 1970s. Tied to concepts of the nation, national culture, and national identity, discussions in both the East and the West have focused on defining the qualities and distinctiveness of East Germany, its difference being variously qualified as produced by postwar, socialist, and/or Cold War policies. While we cannot ignore the national dimension, I insist that national specificity is a dialectical reference point for the larger international or transnational context. The very founding of the GDR, for example, harks back to the Soviet Union and the Comintern, and tension between national ambitions and international commitments surfaced both in politics and culture. Moreover, the GDR always struggled with the issue of whether it was committed to a modern, internationalist form of socialism or whether it was the true inheritor of a humanistic German tradition. Of course, this had a special resonance because of Germany's history of nationalism and racism as well as its status as one of the birthplaces of socialism. Thus, the perspective from the outside on the part of younger researchers such as those contributing to this issue looks at the West as well, transforming the GDR into a refraction lens or mirror for comparative East-West studies. This is how we need to reposition East Germany and to identify blind spots of past approaches that have failed to contextualize it beyond the boundaries and temporality of the GDR.

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Notes

1 For details on my trajectory as a GDR scholar, see Silberman, "Too Near, Too Far."

2 The workshop "New Research on East Germany" took place on April 1, 2016, at the Pyle Conference Center on the University of Wisconsin campus in Madison. I wish to thank the Center for German and European Studies (and Director Pamela Potter), the Center for European Studies (and Director Nils Ringe), and the Department of German (and Chair Jolanda Vanderwal Taylor) for their financial support.

3 Andrew Port has characterized three phases of GDR historiography since unification in 1990: a first phase focused on the totalitarian institutions and structures of power, a second phase of social history beginning in the mid-1990s interested in various social groups, and a third phase of cultural history setting in after the turn of the millennium that has focused on subjective experiences of ordinary East Germans (Port, "The Banalities of East German Historiography" 1-2).

4 For an extended discussion of how this development proceeded in North America, see Silberman, "Readings and Misreadings?"

5 See Rubin's references to Lüdtke in this issue, especially his endnotes 5 and 7.

NEGOTIATING MEMORIES OF EVERYDAY LIFE DURING THE *WENDE*

MARIA HETZER

Abstract *| The visual essay is based on research carried out between 2010 and 2015 under the title "Bodies of Crisis—Remembering the German Wende." The project mainly consisted of oral-history research and a series of performance events presented in the UK and Germany. In 27 interviews, women from East Germany recollected their embodied quotidian experience amidst the political transition from a socialist to a capitalist state in 1989 and thereafter. Live performance opened up access points for a transcultural translation of this experience involving practitioners from diverse cultural and creative backgrounds. The performance work extended the culturally specific experience beyond the East German case by pointing toward global struggles for existence, acceptance, and emancipation.*

Résumé *| Cet essai visuel est le résultat du projet d'études «Bodies of Crisis – Remembering the German Wende» (Corps de la crise – Souvenir de la chute du Mur), réalisé à l'Université de Warwick de 2010 à 2015. Au moyen de 27 interviews, des femmes de l'Allemagne de l'Est se sont remémoré les expériences corporelles de leur vie quotidienne pendant l'époque troublée de 1989 et 1990. Ces interviews ont jeté la base d'un spectacle vivant impliquant des artistes variés, ouvrant un espace d'expression transculturel et artistique de ces expériences de temps de crise. La performance a montré l'universalité des expériences spécifiques de l'Allemagne de l'Est au regard des enjeux mondiaux que sont la survie, la reconnaissance et l'émancipation.*

The visual essay is based on collaborative research a group of performance-based researchers conducted between 2010 and 2015 under the title "Bodies of Crisis—Remembering the German *Wende*." The project mainly consisted of oral-history research and a series of performance events presented in the UK and Germany. In 27 interviews, women from East Germany recollected their embodied quotidian experience amidst the political transition from a socialist to a capitalist state in 1989 and thereafter. Live performance opened up access points for a transcultural translation of this experience involving practitioners from diverse cultural and creative backgrounds. The performance work extended the culturally specific experience beyond the East German case by pointing toward global struggles for existence, acceptance, and emancipation. The following sequence of images and clips invites readers to reflect on the embodied quotidian as a valuable approach to the study of the historical experience of 1989. Short commentaries consider how memories of somatic quotidian experience influence the experience of the body vis-à-vis wider social change.

Performance collaborators: Maiada Aboud, endurance art researcher (UK/Israel); Jessica Argyridou, video performance artist (Cyprus); David Bennett, dancer-researcher (UK); Michael Grass, heritage researcher and visual designer (UK/Germany); Linos Tzelos, musician (Greece). Further studio collaborators: Elia Zacharioudaki, actress (Greece); Osama Suleiman, media artist (Saudi Arabia/Jordan); Gordon Palagi, actor (USA).

 Project photographers for *Bodies of Crisis:* Michael Grass (MG), Maria Rankin (MR), Ian O'Donoghue (IOD). My sincere thanks go to Seán Allan and Nicolas Whybrow, who supervised this research project, as well as Marc Silberman and two anonymous reviewers who made valuable comments on a draft of this essay. More information on the performance research can be found on the project's website http://bodycrisis.org.

Click image for track one

Click image for track two

Click image for track three

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Clip and Image Notes

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Image 3: "Round Table talks, East Berlin, 1989." Copyright by dpa / BAKS. Available online:

baks.bund.de/de/aktuelles/20-jahre-runder-tisch-in-polen-und-deutschland-demokratie-und-freiheit-in-europa

Image 4: "*Kommune I*, the most famous squat in Mainzer Straße, East Berlin 1990." Copyright by Umbruch Bildarchiv.

Image 5: "Example of an East German supermarket (*Kaufhalle*) addressing the desires of East Germans in 1990." Copyright by dpa / MZ.web. Available online: mz-web.de/kultur/ddr-geschichte-streit-um-vergangenheit-entzweit-viele-menschen-3193808

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Image 7: "The ambivalence of everyday practice in a state crisis. Scene from the performance, *Apples*." Copyright by Bodycrisis, Ian O'Donoghue, 2012.

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Image 18: "The fist as a symbol for global feminist struggle." Copyright by history.org.uk. Available online: goo.gl/images/u9d1uK

Image 19: "The Olympic team of the FRG, June 1972." Copyright by ullstein bild / Tagesspiegel.de. Available online: tagesspiegel.de/images/heprodimagesfotos85120130902_imago-jpg/8725044/4-format2.jpg

Image 20: "Scene from performance work, *Fist*." Copyright by Bodycrisis, Michael Grass, 2012.

Image 21: "Scene from performance work, *Tub*." Copyright by Bodycrisis, Michael Grass, 2012.

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE EMBODIED QUOTIDIAN

A reassessment of historical writing about 1989 reveals a general disregard for everyday and somatic practice. This is by no means a particular disposition of the discourse about the German Wende. Indeed, Henri Lefebvre reminds us that the body and more embodied practices tend to be forgotten in Western philosophical thinking and history (161). In cultural studies, critics have explored everyday practices as a resource for resisting modernity's tedious routines and repressive demands (de Certeau xiv; Highmore 3). Here, the everyday encapsulates a limited set of practices by excluding a wide range of the sensate, i.e., issues of the body such as nutritional habits and hygiene. (For nutritional habits and German-German cultural history, see Weinreb in this issue.) One of many aspects nurturing this disregard of the somatic quotidian in Wende history is the relatively limited amount of available visual documentation depicting daily life before the advent of the digital age. In our studio work, we explored the ephemerality of everyday practice and created potential historical documents of the everyday of 1989. The image on the right is based on eyewitness accounts relating the changing taste of apples ("appearing shiny and delicious, but not tasting like an apple at all") and other daily products.

Tasting apples. ©Bodycrisis / MG (IMAGE 1) – Click Image to Continue

November 4, 1989, Berlin, Alexanderplatz © Andreas Kämper, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft (IMAGE 2) – Click Image to Continue

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE EMBODIED QUOTIDIAN

Twentieth-century German historiography has given the everyday prominence as a space of performing Eigen-Sinn in capturing individual agency vis-à-vis wider sociopolitical demands and state control (Lüdtke 13). In this context, the everyday functioned as a gatekeeper for the reassessment of GDR reality in light of the still dominant totalitarianism approach in historiography (Lindenberger 1). (On the need for a new approach to researching the everyday of the GDR, see Rubin and Ebbrecht-Hartmann in this issue.) In the context of writing and remembering 1989-90, however, the everyday has remained out of focus, as has the individual agent of change. Accordingly, historians have largely analyzed East Germans as a political mass (Grix 3). The image on the right shows one of the most significant demonstrations of East Germans for political reforms, taking place on Berlin Alexanderplatz on November 4, 1989. This image belongs to the canon of documents framing the reality of the Wende.

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE EMBODIED QUOTIDIAN

In some cases, historians have turned to examine the everyday of prominent agents for political change, for example, Bärbel Bohley as a leading representative of the GDR civil rights movement (Olivo ix). In short, we know little about how ordinary citizens organized and accomplished the everyday of 1989-90 when confronted with substantial socioeconomic and political change, nor do we know how it is remembered today. The period of the political Wende, 1989-90, disintegrates when employing an everyday approach. Many envision 1989 as the last year of the GDR and thus subsume its everyday under a more generally defined GDR normality that finally came to an end in November 1989. Correspondingly, East Germans woke up to the everyday of the now unified Berlin Republic in October 1990. Accounts following this narrative declared the temporary end of everyday life (Moran 216).

Round Table talks, East Berlin, 1989 © dpa / BAKS
(IMAGE 3) – Click Image to Continue

Kommune I, the most famous squat in Mainzer Straße, East Berlin 1990 © Umbruch Bildarchiv (IMAGE 4) – Click Image to Continue

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE EMBODIED QUOTIDIAN

Frequently researchers approach the everyday of 1989-90 as a transitional, extraordinary, and somewhat anarchic period in which many East Germans made rules on the go and experimented in all areas of life (Links et al. 1; Holm and Kuhn 644). Hence, these accounts tend to document experimental practices and thriving subcultural communities, e.g., squatting and alternative living experiments, techno culture, and political projects. (On squatters and techno culture, see Smith, and on subcultural artists, see Eisman in this issue.) In summary, when we do find pictures of the everyday in 1989-90, they depict a temporary, exceptional period of sociocultural practices that render obsolete the realities hitherto known as ordinary.

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE EMBODIED QUOTIDIAN

In the context of narratives that focus on 1989-90 as a period of state and sociocultural transition from an Eastern to a Western model, this exceptionality seems particularly obvious. Searching for traces of the everyday in this discourse, many examples establish GDR citizens as the historical Other. They feed German-German cultural stereotyping by concentrating on consumption, depicting extraordinary events such as shopping sprees to West Berlin and West Germany, targeting a demand for bananas, cheap electronics, second-hand cars, and other Western daily goods. This kind of focus still dominates the discussion about the nature of GDR citizens' needs and wishes for the future.

Example of East German shop (Kaufhalle) answering to the desires of East Germans in 1990 © dpa / MZ.web (IMAGE 5) – Click Image to Continue

"Young East German woman eating." Copyright by Bodycrisis, private (IMAGE 6) – Click Image to Continue

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE EMBODIED QUOTIDIAN

By contrast, the interviews I conducted for this research project emphasized the persistence of known quotidian practices. Interviewees maintained that mundane practices of the everyday remained the same, in line with Lefebvre's analysis that in times of change the everyday is last to change (131). This continuity of practices sanctioned feelings of reliability in a suddenly insecure political environment. It also enabled political participation on a daily basis, for example, by providing reliable childcare to workers so they could convene and rally for political action during the transitions of 1989-90. As a result, interviewees remembered integrating political participation into their daily routines and regimes, rather than substituting known everyday practices with new ones or changing their approach to daily life altogether. This everyday stability enabled societal change through active engagement with a political situation that was perceived as highly precarious, potentially changing the everyday forever.

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE EMBODIED QUOTIDIAN

On the level of the somatic, our group of performers undertook research in a studio setting that drew attention to the importance of conceptualizing a vital, energetic, accelerated political body. As such, the interviewees framed the everyday as characterized by all sorts of seemingly ordinary practices, a heightened level of energy that further supported restlessness, and a resistance to sleep, thus pushing the limits of the everyday. In our analysis of the interviews this corresponded with remembered practices of hesitation and excessive media consumption, consequently postponing obligations or fulfilling them halfheartedly.

Yet how do we translate this ambivalence of an everyday on the edge, an everyday we have come to understand as precarious but equally stabilized by repeated embodied practice? The live, performing body can generate insight into these parameters by allowing for a provisional and temporally limited identification of the self in others through somatic empathy, situatedness, and avowal of difference. As a result of our performance work, we devised hybrid cultural performance nodes that capture and intersect with the somatic experience from other cultural conflicts and scenarios. These nodes not only reflect back on the analysis of the specific historical experience of 1989-90, but also deflect attention from the extraordinary and unique aspects of the historical situation to focus on common, transcultural parameters for the explication of the relationship between somatic experience, the everyday, and social change.

The following video showcases our aesthetic engagement with the interviews on the precariousness of living through 1989 and grasping embodied quotidian experiences of 1989.

RETURN TRACK 2 TRACK 3

The ambivalence of everyday practice in a state crisis. Scene from the performance, Apples © Bodycrisis / IOD (IMAGE 7) – Click Image to Start Video

BEYOND THE EAST/WEST DIVIDE

Stereotyping was and still is one of the most pronounced features of German-German memory work of the Wende (see Weinreb on stereotypes of German-German obesity and Klocke on attitudes toward medical care). Discussions of what it means to be East or West German intensified with the advent of the German unification process. Since then, cultural and social stereotyping prolongs the systemic competition that was part and parcel of the Cold War. Stereotypes predominantly derived from and referred to everyday practice: the way Easterners walked and talked, carried and dressed themselves (see Eghigian 37). These tropes remain virulent today and have become the legacy of successive generations. For example, in 2010 the German Federal Court was called upon to decide on the ethnic identity of East Germans after a woman from the East accused a Western employer of ethnic discrimination when he handed back her job application with the negative comment "Minus: Ossi" (Ossi is a derogatory term for Easterner). However, the Court rejected this instance of prejudice. While the ruling can be read as a rejection of lived experience as such, the Federal Court was unable to identify it as an instance of cultural discrimination. On these grounds, goes the legal argument, East Germans would be constituted as an independent ethnic community. We might speculate about the intellectual and material consequences for a revaluation of the Wende process in light of a postcolonial theoretical paradigm.

LEBENSLAUF

Persönliche Daten

⊖ OSSI

Name
geboren in Berlin
Staatsangehörigkeit deutsch
Familienstand geschieden
Kind

BERUFSERFAHRUNG

Seit 2004 Bei GmbH

1997 – 2004 Buchhalterin bei der Firma GmbH+ Co .KG Schulabschluss fehlt

1991 – 1997 Buchhalterin GmbH & Co.

1989 – 1990 Leitung der in als stellv. Geschäftsführerin

1988 Ausreise aus der ehemaligen DDR

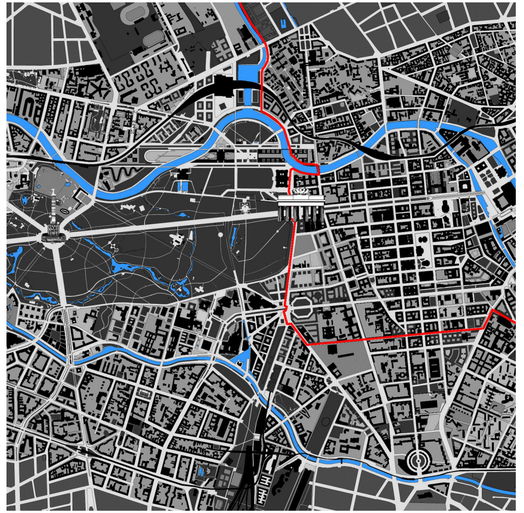
1987 – 1988 Gärtnerei als Buchhalterin und Verkauf DDR ↳ Ausbildung Lehrausbildung ?!

1984 – 1987 Wohnungswirtschaftler bei der kommunalen Wohnungsverwaltung in Berlin DDR

LEHRAUSBILDUNG

1978 – 1980 Ausbildung zum Technischen Zeichner Zentralamt für Fernleitungen

An East German woman's application to a Western employer marked down "Minus Ossi" © dpa / n24.de (IMAGE 8) – Click Image to Continue



Plan for the "New Berlin," 1997. Map of Berlin with demarcation of Wall © Senatsverwaltung für Stadtentwicklung Berlin (IMAGE 9) – Click Image to Continue

BEYOND THE EAST/WEST DIVIDE

Interestingly, the women interviewed for the project did not focus on the way in which the all-encompassing rejection of work experience mirrored an overall rejection of the lived experience of GDR citizens that was evident in the Wende process. This rejection ranged from blue collar to academic work in the context of liquidating and converting institutions (Abwicklung), not to mention political bureaucracy. While a minority of women employees were made redundant as early as 1990, the symbolic rejection of quotidian practices that came with ridiculing and mocking their outward appearance and habits seemed to weigh much more at this particular point in their lives. It was within this context that the interviews conducted for the Bodies of Crisis project picked up on stereotyping in relation to how it informed everyday practice. Meta's account was the most pronounced in identifying a strategy of creative everyday resistance. She remembered engaging in camouflage tactics: "I hated the stereotyping, I really did… I moved to Berlin during that time… I got myself a map of Berlin and pretended to be a tourist, dressing like a stranger."

BEYOND THE EAST/WEST DIVIDE

Against this backdrop, East Berlin occupies a specific place in cultural memory and the practice of cultural stereotyping—where counterculture thrived in the 1980s GDR and where subcultures blossomed in the early 1990s, often nurtured by activists from West Berlin seeking to extend their urban playground in the East. (On West German activists in East Berlin, see Smith in this issue.) East Berlin evolved as a comfort zone of social experimentation, while the new federal states in the East faced the consequences of rapid reorganization in all areas of life: mass unemployment and widespread industrialization, the breakdown of social and cultural services and institutions, rapid demographic declines caused by East-West and urban migration, shrinking cities and deserted rural areas—the post-socialist landscapes of change.

Projecting histories onto bodies © Bodycrisis / IOD (IMAGE 10) – Click Image to Continue

Translating the comfort zone of stereotyping © Bodycrisis / MR (IMAGE 11) – Click Image to Continue

BEYOND THE EAST/WEST DIVIDE

Following Meta's account of her resistance to stereotyping, we traced the transformation of the Easterner into a tourist or stranger in our performance work. Among many attempts at identifying transcultural nodes of resemblance, an Arab-Israeli member of our group injected her own cultural associations of self-estrangement. In her analogy, Arab women in Israel are the Other of history, confronted with strong social and cultural stereotyping and consequently social discrimination in many aspects of daily life. This stereotyping is nurtured from a multitude of perspectives which preclude women's accounts of resistance from fitting neatly into normative ethnic narratives of subjugated victims (Aboud 1). As the stereotypes go: in Arab eyes, women are either submissive or deviant daughters within a patriarchal system; in Israeli eyes, they are looked upon as politically and culturally conservative and unmodern, if not a potential threat to society and state control. Women seem constrained to perform within this frame of social stereotyping.

BEYOND THE EAST/WEST DIVIDE

However, Arab-Israeli women can also assume such ascribed social roles and practices to their advantage in order to secure individual agency and room to maneuver in the everyday. Cultural camouflage also plays an important role here. For example, mimicking an Arab girl who does not understand Hebrew may provide protection in challenging public situations. In situations such as these, women utilize the stereotype to reclaim individual agency. Metaphorically speaking, they stretch the veil and turn it back into a piece of fabric they can mold into multiple shapes. The ambivalence of this twofold approach to cultural stereotyping can be usefully applied to the everyday of 1989-90.

Tentatively exploring cultural practices for room to maneuver
© Bodycrisis / MR (IMAGE 12) – Click Image to Continue

Scene from the performance, The map
© Bodycrisis / IOD (IMAGE 13) – Click Image to Start Video

BEYOND THE EAST/WEST DIVIDE

As such, the continuity of everyday practices provided a comfort zone, helping to preserve a sense of self in the light of intense devaluation of the former life and everyday practices in dominant public discourses. Moreover, we might imagine this comfort zone as an oxygen tent that can conserve everyday practice and that counteracts the suffocating quality of capitalist consumerism and overall change. Prolonged everyday practices thus served as a source of social identification and belonging, but also as cultural capital to secure scarce financial resources. To give but one example, it limited potential excessive buying and experimentation, throwing out all household items in exchange for new Western goods (Bude et al. 31). Everyday practices also formed a cocoon against the bitter reality of social discrimination based on cultural stereotyping, for example, by fostering a disregard for public discourse on GDR politics of the body (e.g., disregard for makeup, mainstream naturism, and sex practices) or deliberately ignoring advertisements that promote specific ideals of beauty.

Lastly, Meta's account reveals how reticence to assimilate culturally on the level of the everyday and particular practices could be used as a means for self-identification beyond the felt provincialism of German-German stereotyping. Here, everyday practices served as a buffer zone, confronting and undermining expectations and stereotypes of what East Germans are and how they prefer to identify themselves.

TRACK 1 RETURN TRACK 3

EXPLORING SOCIALIST POLITICS OF THE BODY

Jahrhundertschritt

Gleichschritt und eigener Weg, Hitlergruß und Proletarierfaust,
Militarismus und Widerstand, Diktatur und Freiheit
– ein Rückblick auf das 20. Jahrhundert. (Mattheuer 1)

[Step of a century

Marching and individual pace, Hitler sign and proletarian fist,
Militarism and opposition, dictatorship and freedom –
Looking back on the twentieth century.]

What is left of the liberated woman in German discourses of 1989 relating to embodied quotidian experience? Discussions of socialist politics of the body regarding the everyday remain infrequent and often limited to exploring nudist practices as an exotic but widespread phenomenon in the GDR. Nudist practices often signal a point of reference for cultural differences between East and West and symbolize generally a different image of women in GDR society—the liberated woman.

Jahrhundertschritt by Wolfgang Mattheuer © Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (IMAGE 14) – Click Image to Continue

East German bathing © Eulenspiegel Verlag (IMAGE 15) – Click Image to Continue

EXPLORING SOCIALIST POLITICS OF THE BODY

Naturism may have emerged as a powerful trope of cultural distinction because it was such a pronounced and visible feature of GDR beach culture. As West Germans began to frequent East German beaches and declared nude bathing inappropriate, many East Germans felt annoyed and deprived of a habitual, quotidian practice. Gradually the Eastern nude beaches turned into "textile zones" (i.e., swim suits required) for Western tourists where naturism was prohibited by local authorities. Naturism is also strongly connected to the image of the liberated woman, a trope that was cultivated as a reality in the GDR by authorities and citizens alike and that found its symbolic expression in visualizations of the confident female nude: natural, that is, nonchalantly unshaven and naked. Thus, we can regard the image of the nude bather as a seemingly strong document of performing mainstream East German politics of the body.

EXPLORING SOCIALIST POLITICS OF THE BODY

However, while some maintain that naturism is a movement grounded in turn-of-the-century German culture, others show its evolution among independent movements across the globe (BritNat 1). Be that as it may, by the 1940s it had become a cross-cultural phenomenon. In images of an early conference of British naturists, we can discern female presenters and participants.

Participants of the 1941 conference of British Naturists' Associations
© IMAGO / Welt.de (IMAGE 16) – Click Image to Continue

GDR stamp illustrating allegiance to a global fight against racism incorporating a drawing by John Heartfield © 123RF (IMAGE 17) – Click Image to Continue

EXPLORING SOCIALIST POLITICS OF THE BODY

The history of naturism in the GDR is complex, and by no means were the petty-bourgeois fathers of the new socialist German state initially inclined to accept it as a mainstream cultural practice (McLellan 143). Only gradually did it become a mass movement that gained political momentum and emerged as a defining symbolic feature of a society that strove for the liberation of people from all sorts of oppression around the globe.

EXPLORING SOCIALIST POLITICS OF THE BODY

By the end of the socialist state, however, mainstream nudism first and foremost stood for the emancipated GDR woman, freed from the patriarchal politics of the gaze.

The fist as a symbol for global feminist struggle
© history.org.uk (IMAGE 18) – Click Image to Continue

The Olympic team of the FRG, June 1972 © ullstein bild / Tagesspiegel.de (IMAGE 19) – Click Image to Continue

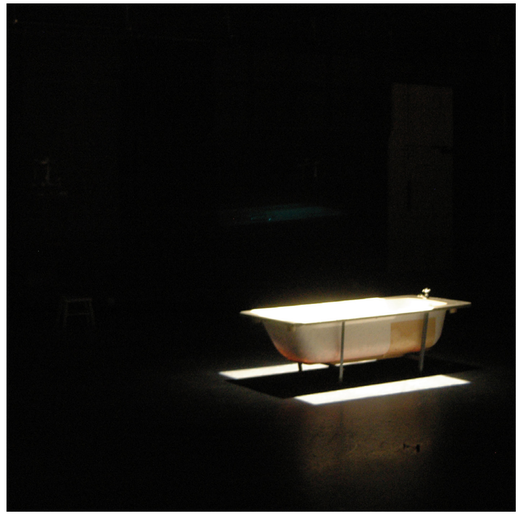
EXPLORING SOCIALIST POLITICS OF THE BODY

Correspondingly, West German public discourse since the 1970s has seen a strong correlation between feminism and culturally specific politics of the body related to shaving, rather than a permissive attitude toward displays of nudity. This correlation led to a cultural stereotype that still identifies women as lesbians and feminists on grounds that they employ a more "natural" approach to daily body practices, i.e., no body shaving. The cliché says: feminists are hairy and stink (Eisman 628). Needless to say, we have strong evidence to the contrary, for example, images of a female team from West Germany in the 1972 Olympic Games display unshaven armpits. The life circumstances of Ingrid Meckler-Becker, one of the women portrayed in the photo, suggest a non-correlation between unshaven armpits and feminism: she was a conservative party member, married with children, and a schoolteacher. This cultural stereotype based on daily hygiene has gained new momentum to include East Germans in the post-Wall Berlin Republic. It exemplifies the union of fashion-based everyday practices and time-specific politics of the body at work.

EXPLORING SOCIALIST POLITICS OF THE BODY

As part of the Bodies of Crisis project, we realized performance research on the relationship between cultural stereotypes rooted in public discourse that links everyday practice to political struggle. The creation of living statues targeted the visualization of the fashion-based, temporal, and cross-cultural elements of symbolism and aimed to account for their situatedness in localized political narratives and cultural discourses. The image shown here depicts the design of a performance response to the research question: how can we ascribe politics of the body their space in situated—that is, local and culturally specific—historiography without unnecessarily exoticizing it?

Scene from performance work, Fist © Bodycrisis / MG (IMAGE 20) – Click Image to Continue



Scene from performance work, Tub © Bodycrisis / MG (IMAGE 21)

EXPLORING SOCIALIST POLITICS OF THE BODY

This important question also provided the background for most audience reactions to the project. We performed Bodies of Crisis for festival and academic audiences in London and Coventry (UK) as well as Bremen (Germany) with 30 to 80 people attending at any one time. In different organized feedback formats as well as informal conversations, spectators reacted to aspects of the performance they deemed well-suited (or not) to creating a transcultural understanding of historical experience. German audience members tended to refer to the relationship between memory work and nostalgia, a good reminder of enduring discursive parameters. Some were pleased by the emphasis on quotidian experience, even though it might not lend itself easily to political ideologization. Others were concerned that the performance offered no commentary framing the particular historical experience of GDR women in a socialist dictatorship, since this provided the main material. These viewers wanted to draw out the dangers of nurturing a possibly nostalgic view on the past, in contrast to UK spectators who could identify with images, quotidian behavior, and the depicted conflicts. The latter felt encouraged to become engaged in a transcultural conversation of crisis experience. Yet, since the performance work had been the collective creation of performers from multiple cultural backgrounds, it ceased "belonging" to a single cultural meta-narrative. As such, talking about nostalgia, for example, a main driver for memory discourses of German and anglophone publics, proved meaningless to Arab spectators, who were instead eager to discuss the necessity to re-perform the specific politics of the body on stage, displaying unshaven female nudes.

TRACK 1 TRACK 2 RETURN

BEYOND DOMINATION: SOCIALISM, EVERYDAY LIFE IN EAST GERMAN HOUSING SETTLEMENTS, AND NEW DIRECTIONS IN GDR HISTORIOGRAPHY

ELI RUBIN

Abstract | *Communist societies in Eastern Europe have left behind massive prefabricated housing settlements within and outside cities as perhaps their most visible legacy, often assumed to be a negative legacy. Yet this assumption is a superficial judgment, one indicative of a larger trend in the history of Eastern Europe, especially that of East Germany, which only operates within a framework of power and state versus society. What happens when we examine everyday life in socialism without taking as our starting point a search for state power as the goal of the research? Removing this solipsistic framework, we see a different, more balanced picture, not one that necessarily whitewashes or ignores the presence of the state, but one that clearly tells the story of a kind of socialism that was experienced by ordinary people as a tight-knit community rather than a form of top-down control. Such an analysis points the way forward to a reassessment of Eastern European communist society.*

Résumé | *Beaucoup des grandes ensembles préfabriqués survivent dans les villes des sociétés communistes. Ils sont l'héritage le plus visible de communisme, lieux de mémoire d'un monde profané. Mais ce jugement est superficiel, et c'est partie d'une tendence plus grande dans l'histoire de l'Europe de l'Est, notamment de l'histoire de RDA. Cette tendence perçoit seulement le système de pouvoir. Je vois l'histoire quotidienne dans les ensembles. Cette perspective révèle une société qui a bon fontionné et commence une révaluation de la socio-histoire des pays communists dans l'Europe de l'Est.*

Title Image (Figure 1): Children in Marzahn. Courtesy Bezirksmuseum Marzahn-Hellersdorf, e.V.

If there is one particular type of urban space that is associated with Eastern European communism, it is the massive blocks of prefabricated housing, found both within older cities and on the outskirts of cities from East Berlin to Siberia. Prefabricated, mass-produced apartments, particularly those built in clusters or settlements, were not uniquely Eastern European or socialist. The technology of prefabrication came from the West, and western nations built them in postwar France, Britain, and West Germany, but because they were built to such a massive extent in the socialist Bloc, they were and remain among the most visible, immediate, and phenomenological links to the communist past. Nothing says "this was once a communist land" like seeing the rows of nearly identical housing blocks, sometimes symmetrical, sometimes folded inward as semi-closed polygons, separated by green spaces, rising along the outskirts of cities. From earlier settlements such as Halle-Neustadt in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) built in the 1950s and 1960s to later settlements such as Przymorze in Gdansk and Ujplata in Budapest built in the 1970s and 1980s, this architectural and urban form remains as a spatial and visual element of the communist past that cannot be erased from the phenomenological field of urban space. Long after the statues of Lenin and the giant hammers and sickles have been removed, the outdated and polluted factories either dismantled or completely modernized, and idiosyncratically "Eastern" signs and slogans replaced with western corporate advertising, these apartments remain.

To western visitors, the sight of these prefabricated blocks—called *Plattenbau* in German, *Panelaky* in Czech, and *Khrushchoyvka* in Russian—immediately conjures up negative associations, that is, when visitors from the West see them at all. Most western visitors in Prague, for example, never take the metro line out of the historic district to see the immense housing settlements at the end of the line in Stodulky, nor do visitors to Berlin venture beyond the central historic and trendy districts immediately east and north of the city centre; thus they do not see the massive settlements of Marzahn, Hohenschönhausen, and Lichtenberg. If anything, it is commonplace for westerners to assume that these housing settlements signify the failure of the communist regime; in this, their shared modernist heritage with the ill-fated housing projects of the 1940s to 1960s in the United States further taints them to western eyes. Indeed, many of these housing settlements have suffered after the fall of communism, becoming in some countries ghettos or bastions of right-wing extremism (see Sammartino; Urban, "Tower and Slab"). A symbol of failure might be what these spaces *look like* to westerners but, as always, there is a wide gap between the surface and the interior. What was life *really like* in these spaces?

For a long time, scholarship has ignored life within the *Plattenbau*. The central theorist of what has become known as the "spatial turn," Henri Lefebvre, dismissed them as "undifferentiated space" (Lefebvre 54). Historians of Eastern Europe, and especially of the GDR, have largely ignored them except to suggest that they were artificial communities created by the state and the party (Palmowski 191). Much of the work done by urban and architectural historians has focused on the prestige or neo-historical projects that took place largely in city centres, such as East Berlin's Palace of the Republic or Television Tower (Pugh; Urban, "Neohistorical"). This is beginning to change, with a spate of studies on mass-produced housing in communist countries that attends to everyday life within these new apartment blocks.[1] However, much more needs to be done, especially considering that this form of life was so prevalent and defined everyday life in socialism in its final decades.

This essay is based on my attempt to research and write a history of everyday life in the largest East German *Plattenbausiedlung* (*Plattenbau* settlement): a vast, mass-produced district on the northeast edge of East Berlin known as Marzahn. This project borrowed from the idea of a Geertzian "thick description" by paying close attention to the habits, experiences, and relationships of ordinary people, and not necessarily leading political or cultural figures. It sought to understand everyday life as it was lived within the space defined by the mass-produced buildings—the *Plattenbauten*—that came to define East German and Eastern European socialist architecture. In attempting to construct such a thick description, this study employs a wide range of sources. I carried out interviews with former East Germans who lived in Marzahn, read published interviews and memoirs of former Marzahners, often available only locally, and examined printed and archival sources. Originally, I was expecting to find evidence that the ruling SED (Socialist Unity Party) had been able to transform the consciousness of ordinary East Germans by transforming the spaces that defined their everyday lives. In so doing, I was following one of the dominant tropes of GDR historiography over the past two and half decades: I was looking for the traces of what many historians refer to as *Herrschaft*, loosely translated as "domination" or "soft power," described below. Instead, what I found

DOI : http://dx.doi.org/10.17742/ IMAGE.GDR.8-1.3

was that in Marzahn everyday life was defined by a lived and experienced a kind of socialism that was not a form of domination or *Herrschaft*, and can perhaps be best described as a mostly self-organized socialism built around the local community that developed in these spaces–what one might call a "communitarian" socialism. In the spaces of Marzahn, people did not live under the yoke of the ruling party. Yet their community could only be described as a form of socialism, one that functioned well. In the case of this qualitative oral history project, I did not use questionnaires or surveys. I met Marzahners, spent time with them in their homes and their familiar spaces, talked with them, listened to them tell the story of their lives and their family histories, looked through their photo albums and documented their prized possessions, furniture, mementos, and read their letters and unpublished novels and poems. Lives are lived in spaces, and spaces intertwine with lives to create topographies of memory. Some of my informants were inclined to view the topographies of their lives in Marzahn through the rose-colored glasses of *Ostalgie* (a German neologism referring to nostalgia for the bygone days of East Germany). As described below, many of those who moved to Marzahn did so because they were privileged by the system—acquiring an apartment in Marzahn was in certain ways connected to belonging to important state or party institutions and organizations.

Yet even if we allow for some ideological bias in the respondents and archives, the narrative that emerged for me from listening to East Germans recount their lives on their own terms stood in stark contrast to the narrative that surrounds prefabricated, mass-produced communist housing blocs and, more broadly, the narrative of top-down power that has defined the historiography and popular discourse on the GDR. Since the collapse of East Germany in 1989-90, often called the *Wende* ("turning point"), a focus on studying the power of the state and the ruling Communist party profoundly overshadowed and framed GDR historiography in Germany. Books, dissertations, articles, funded institutional research projects, publication series, museum exhibitions, conference papers, etc. abound with terms like *Macht* ("power"), *Diktatur* ("dictatorship"), and *Herrschaft*, as well as the related terms *Widerstand* ("resistance") and *Opposition*.[2] Public pressure from well-organized and politically connected former East German dissidents ensured that topics such as the oppression by the secret police (Stasi) and other security organs, the Berlin Wall, and the failed uprising against the party and state on June 17, 1953 have been thoroughly researched and have dominated the historical literature on East Germany.[3] As a result, numerous research institutes, archives, museums, and subsidized publications have appeared in Germany, all dedicated to the *Aufarbeitung* (the "working-through") of the legacy of the GDR, many of which are supported with state funds or other political sources of capital. Many of these, such as the *Bundesstiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur* (Federal Foundation for the Working-Through of the SED Dictatorship) and the *Bürgerbüro* (Citizens' Office) are led by former dissidents and vehement anti-communists who are fiercely opposed to any interpretation or representation of the GDR that does not centre state repression and its victims and resistors.[4]

Even German scholars who have conducted more nuanced scholarship and discourse on everyday life in the GDR define their work largely by a need to understand the extent to which the state and the party controlled that everyday life. Specifically, many scholars have made significant use the concept of *Herrschaft*—a concept introduced by Max Weber and later became associated with Alf Lüdtke—to explain how those who hold power often depend on the consent of those they rule. These analyses of East Germany focus on the more subtle and cultural ways in which the party "dictatorship" exercised "soft power"[5]—the framing for a large number of works done on the GDR in Britain and North America. Many studies in this vein looked, for example, at consumer culture, sports, gender, domesticity, private life, etc.[6] However, the general purpose was ultimately to uncover the extent of party *Herrschaft* over East German society. To a degree, the reason that the term *Herrschaft* became so ubiquitous was its conceptual flexibility—it could accommodate a more nuanced, even Gramscian, or Foucauldian interpretation of power, or it could mean power more generally or colloquially.[7]

By the early 2000s the scholarship on the GDR, particularly in history, had become so profoundly shaped by the search for *Herrschaft* that it seemed as if there were no other way to think about studying the GDR. Nearly every study, in both English and German, began with the paradigm of the GDR as a state and party as well as a society, and essentially tried to document the extent of the imposition of the former onto the latter. Most of this scholarship, as valuable as it was, bordered on question-begging, containing much of the conclusion within its premise. It began with the notion that there was a state on the one hand and a society on the other, that there was interpenetration, and ended with the conclusion that, in fact, the state/party penetrated into the society. The only real point of contention in this scholarship was the degree to which that penetration happened and how to characterize it. The focus on "power" from the beginning was self-reinforcing because, as Michel Foucault argues, power, especially in its subtler or more diffuse forms (such as *Herrschaft*), is everywhere, in every society, and not just dictatorships. That there was *Herrschaft* in the GDR is not, in the end, what is most important. Instead, I argue that one of the aspects of East German society and everyday life that tends to be de-emphasized in the literature is the reality of *socialism* itself, as both an ideology and a system of organizing everyday life. That is, the impression emerges from much of the literature that the "socialist" part of East German everyday life was merely epiphenomenal—almost as if it were incidental whether East Germany was socialist, or fascist, or whatever—and that what really matters when studying the GDR is gaining an understanding of how power-in-general works. Yet East Germany was unique not because of *Herrschaft* but because it was socialist. This was a core of its existence, not an epiphenomenon.

Indeed, the experience of former East Germans highlights this discrepancy between the politics of academic discourse on the GDR and the actual lived experience in the GDR. In interview after interview, East Germans in Marzahn painted the same kind of picture of their life in the *Plattenbausiedlung*—a new beginning, a progressive community, a major upgrade into the long awaited socialist good life, and most of all, a real and authentic everyday lived experience of socialism—not ideological socialism, not the socialism of the party line, but a true communitarian socialism that worked even where and when the system did not function. They attributed little importance to their belonging to the SED or the presence of that official system, but rather described a lived experience that was, in fact, socialism. Furthermore, what many complained about, and what many East Germans in general have found hardest to understand in the years since 1989, is that their experience in the GDR seems to have been grossly misunderstood by westerners, especially historians.[8] The narrative below depicts a very different reality than much of the German and English scholarship on the GDR.

The importance of this disconnect goes beyond the milieu of former East Germans. Quite apart from the politics of GDR historiography, there has been a transatlantic explosion of interest in East German everyday life and material culture.[9] While this interest is perhaps easy to explain away as *Ostalgie* among former East Germans, it is much harder to understand its transatlantic and international appeal. The well-known GDR Museum located in the heart of the most touristy area of Berlin—just off Unter den Linden, between several museums and monuments—is not large but it is heavily visited, almost exclusively by foreign tourists. Shops selling former East German consumer goods, marketed as "communist kitsch" have appeared in hip, trendy neighbourhoods, especially in Berlin, where many foreigners or young people with no memory or connection to the GDR live. The largest existing museum devoted to the material culture and everyday life culture of East Germany now exists in California. Known as the Wende Museum, it houses an impressive array of objects, visual art, film, clothing, and printed sources (including Margot Honecker's papers).[10] The Wende Museum has demonstrated that, amazingly, in Los Angeles there is a strong interest in East Germany—the museum's success has led it to recently move to a new, larger building, and it managed to stage an impressive spectacle (even for Hollywood's standards) for the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Wall, shutting down Wilshire Boulevard with segments of the Berlin Wall placed across it, the Mayor of Los Angeles and the Governor of California in attendance. Indeed, interest in East German everyday life and material culture is found throughout the world.

One might argue that in a neoliberal era this interest signifies a strong yearning for "something else" (Rubin, "Future," 2). Indeed, East Germany represented an alternative modernity–not just any alternative, but a distinctively *non-capitalist* modernity. As such, the suggestion here is that the GDR holds a strange and uncanny fascination for westerners. This is especially true of the younger generation, which is apt to be both attracted to and condescendingly amused by the phenomenological world left behind by a highly developed, modern socialist society. One of the enduring slogans of the Occupy movement is "Another World is Possible." Among the political left in the United States and throughout the millennial generation, there is a radically new openness to considering alternatives to capitalism itself. This has been made clear by the success of Bernie Sanders—a self-avowed socialist—in nearly gaining the nomination of the Democratic Party, as well as by a recent Harvard study revealing that just over half of all millennials do not support capitalism and one-third support socialism (Ehrenfreund). Yet in the suddenly flourishing discourse to be found, for example, in magazines and blogs such as *Jacobin*, *Dissent*, and *The Baffler*, there is little to no mention of what life was actually

like in a modern socialist society that existed in recent memory. Beginning to understand everyday lived socialism on its *own terms*s a first step in filling in the blind spots regarding what "other worlds" are possible and what they actually look like. What follows is an attempt to write a history of everyday life in socialist East Germany beyond *Herrschaft*.

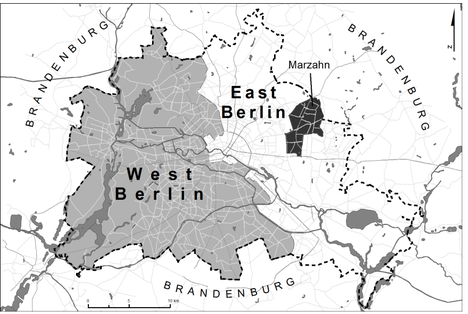


Figure 2: Map of Berlin-Marzahn. Courtesy of Jason Glatz, Western Michigan University Mapping Services.

In 1982, Gabriele Franik and her husband drove from central East Berlin to the vast *Plattenbau* construction site in Marzahn, a rural district on the northeast edge of Berlin. They were hoping to see their new apartment in what had become the single largest housing settlement in all of Europe. Eight months pregnant with twins, Gabriele had been

Figure 3: Sebastian and Daniel Diehl in front of their new WBS 70 building, Allee der Kosmonauten, Marzahn, 1984. Courtesy of Barbara Diehl.

on prescribed bed rest, but was so excited to see this new world and the place in it for her and her family that she could not resist. She recalled the experience of entering this completely new world, a world still in the process of becoming: "[My husband] drove and drove. We emerged into a giant construction site: our way was lined with construction cranes. Newly begun *Plattenbauten* stood everywhere. There were no streets to be seen anywhere. Mountains of sand towered, a gigantic wasteland of mud; nowhere was there a tree, or even a shrub" (Franik, 80). When she got to their apartment, on the second floor of a WBS-70/11 model prefabricated apartment block on Ludwig-Renn-Strasse 43, her enormous stomach making it difficult to walk, the socialist future suddenly became a real, material space:

> *My heart was in my throat with excitement; my knees shook as I left the car and we walked up to the second floor together, the building still smelling of cement and paint. My husband opened the door to our new apartment and […] a giant empire appeared, with enough room for five family members. Central heating, warm water from the wall, and a six-meter-long balcony! This is what happiness looks like. We fell into each other's arms, euphorically. (79-80)*

The Franiks were among over 400,000 East Germans who would come to live in Marzahn and the connected *Plattenbausiedlungen* of Lichtenberg, Hohenschönhausen, and Hellersdorf between 1977 and 1990. Marzahn was built as the centerpiece of a larger campaign by the East German state, the Housing Program (*Wohnungsbauprogramm*), which aimed to build or renovate three million modern dwellings for East Germans by 1990 to eliminate the persistent shortage of adequate housing that had afflicted East Germans, the German working class in general, and Berliners in particular since the 19th century. By the time the GDR collapsed, its Housing Program had built two million apartments and renovated another one million, and almost five million East Germans (28 percent of the population) lived in prefabricated housing settlements such as Marzahn (Rubin, *Amnesiopolis* 29-31). Most of these—650 to be exact—were built on the outskirts of cities, ranging from a few thousand residents to 90,000 residents; examples include the Fritz-Heckert settlement outside Karl-Marx-City, the Grünau settlement outside Leipzig, and the Nordwest settlement outside Rostock (Rubin, *Amnesiopolis* 160-63).

These settlements were mostly identical apartment blocks, repeated in rows in varying patterns, which were constructed using prefabricated, steel-reinforced concrete panels assembled on site by three-shift assembly lines of workers. However, they were not intended by the East German state and its ruling party to be mere housing. The Housing Program was itself the central pillar of the most important legacy of East German leader Erich Honecker's regime, which lasted from 1971 until 1989, officially called the "Unity of Economic and Social Policy." Often referred to in shorthand as "real existing socialism," it was a massive effort to bring the "good life" to socialist citizens (see Steiner; Bouvier). Until Honecker took power in 1971 from aging leader Walter Ulbricht, life in socialist East Germany had mostly consisted of promises of a deferred utopia. "As we work today, so we will live tomorrow" was a favorite slogan of the party in the 1950s and 1960s (Merkel 121). While the regime focused on building up its heavy industry, collectivizing farms, and investing in prestige projects such as Alexanderplatz, the TV tower, and the Palace of the Republic in East Berlin, it ignored the needs of ordinary citizens in the realm of consumer goods and social needs such as childcare, infrastructure, and, above all, housing.

As of 1971 most East Germans lived in dwellings that were inadequate, with two-thirds built before 1918 and the majority of those from the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s. One-third had no running water, which increased to two-thirds in smaller towns; only one-third had an indoor toilet. In Berlin the problem was especially acute; since the rapid expansion of Berlin after the unification of Germany after 1871, it had become infamous for its slum apartments, called "rental barracks," which were cramped, dark, and expensive. Tens of thousands could find no affordable housing at all, instead living on the streets and in shantytowns outside the city. Because of economic depression, the war, and the low priority of housing policy during the 1950s and 1960s, East Berlin continued to resemble the "misery quarters" of the 19th century. In other words, in terms of lived everyday experience, little had changed for workers, even though the GDR was supposed to be the "Workers' and Peasants' State." Yet by the 1970s a new generation was coming of age, born after the war, hoping to start a new life and yet unable to find adequate housing, making inadequate and unavailable housing by far *the* leading topic of citizen *Eingaben* (complaint letters) addressed to the government. By 1970, the state estimated that 90,000 people in East Berlin were unable to find housing at all, often young married couples still sharing a small living space with their families (Peters and Seifert 17). Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev first called for his Soviet comrades—and the leadership of other communist nations—to pay attention to the completely inadequate housing in communist countries, especially in light of the postwar boom of mostly suburban housing in the US and various modern housing developments in Western European cities, such as the *Villes Nouvelles* ("new towns") in France, the "New Towns" in Britain, and prefabricated housing settlements in West Germany such as Gropiusstadt, Märkisches Viertel, or Neu Perlach. Specifically, he wanted communist nations to build housing "better, cheaper, and faster" (Khrushchev), leading to a boom in prefabricated housing settlements across the Soviet Bloc, from Nizhny Novgorod in the USSR to New Belgrade in Yugoslavia, Nowa Huta outside Krakow, or Ujplata outside Budapest.

Yet the problem facing the GDR was not simply that citizens lived in inadequate circumstances while the promise of a socialist utopia had raised their expectations; it was that the history of capitalism—and fascism, as the rise of Nazism had played out in these streets—was inscribed into the very physical spaces that made up these old neighborhoods. They were, literally, the product of capitalist logic—East German officials even referred to the old slum neighborhoods as "the capitalist legacy" (*das kapitalistische Erbe*). They could be renovated, but because they were built to cram in as many residents as possible, the only way to make them conform to a baseline of adequacy and modernity—an *Existenzminimum*—would be to *reduce* the total available living units in order to increase the average living space within each unit. This meant that the housing crisis was *built into* the city structures by the system that built the city—capitalism. To solve the housing crisis, and thus to finally break free of the capitalist legacy, socialism would have to build a new physical space, not just new housing but a new city, from scratch. The plan for Marzahn, developed in 1974-75 at the behest of the SED's Politburo, under the leadership of Günter Mittag,[11] was not only to build housing but to build an entire, self-contained city, with every conceivable need in life mapped out, rationally, in advance: not only apartments, but schools, shopping centers, athletic and recreation facilities, communal spaces, health clinics, public transportation, etc.

These guidelines were enshrined into East German law a year later in 1976 (Gesetzblatt Sonderdruck 195).

The plan for Marzahn was to create an entirely new socialist city, a monument to "real existing socialism" in concrete. The plan borrowed heavily from modernist urban planning concepts—especially those of Le Corbusier—that emphasized apartment towers separated by large swaths of green space and oriented to allow maximum sunlight and fresh air for residents while also reducing the intermixing of pedestrian and automobile traffic. No school or nursery/preschool (called *Kindergarten-Kinderkrippekombinat* or "KiKo"), health clinic, sports/recreation center, or public transit stop could be more than 600 metres from any residence. The new town contained fourteen large and thirteen small school gymnasiums (*Schulturnhallen*) and eleven school sports facilities, which included tracks, soccer fields, volleyball areas, and smaller athletic fields. Another eleven sports recreation facilities were to be built for adults. One of these was to be a central stadium with 5,000 seats. Other planned social facilities included a home for troubled youths (*Heim für Jugendhilfe*), which also had to be no more than 600 metres from a polytechnic high school (Magistrat Berlin 30-32); three pharmacies; up to nine retirement homes/hospices, each seven stories (Peters 107); a central supply depot for gardeners; a music school with a rehearsal studio; an open-air theatre with enough capacity to hold large festivals, including the appropriate facilities for food and drink; and a youth hostel (Magistrat Berlin 30-33). Later, the Politburo mandated that four churches (Catholic and Lutheran) be added to the plan, all from prefabricated concrete, with a starkly modern and minimalist design (Bezirksmuseum Marzahn 126-30).

Figure 4: View from the Diehls new apartment, Allee der Kosmonauten, 1983. Courtesy of Barbara Diehl.

Each district had restaurants, milk bars, cafes, dance halls, pubs, service shops (*Dienstleistungen*, denoting repairs, auto mechanics, etc.), a cinema, a public swimming pool and sauna, and so on. There were even plans to make a bobsled run (*Rödelbahn*) and bunny ski hill out of the artificial mountains created by the enormous amount of earth—two million cubic metres (Peters 103)—displaced by the construction of this entirely new city ("Vorflut Kanal" 2-3). There were also senior living centers, youth hostels, and a youth group home. In short, it was what planners described as a *heile Welt*—a holistically planned and self-contained world. On paper, Marzahn looked like the Utopia that socialism had longed promised. It was also a world fully detached from the old spaces defined by the bygone fascist and capitalist eras, at least in terms of how it appeared to the senses.

However, once people began to inhabit this new space, it was no longer just a blueprint or a space, but rather a "socio-spatial dialectic" (Soja 76-94). The crucial point is not just what Marzahn *looked* like, but what life was *actually* like there. For many, it was obviously a significant material upgrade in living standards, which remained little better than they had been in the 19th century. This was true, for example, for Elisabeth Albrecht, a librarian who lived in a crumbling and damp one-room apartment in Berlin's old tenement district of Friedrichshain, where the ventilation was so bad she and her nine-year-old son Steffen suffered from high levels of carbon monoxide fumes, a situation so common in East Berlin it was known to many simply as "Berlin conditions" (Marin 81). For Albrecht, moving to a two-bedroom, fully modern apartment in a WBS 70/11 block with a ninth floor, gorgeous view of the Brandenburg plains stretching out to the east was obviously a significant upgrade. It was also the case for Barbara Diehl, who lived in a cramped and dark one-room "rental barrack" apartment in Friedrichshain with her husband Rolf and young son Dieter, with no warm water or heating. For them, moving to a three-bedroom apartment in 1980 on the Allee der Kosmonauten ("Cosmonaut Street"), in time for their second son, Sebastian, to be born was a serious upgrade in material living standards (Diehl), as it was for almost everyone who moved to Marzahn.

Figure 5: Marquardt family on first day of school, 1982, Marzahn. Courtesy of Evelyn Marquardt.

The move meant a new beginning for themselves and their families. For Diehl, it meant being able to have a marriage again—Dieter and Sebastian could have their own rooms and she and her husband some privacy. Not only that, but Dieter, who had had problems making friends and being ostracized at his old school in Friedrichshain, seemed to be more accepted in his new school, where none of the kids knew each other previously and his mother could see his school yard from her balcony, watching him slowly begin to make friends during outdoor recess (Diehl). Albrecht, like other residents, helped plant trees along the outside of her building, and for her both the new tree she planted and the new apartment she and her son now occupied, represented literally and figuratively putting down new roots in new soil. She even learned to measure the passage of time in terms of both the tree—as it reached close to her balcony—and her growing son, who graduated from high school and moved away: "but in the meantime, the poplar that I planted during those days [when he was a child] has reached all the way to me, almost growing into my window. It is now 21 years old" (36).

The move to Marzahn also meant a chance to create a new community. Most buildings in Marzahn and in the GDR had a communal building association (*Hausgemeinschaft*, HG), usually run by a five-person leadership committee (*Hausgemeinschaftsleitung*, HGL) elected by the building residents. Marzahners recall their HGLs as having organized a good deal of the buildings' social life: summer parties outside on the greenways with grills and beer (Wormbs 18); Carnival (*Fasching*) parties every February in the communal rooms included in the WBS 70 buildings (Wormbs 18); festivals on International Children's Day (Albrecht 38); and Advent celebrations for the senior citizens (Weber 41). *Namensgebung* and *Jugendweihe*—secular ceremonies intended to replace baptism and confirmation, respectively, widespread in the earlier working-class left-wing milieu and commonplace in the GDR—were frequent occasions (Wohnbezirksausschüss 103-4), as Marzahn had the highest concentration of children of any other single district in the entire country (Niederländer 2). So too were coming home ceremonies for young men completing their mandatory military service (Ladwig 78) or charity events coordinated with quasi-state charitable organizations such as the *Volkssolidarität* (Bezirksmuseum Marzahn 121) and the Society for German-Soviet Friendship. Sometimes, the HGL would throw parties just for fun and everyone was invited, even those who had been shirking their volunteer commitments, as Jasper Oelze recalled: "The vibe was great, and we had lots of fun" at these events (Bezirksmuseum Marzahn 121). Jutta and Joachim Kretzschmar agreed: "When it came to communal festivals, it didn't matter if you had helped clean the stairwell or not, every doorbell was rung. There were a few people who organized it all […] we had a cook in the building, as well as the director of the shopping mart, and that was reason enough to throw a party" (Verein Kids & Co. 54). Karin Hinkel remembered the residents of the twentieth floor where she lived having spontaneous parties:

> *Overall, we partied a lot. Never planned it, just did it. We'd meet up in the hallway on the twentieth floor, and that's how it would start. Everyone brought a chair, and with the kids we'd do something for Carnival (Fasching), or we'd organize dance parties for the older kids (jugend-*

liche Diskos). Or, right in front on the greenway, there would be kids' parties, sometimes in conjunction with the school nearby. And there would be a lot of baked treats. There was a real sense of togetherness and sociability (geselliges Zusammensein) in the building. (Bezirksmuseum Marzahn 121)

The HGL also was the main conduit for larger programs, such as *Mach Mit!* ("Join In!"). This nationwide program, run by the National Front, encouraged residents to beautify and landscape their buildings' communal areas and neighborhoods. This work was part of the 25 annual hours of communal service (*volkswirtschaftliche Masseninitiativen*—VMI) required of all East Germans (Betts 145). In Marzahn, residents participated in *Mach Mit!* by helping to landscape the grounds around their buildings, which were mostly still mud and dirt churned up and packed down by the tens of thousands of construction workers who had just recently moved on to the next building in the row. For many Marzahners, participating in *Mach Mit!* was one of their foundational experiences of moving to the *Plattenbau*. Torsten Preußing recalled that one of his earliest memories of moving into Marzahn was seeing a placard posted by his building's communal association in the lobby: "Tomorrow topsoil is coming. All men outside, with shovels in hand!" "It worked," Preußing remembered. "We stood there [the next day], and we spread out the topsoil. And we designed the garden in front of our building ourselves. It was a time which can be described with a phrase that was often thrown around back then: 'From 'I' to 'we'" (17-18). Klaus Hölgermann recalled the *Mach Mit!* days as a kind of foundational myth, with honest labour yielding a well-deserved reward:

The residents were ready to join in. One didn't need a lot of convincing. The tasks were organized here, in the building. On this or that day, for example in May, it would be announced: "In fourteen days we're getting bushes and trees delivered. You are to see to it that they are planted." And it worked. We got started at eight in the morning, and we worked straight through to 11:30am. And when we finished something, we went and grabbed a case of seltzer, or two, and also perhaps a crate of beer. It was all work, sweat, and beer! (Bezirksmuseum Marzahn 119)

Through these shared experiences, residents of the *Plattenbausiedlung* experienced a strong sense of communal trust and community. Ingeborg Hämmerling described her memory of the community in Marzahn:

The renters were blue-collar and white-collar workers, and intellectuals, although these intellectuals had come originally from the working class, taking advantage of the many educational opportunities they had, as I had in earning my degree in economics. So, there was no division into social classes. And we residents took over responsibility for maintaining the building and the landscaping, and for upholding order and security in the building, including observing the fire code. […] With us, the professor lived next to the cleaning woman, and we all used the informal form of address (Du). […]

The residents absolutely supported their duty to take care of the living area. We maintained the apartment, the building, the landscaping in the front, and we made sure all the kids in the building were respectful of the property. Because all the residents were employed, including women and young adults, the communities in these buildings were not environments where petty criminality, drug addiction, vandalism, or a seedy atmosphere could take root. Outside of a few cellar break-ins, I don't recall any criminality at all. (3)

This was not just a case of viewing the past with rose-coloured glasses. In the 1980s, Loni Niederländer of the Humboldt University's Institute for Marxist-Leninist Sociology found that most families in Marzahn had close relationships with between three and five other families, with only 14 percent of the residents having no close relationships with any other residents. Two-thirds of the residents reported that they would leave their key with at least one neighbor, and in the five-story WBS buildings the atmosphere was even more trusting—95 percent reported they trusted their neighbors enough to leave a key with them (28). Marzahners, like East Germans in general, tend to feel that this sense of communalism and collective trust has been severely eroded since 1989. As Marzahner Wilfried Klenner put it, "this us-feeling is gone today. Now, there are borders, which didn't used to be there" (38).

It was true that these Marzahners lived within an environment that had definite traces of the influence of the state's security policies and forces. For one, there were a number of families in which one or both parents worked either for the armed forces, the SED, the police, or the Stasi (though there was a separate *Plattenbausiedlung* a little further to the west, in Lichtenberg, where most Stasi families were settled).

Figure 6: WBS 70 buildings in Marzahn, 1984. Courtesy of Bezirksmuseum Marzahn-Hellersdorf, e.V.

One of the amenities of the new WBS 70 buildings was a central antenna, with a control box in the basement making it difficult to receive West German TV signals (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, Gemeinschaftsantennenanlagen 1); in any event, the tall concrete buildings often interfered with the airborne signals (Domnitz 42). The Stasi had an interest in Marzahn, in part because there were so many well-connected people there (and thus people with access to sensitive information, for example) but they were especially interested in learning how prefabricated buildings were built so as to maximize their ability to observe residents (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, Dokumentation; Rubin, *Amnesiopolis* 139-45).

These were undeniable facets of life in the GDR. Yet the reality of life in this new socialist city presented a paradox of sorts. On the one hand, residents built a close-knit community based in almost every conceivable way on socialist principles, or at least a kind of socialist communalism. There was a strong sense of trust, social cohesion, and a collective and egalitarian identity. Marzahners, and East Germans in general, were joiners—they frequently belonged to organizations, whether the state labor union (FDGB), *Volkssolidarität* ("Peoples' Solidarity," a state-supported national charity organization), the National Front's local committees, HGLs, parent committees (*Elternaktiven*), committees or "brigades" at their workplaces, and so on. In many ways, these conformed to the ideology of the state, for example, the widespread adoption of *Jugendweihe* instead of Christian confirmation.

On the other hand, most Marzahners seemed to have little allegiance to the higher organs of the state. Many were SED party members and showed little hesitation to admit this membership, or even the fact that they were truly committed ideologically. Yet when it came to the memories that shaped the narratives of their lives in Marzahn, interaction with the national SED played little role. Although many of them participated in communal activities supported by the state—many of the HGs received their budget from the National Front—they did not particularly dwell on that relationship. For example, those buildings that did the best *Mach Mit!* work were awarded a cash prize and an official plaque, the "Golden House Number," which was could be affixed to the front of the building entrance; many winning buildings took only the cash and discarded the plaque, as Wilfried Klenner recalls (37). Similarly, according to Niederländer's study, 72 percent of Marzahners had no idea who their National Front *Volkskammer* representative was, and 50 percent responded that whoever they were, they were totally useless. At the same time, a large majority of Marzahners had a strong interest in the activities of the communal association, with 84 percent reporting interest in helping with celebrations and festivals and 67 percent reporting interest in helping with VMI labour (such as *Mach Mit!*) (Niederländer 27).

If we approach this history in search of how power or *Herrschaft* functioned, we do indeed find ample cases of power. After all, the initial impetus for my research in Marzahn was to examine how spaces created by the state were used to subtly control citizens. Nostalgia presents an undeniable bias for some former East Germans who contrast the present unfavorably with the past. Yet there is substantial bias the other way, in terms of the overall framing of GDR research that precedes the formulation of research questions and problematics. Trying to understand any historical era or experience on its own terms is also highly fraught and problematic. Indeed, historians over a century ago saw their task as understanding the past *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist* (as it actually was)—an uncritical acceptance of objectivity, scientific thought, and positivism that over 30 years of post-structuralist critique has deconstructed. This essay is not suggesting a return to uncritical positivism in researching the GDR. Instead it is suggesting an attention to the gaps and contradictions between the memories and experiences of historical subjects and the discourses of historians and their institutions and texts. It is especially arguing for a critical reflection on the political and meta-historiographical dynamics and conditions that created these gaps. Doing so can open up new spaces for new questions and new debates. Above all, we should move away from an endless and tautological search for *Herrschaft* in studying the GDR.

What would moving away from search for state power in everyday life entail? This essay has suggested that such a shift might begin with taking the functioning of socialism in everyday life on its own terms, rather than a reflection of some kind of power dynamic. Perhaps in a political-economic climate in which alternatives to neoliberal capitalism are actively being discussed, in which there is a real yearning for a nebulous "other world," the lived experience of socialism in East German *Plattenbausiedlungen* can help fill in what that alternative might look like. Furthermore, perhaps moving away from *Herrschaft* and into a study of East German socialism as a form of everyday life on its own terms may lead to other directions of research. Until we leave behind the tendency to weigh every facet of life in East Germany on the scale of *Herrschaft*, we will not be able to open up spaces for new questions and debates.

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Image Notes

Title Image (Figure 1): Children in Marzahn. Courtesy Bezirksmuseum Marzahn-Hellersdorf, e.V.

Figure 2: Map of Berlin-Marzahn. Courtesy of Jason Glatz, Western Michigan University Mapping Services.

Figure 3: Sebastian and Daniel Diehl in front of their new WBS 70 building, Allee der Kosmonauten, Marzahn, 1984. Courtesy of Barbara Diehl.

Figure 4: View from the Diehls new apartment, Allee der Kosmonauten, 1983. Courtesy of Barbara Diehl.

Figure 5: Marquardt family on first day of school, 1982, Marzahn. Courtesy of Evelyn Marquardt.

Figure 6. WBS 70 buildings in Marzahn, 1984. Courtesy of Bezirksmuseum Marzahn-Hellersdorf, e.V.

Endnotes

1 In addition to works already mentioned, see also: on the USSR, Mark Smith, *Property of Communists: The Urban Housing Program from Stalin to Khruschev* (Northern Illinois UP, 2010), Steven Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street: Mass Housing and Everyday Life After Stalin* (Johns Hopkins UP, 2013), and Christine Vargas-Harris, *Stories of House and Home: Soviet Apartment Life during the Khrushchev Years* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2015); on Poland, Katherine Lebow, *Unfinished Utopia: Nowa Huta, Stalinism and Polish Society, 1949-56* (Cornell UP, 2013); on Hungary (as well as East Germany), Virág Molnár, *Building the State: Architecture, Politics and State Formation in Postwar Central Europe* (Routledge, 2013); on Yugoslavia, Brigitte Le Normand, *Designing Tito's Capital: Urban Planning, Modernism and Socialism in Belgrade* (U of Pittsburgh P, 2014).

2 For a small sampling, see: Lothar Mertens, editor, *Unter dem Deckel der Diktatur: Soziale und kulturelle Aspekte des DDR-Alltags* (Duncker & Humblot, 2003); Ulrich Weissgerber, *Giftige Worte der SED-Diktatur: Sprache als Instrument von Machtausübung und Ausgrenzung in der SBZ und der DDR* (Lit, 2010); Dorothea and Michael Parak, editors, *Opfer und Täter der SED-Herrschaft: Lebenswege in einer Diktatur* (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2005); Gary Bruce, *Resistance with the People: Repression and Resistance in Eastern Germany, 1945-1955* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003); on dictatorship, Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism: Plastics and Dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic* (U of North Carolina P, 2008); Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR* (Arnold, 2002); Mary Fulbrook, editor, *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961-1979: The 'Normalisation of Rule'?* (Berghahn, 2009).

3 A catalogue search in Germany will turn up more than 150 titles on the 1953 uprising alone, with hundreds more studies to be found in other places. A small sampling: Roger Engelmann and Ilko-Sascha Kowalczuk, editors, *Volkserhebung gegen den SED-Staat: Eine Bestandsaufnahme zum 17. Juni 1953* (Ch. Links, 1996); Kowalczuk, *17. Juni 1953, Volksaufstand in der DDR: Ursachen, Abläufe, Folgen* (Timmermann, 2003); Hubertus Knabe, *17. Juni 1953: ein deutscher Aufstand* (Propyläen, 2003).

4 A good introduction to this topic is Martin Sabrow et. al., editors, *Wohin treibt die DDR-Erinnerung? Dokumentation einer Debatte* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007). This publication is a documentation of the "Sabrow Commission," tasked in 2005-06 by the federal government with reporting on and creating recommendations for how best to fund and manage the official memory of the GDR. It caused a firestorm of controversy for recommending that more attention be paid to the everyday life history of ordinary East Germans along with the continued spotlight on the repression and dictatorial nature of the GDR. For examples of those vehemently opposed to any nuanced consideration of everyday life in the GDR, see Hubertus Knabe, *Die Täter sind unter uns: über das Schönreden der SED-Diktatur* (Propyläen, 2007); Manfred Agethen, Eckhard Jesse, and Ehrhart Neubert, editors, *Der missbrauchte Antifaschismus: DDR-Staatsdoktrin und Lebenslüge der deutschen Linken* (Herder, 2002); Vera Lengsfeld, "Das DDR-Bild der westlichen Linken: Eine Polemik," *Ostalgie International: Erinnerungen an die DDR von Nicaragua bis Vietnam*, edited by Thomas Kunze and Thomas Vogel (Ch. Links, 2010), pp. 211-19.

5 For example, see Thomas Lindenberger, editor, *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur: Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Böhlau, 1999), especially his introduction entitled "Diktatur der Grenzen"; for a more recent work, see "SED-Herrschaft als soziale Praxis, Herrschaft und 'Eigen-Sinn:' Problemstellung und Begriffe," *Staatssicherheit und Gesellschaft: Studien zum Herrschaftsalltag der DDR*, edited by Jens Gieseke (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), pp. 23-47, and his *Volkspolizei, Herrschaftspraxis und öffentliche Ordnung im SED-Staat 1952-1968* (Böhlau, 2003). For a small sampling of works with *Herrschaft* as their primary framing, see Martin Sabrow, *Geschichte als Herrschaftsdiskurs* (Böhlau, 1999); Stefan Wolle, *Die Heile Welt der Diktatur: Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR 1971-1989* (Ch. Links, 1998); Alf Lüdtke and Peter Becker, editors, *Akten. Eingaben. Schaufenster. Die DDR und ihre Texte. Erkundungen zu Herrschaft und Alltag* (Akademie, 1997); Patrice Poutrus, *Die Erfindung des Goldbroilers: Über den Zusammenhang zwischen Herrschaftssicherung und Konsumentwicklung in der DDR* (Böhlau, 2002); Heiner Timmermann, editor, *Das war die DDR: DDR-Forschung im Fadenkreuz von Herrschaft, Aussenbeziehungen, Kultur und Souveränität* (Lit, 2004). On the earlier work done by Lüdtke on *Herrschaft*, see Lüdtke's introduction to his edited volume *Herrschaft als soziale Praxis* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991) and his introduction to his edited volume *"Sicherheit" und "Wohlfahrt": Polizei, Gesellschaft und Herrschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Suhrkamp, 1992).

6 Some examples: Andreas Ludwig, editor, *Fortschritt, Norm und Eigensinn: Erkundungen im Alltag der DDR* (Ch. Links, 1999); Ludwig with Katja Böhme, editors, *Alles aus Plaste. Versprechen und Gebrauch in der DDR* (Böhlau, 2012); Dorothee Wierling, *Geboren im Jahr Eins: Der Jahrgang 1949 in der DDR: Versuch einer Kollektivbiographie* (Ch. Links, 2002); Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton UP, 2006); Sandrine Kott, *Communism Day to Day: State Enterprises in East German Society*, translated by Lisa Godin-Roger (U of Michigan P, 2014); Josie McClellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge UP, 2011); Heather Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism: Television and the Cold War in the German Democratic Republic* (U of Michigan P, 2014); Scott Moranda, *The People's Own Landscape: Nature, Tourism and Dictatorship in East Germany* (U of Michigan P, 2013); Monika Sigmund, *Genuss als Politikum. Kaffeekonsum in beiden deutschen Staaten* (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014); Judd Stitziel, *Fashioning Socialism: Clothing, Politics and Consumer Culture in East Germany* (Berg, 2005).

7 This ability of the term *Herrschaft* to encompass different viewpoints became clear early in the development of GDR historiography. See Lüdtke, "'Helden der Arbeit'—Mühen beim Arbeiten. Zur mißmutigen Loyalität von Industriearbeitern in der DDR," *Sozialgeschichte der DDR*, edited by Hartmut Kaelble, Jürgen Kocka, and Hartmut Zwahr (Stuttgart, 1994), pp. 188-216, as well as Kocka's contribution to that volume, "Eine durchherrschte Gesellschaft," pp. 547-54. Both of these are among the most cited and referenced essays in the field of GDR history, although they represent different viewpoints.

8 Lutz Niethammer (who pioneered the field of everyday life history and oral history and was one of the few western historians to be allowed to work in East Germany before 1989) also makes this point in an interview with the *tageszeitung*, May 12, 2006, cited here in Sabrow, *Wohin treibt die DDR-Erinnerung*, 208-9 [see note 4].

9 There has been important scholarship done on this phenomenon of official and unofficial memory of GDR everyday life, more so in English than in German. In English see Jonathan Bach, "Collecting Communism: Private Museums of Everyday Life under Socialism in the Former East Germany," *German Politics and Society* 114, vol. 33 no. 1-2, Spring/Summer 2015, pp. 135-45, and Bach, *What Remains: Everyday Encounters with the Socialist Past in Germany* (Columbia UP, forthcoming 2017); in German see Thalia Gigerenzer, *Gedächtnislabore: Wie Heimatmuseen in Ostdeutschland an die DDR erinnern*, translated by Christa Krüger (Be.Bra, 2013).

10 See www.wendemuseum.org and its recent major publication: Justinian Jampol, editor, *Jenseits der Mauer / Beyond the Wall* (Taschen, 2014).

11 Mittag's role was extensive in creating the Housing Program and specifically the Marzahn project. See Bundesarchiv (BArch) Stiftung Archiv Parteien und Massenorganisationen (SAPMO) DY 2838 (Büro Günter Mittag), "Wohnungsbau in Berlin, Bd 4, 1972-73," pp. 345-47, "Entwicklung des komplexen Wohnungsbaues in der Hauptstadt der DDR, Berlin, für die Jahre 1976-1980."

ADVENTURES IN COMMUNISM: COUNTERCULTURE AND CAMP IN EAST BERLIN

JAKE P. SMITH

Abstract | *This essay examines the encounter between Western countercultural groups and the urban landscape of East Berlin in the years immediately following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Focusing on squatted houses, the underground techno scene, and experimental art projects, the essay argues that countercultural groups who were active in East Berlin in the early 1990s developed a peculiar set of practices that were characterized both by their campy aesthetics and by their temporal indeterminacy. The essay posits that these experimental temporal practices were only possible due to the layered historicity of urban space in the dilapidated, inner-city neighbourhoods of East Berlin.*

Résumé | *Cet essai étudie la rencontre entre les groupes contre-culturels Occidentaux et le paysage urbain de Berlin-Est suite à la chute du Mur de Berlin en 1989. A travers une analyse des squats, de la scène techno « underground » et des projets d'art expérimental, l'essai soutient que les groupes contre-culturels actifs dans le Berlin-Est du début des années 1990 ont développé un ensemble de pratiques caractérisé à la fois par leur esthétique maniérée et leur indétermination temporelle. L'essai avance que seule l'historicité imbriquée de l'espace urbain dans les quartiers pauvres et dilapidés du Berlin-Est a rendu possible ces pratiques temporelles expérimentales.*

I. Space and Place in East Berlin

In the months and years following the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, Berlin became something of a laboratory for the German nation, a space in which urban planners, politicians, activists, and artists could experiment with new constellations of what it meant to be German at the end of the tumultuous 20th century. However, as the debates surrounding the Potsdamer Platz, the Palace of the Republic, and the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin as well as similar discussions surrounding the Frauenkirche in Dresden and historic architecture in Leipzig clearly illustrate, the attempt to remake the nation through the built environment was a highly contentious process.[1] This was especially true in reunification-era Berlin, a city that anthropologist Wolfgang Kaschuba described as "open, undefined, transitory," a space that, in the wake of the fall of the Wall, suddenly found itself without fixed points of social, cultural, and political reference (235). On the one hand, the indeterminacy that characterized Berlin's urban landscape generated deep feelings of unease stemming from a widespread fear that Germans would be unable to find "a common symbolic grammar" through which they could begin to reestablish the bonds of mutual belonging (Kaschuba 235). On the other hand, many groups experienced the openness of Berlin, and especially East Berlin, in these years as a form of liberation. Indeed, in the early 1990s, leftist activists and countercultural groups from across Europe descended on East Berlin neighbourhoods such as Mitte, Friedrichshain, and Prenzlauer Berg, where they squatted in hundreds of buildings, organized illegal techno parties, and opened experimental art galleries, thus transforming the dilapidated urban landscape of these neglected areas into some of the late-20th century's most cutting-edge environments for experimental cultural production. In the early 1990s, East Berlin was, against all odds, the place to be.

Why, though, were West German countercultural youth, and eventually alternative youth from across the globe, so enamored with East Berlin? What led them to imagine the crumbling landscapes of "real existing socialism" as preeminent locales for adventure, play, and experimentation? Drawing from arguments developed by Hans-Liudger Dienel and Malte Schophaus, we might conclude that the unique affective power of these neighbourhoods stemmed primarily from their lack of placeness, their resistance to the auratic power of the nation. According to this reading, the affective emptiness of these neighbourhoods made them ideal locations for countercultural life. As "wastelands," they were exciting because they "offer[ed] empty spaces where behaviour [was] not so defined by dominant culture" and where youth could appropriate and transform the landscape for their own purposes (133). While true to a certain extent, this narrative places the locus of creativity almost entirely in the experimental practices of the counterculture, thus implying that equivalent forms of artistic experimentation would have arisen in any similarly empty urban setting. Alternatively, drawing from cultural critics such as Andreas Huyssen, we might posit an interpretation in which the empty houses, the crumbling façades, and the obsolete environmental markers were attractive precisely *because* of their historical qualities.[2] As locations that bear visible traces of a different past, the empty spaces of Mitte could serve as authentic refuges from the unsettling temporal velocity of the present, as bunkers where one could resist the modern injunction to "melt into air." East Berlin, in this interpretation, was a living museum, a space where disaffected groups from across the world could escape into nostalgic enclaves of romanticized authenticity.

Both of these arguments—that urban spaces such as Mitte functioned as wastelands in which youth were free to experiment with alternative subjectivities and that these spaces provided access points to what was felt to be a more authentic past and thus served as refuges from the vicissitudes of modernity—are valuable but insufficient tools for understanding the peculiar excitement generated by the urban landscape of *Wende*-era East Berlin. The anthropologist Anja Schwanhäußer offers an alternate explanation for the lure of East Berlin in her essay "The City as Adventure Playground" and her book *Kosmonauten des Undergrounds: Ethnografie einer Berliner Szene*. According to Schwanhäußer, historically resonant spaces in the city created a unique atmosphere in which participants in techno subcultures could organize events that celebrated the pleasures of the here and now. The urban landscape, in other words, facilitated novel subjective experiences that both drew from the affective power of historical spaces and superseded them. Although convincing in many respects, Schwanhäußer's ethnographic account of the Berlin techno scene fails to fully elaborate on the reasons why the historically resonant spaces of East Berlin proved to be such attractive atmospheres for youth subcultures.

In the pages that follow, I extend Schwanhäußer's arguments by suggesting that the effervescent buzz surrounding *Wende*-era East Berlin cannot be attributed either to a decontextualized unfolding of countercultural fantasies in an empty urban wasteland nor to the inherently auratic qualities of historically resonant spaces. Instead, I argue that the urban landscape of East Berlin facilitated the development of new temporal practices by giving residents and visitors free reign to transgress the borders between the past, present, and future.[3] The cultural theorist Phillip Wegner makes a similar argument in his discussion of Rem Koolhaas's engagement with the Berlin Wall, arguing that, in the wake of November 1989, the area surrounding the Wall became "a heterotopia, open to a range of possible 'symbolizations/historicizations,' a place, in short, wherein history might move in a number of very different directions, and thus once again become the site of collective political struggle" (Wegner 291). This is not to suggest that East Berlin's urban landscape was devoid of historical markers. Quite the contrary: it was littered with the fragments of world historical ideologies and the shattered dreams of utopias past. Rather than determinative, all-encompassing temporal structures, though, these materially encoded pasts existed in a state of simultaneity, in what—drawing from the historical theorist Reinhart Koselleck—we might think of as "temporal layers" [*Zeitschichten*]. The peculiar landscape of East Berlin, marked as it was by the fractured material remains of what historian Eric Hobsbawm has termed "the age of extremes,"

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came to serve as something of a historical theme park where disaffected youth from around the world could dance with the ghosts of the dead, where they could creatively dwell in the material traces of lost lifeworlds and, in so doing, escape once and for all from the oppressive temporalities of the 20th century. East Berlin offered spaces in which countercultural youth could recreate themselves as time-traveling bricoleurs, adventurous explorers who felt as if they had the power to intervene in and transcend the flow of historical time, to live dangerously at the edge of meaningful existence. This essay thus argues that East Berlin—with its wealth of symbolically laden spatial ruins and its discarded material accouterments of world-historical ideologies—served as the perfect setting for the emergence of a new corpus of experimental temporal practices (evident in music, performance, video art, and club culture), which I will read as a form of historically oriented "camp consciousness." Before moving into a discussion of camp, however, it is worth dwelling for a moment on the ways in which countercultural groups themselves described life in the urban landscape of East Berlin, an area they affectionately referred to as "the Zone."

II. The Zone as a Space of Adventure

Long after the champagne bottles had been cleaned from the streets and the eager East German crowds had spent their welcome money, the *Wende* retained a magical quality for the autonomous and countercultural left. Throughout these months, tens of thousands of protesters took to the streets in colourful costumes; new tenements were squatted daily; techno parties like the famous *Tekknozid* events proliferated in empty buildings and abandoned factories; and activists from East and West Germany came together in the streets and squares to discuss their visions for the utopian future. According to Jochen Sandig, youth at the time felt as if they "were in a realm of possibilities where dreams could come true. [They] encouraged, inspired and challenged each other. For a brief and precious moment, different rules applied" (qtd. in Fesel and Keller 55).

Clip 1: Sag niemals nie. *Dir. Kollektiv Mainzer Strasse, 1991.*

This sense of unbounded optimism is clearly evident in one of the opening scenes from the 1991 film *Sag niemals nie* (*Never Say No*) in which the viewer is initially confronted with a ruined, almost otherworldly landscape of crumbling buildings in East Berlin. Dramatic ambient music intensifies the feeling of post-apocalyptic gloom as the camera pans across the desolate landscape. Suddenly an upbeat guitar riff cuts through the existential dread and a whimsical Peter Pan figure skips across the screen. The scene then immediately shifts into one of joyful exuberance and infinite possibility, a Neverland replete with crowds of people in the streets, figures rappelling down the front façades of crumbling buildings, festivals, groups of punks repairing apartments, graffiti-covered walls, fantasy, effervescence, life. In another film from the period entitled *Petra Pan und Arumukha: Der Traum von ordentlichen Anarchisten* (*Petra Pan and Arumukha: The Dream of Orderly Anarchists*), a similar Peter/Petra Pan figure appears again, nonchalantly skipping across the landscape and stopping from time to time to spray-paint a number on a wall, representing the number of squatted buildings in the city. At one point we even see Petra spray-paint the number 1000, thus indicating the belief that this time around the "movement" was unstoppable, that anarchist youth were ready to take over the world.

Not only did activists find in East Berlin an almost limitless number of venues in which to realize their dreams, they also found a world that was itself utterly fantastical. Writing about his experiences at clubs and in squatted buildings in Mitte in 1989-90, Anton Waldt noted:

> *[Y]ou just walked over—and suddenly you were in the Zone! Museum village East Berlin: an orphaned area, sparsely settled, the stock of abandoned apartments, buildings, and factories was inexhaustible […]. The temporary anomaly of East Berlin was not just endlessly exciting, but also obviously part of something much bigger. A crazy person [who lived in the squatted apartment facing the street] developed a theory that the TV tower at Alexanderplatz was at the center of a particle accelerator for time travel. (Waldt 128)*

Similarly, another participant in the scene, Danielle de Picciotto, noted that entering East Berlin "was just like some of [her] favorite children's books where a person could just open a door and enter an entirely new world" (qtd. in Denk and von Thülen 109). This fantasy landscape was not, however, merely an Alice-in-Wonderland-style inversion of normal life; it was a world that seemed frozen in multiple different times at once. It was the long 20th century in the form of a miniature. Not only did buildings in neighbourhoods such as Mitte exude a sense of the Prussian past, they also bore visible traces of the Jewish residents who lived there prior to the rise of Hitler, of spring 1945 when the Red Army took Berlin, and of the 40 years of socialism. This layered historicity of the urban environment was not lost on the new residents. According to Henner Merle, for example, "there was a tangible sense of history. We were in the exact spot where all these events we'd only previously read about had taken place. On the one hand it was slightly oppressive, but on the other hand it opened up entirely new perspectives for us to view the present" (qtd. in Fesel and Keller 101). Walking through the rubble-strewn streets of the "Zone," in other words, was akin to entering an uncanny Neverland, a strange combination of Peter Pan and the *Planet of the Apes* where the urban landscape represented both a utopian alternative to the present and an unsettling reminder of the troubled past.

The underground techno parties of 1989-90, in particular, helped to facilitate these adventurous journeys through the landscapes of the past. In their foreword to a collection of interviews on the Berlin techno scene of the early 1990s, Felix Denk and Sven von Thülen write:

> *Suddenly there were all of these spaces to discover: whether a tank chamber [*Panzerkammer*] in the dusty no-man's-land of the former death strip or a bunker installation from the Second World War, whether a closed soap factory on the Spree or an electric substation across from the former Reich Aviation Ministry—all of these spaces, which had been made obsolete by recent history, were suddenly the scenes of dancing and music, which was reinvented on almost a weekly basis. (Denk and von Thülen 9)*

Discussing their discovery of one such locale, the founders of the widely renowned Tresor club in Berlin Mitte expressed their amazement at the tangible traces of the past that emanated from the space, which had served as the bank vault for the old Wertheim Department Store in the years prior to its Aryanization in the 1930s. Johnnie Stieler, an East Berliner and one of the club's founders, noted: "This was probably what if felt like to discover some Aztec treasure. None of us could even speak. We just walked around silently with our lighters" (qtd. in Denk and von Thülen 139). Techno DJ Terrible remembered how Tresor's founders were constantly joking that they had found a tunnel leading to the subterranean Führer bunker where Hitler committed suicide (qtd. in Denk and von Thülen 141). Kati Schwind, remembering her first encounter with the space, noted that one "could feel [its] history" (qtd. in Denk and von Thülen 148). Dmitri Hegemann—who had founded the Ufo club in West Berlin in the late 1980s and helped to organize the Atonal Festivals in the early 1980s—called it "magic." Feeling as if "the walls were talking to [him]," he couldn't help but to think "about the life stories behind them, about the joyful moments and the family tragedies" (qtd. in Künzel's film).

The buildings, it seems, were whispering secrets from the past, bearing witness to the lives of those who had lived and worked there, to the countless Berliners whose futures had been cut short by the Nazi regime. They were both archeological sites where one could uncover the mysteries of lost lifeworlds and sacred access points to the buried nightmares of the German past. Although perhaps the most famous, Tresor was far from the only club in East Berlin that exuded a sense of the past. In discussing his experiences in the experimental music space in the basement of the squatted art complex known as Tacheles, for example, Ulrich Gutmaier described the scene as follows: "a laser beam crossed through the club from left to right. Like a finger pointing to the future, which touched a history that seemed to have stopped in 1945 when Berliners spent their nights in the air raid shelters waiting for the Red Army" (12). The Tacheles, and Mitte more broadly, was an "open wound," a historical wormhole that "catapulted you into the immediate postwar period" (27). This time around, though, the postwar turned out to be fun, without a doubt, but also immeasurably strange—an exotic, adventurous trip through the uncanny. Reminiscing about an incident in which squatters in Mitte found mummified corpses in one of the buildings and then brought them into the living room, Gutmaier writes:

> *[E]ven the dead were for a brief moment part of the everyday. They dwelled in the same space as the living. It was a Carnival*

where the low and the high switched places. One did not need to have mummies in the living room in order to see the death and the destruction of the city. One was reminded of it in front of every door. East Berlin was full of remains. Every stroll through the streets took you by ruins, wastelands, faded inscriptions that advertised products and stores that haven't existed in fifty years. Their owners were all long dead. (57)

In another similarly odd instance, the squatters at the Bergstrasse, which was infamous in the leftist scene for housing members of the sexually experimental (and, in many cases, abusive) Indianerkommune, unearthed a 100-year-old corpse from the Sophien Cemetery in Mitte, supposedly to use in some sort of sinister, satanic ritual. According to an official quoted in the *Berliner Zeitung*, "the gravestone, pieces of bones, the cross, and the corpse had been arranged as if for an occult meeting" (qtd. in Palmer). With its domesticated corpses, particle accelerators, occult rituals, ruins, and, of course, its futuristic techno soundtrack, "the Zone" was indeed a strange place, ripe for historical adventure and countercultural exploration. There was, however, a method to this madness, one which in the following section I argue we think of as a fundamentally campy form of temporal transgression.

III. Counterculture as Camp

According to Susan Sontag, camp is a mode of perception that revels in the unnatural and the artificial, that "sees everything in quotation marks" (280). "The whole point of Camp," Sontag argues, "is to dethrone the serious. […] More precisely, camp involves a new, more complex relation to 'the serious.' One can be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious." She goes on: "Camp—Dandyism in the age of Mass Culture—makes no distinction between the unique object and the mass-produced object. Camp taste transcends the nausea of the replica" (288-89). Unlike universalist discourses that apotheosize their own values as abstract universals and thus misrecognize contextual specificity as decontextualized truth, and unlike nationalist discourses that recontextualize such abstractions within the overarching geographical, temporal, and racial frameworks of the nation, camp problematizes the relationship between singularity and replication by transforming all fixed definitions into performances, placing everything in quotation marks, and refusing to consistently differentiate between the serious and the frivolous, the natural and the artificial. It is important to note, however, that camp is not necessarily ironic. Indeed, whereas irony aggressively uncovers the constructed nature of social phenomena from an ostensibly objective critical vantage point, camp rejects the very possibility of such an objective locus of critique. Rather than attempting to extricate itself from the inauthentic, camp revels in the interstitial spaces between reality and representation.

Although Sontag does not go into great detail about the relationship between camp and temporality, she does note at one point in the essay that as a creator of distance, time can increase the campiness of an object, arguing that "things are campy, not when they become old—but when we become less involved in them, and can enjoy, instead of be frustrated by, the failure of the attempt" (285). Temporally oriented camp consciousness, then, is a way of relating to past objects and narratives in which one neither dismisses them as irrelevant remnants of bygone times nor regards them as all-determinative patterns of experience. The past, like the present, is constructed—it is "real" but only within its own historical conditions. Objects and places that are saturated by the past are thus simultaneously authentic/auratic and constructed. Adopting this campy perspective on the past allows its practitioners to simultaneously dwell within the concrete spaces of the real and transcend them altogether. The past becomes a series of masks which one can put on and take off at will while still recognizing them as contextually embedded realities. Michel Foucault makes a similar, if ultimately more nihilistic, point in his discussion of genealogical history writing: the critical, genealogical historian "will push the masquerade to its limit and prepare the great carnival of time where masks are constantly reappearing. […] Taking up these masks, revitalizing the buffoonery of history, we adopt an identity whose unreality surpasses that of God, who started the charade" (94). Campy perspectives on the past, in short, allow people to come to a more objective, distanced understanding of historical contingency, even as they induce an experience of transgressive joy stemming from the vertiginous occupation of multiple different temporalities at the same time.

This is a useful way for thinking about the unique scenario that arose in the eastern sections of Berlin in 1989-90. As the overarching temporal frameworks of socialism crumbled, they both left behind a diverse array of discarded and disconnected fragments in the form of Lenin statues, Red Army uniforms, Trabis, abandoned buildings, consumer goods, furniture, and photo albums, *and* revealed a layer of Nazi-era historical remains, which the conquering youth armies of Kreuzberg, Hamburg, Freiburg, Amsterdam, London, New York, and Tokyo could collect and reconfigure into magical tools for traveling through time and space. In navigating the fractured temporal landscape of East Berlin, activists mobilized this form of historically oriented camp consciousness in order to assume a more "authentic," more anchored, identity by dwelling within the embedded, auratic objects of the past. It also allowed them to transcend such temporally and contextually specific modes of existence altogether, to travel adventurously through the layered sediment of lost lifeworlds. Instead of attempting to create new abstractions by re-anchoring these fragments of shattered pasts into some preexisting, overarching narrative of historical progress, the cultural anarchists of the *Wende*—primed by over a decade of regenerative cultural fantasies that had been kept alive through the small-scale activism of the *Autonomen* (unaligned, anarchist activists) and through the cultural products of new wave movements such as the Neue Deutsche Welle—used these traces of the past to a create a cosmology of campy experience, an identity that was both real and simulated, rooted and rootless. The interstitial spaces that emerged during the *Wende* functioned as the necessary stages upon which the practitioners of countercultural camp arranged the talismanic objects and belief systems of utopias past. In so doing, they managed to both call attention to the underlying historicity and contextual specificity of putatively ahistorical ideologies *and* forge a new sense of self—a campy mode of existence in which the adventurous subject stood at the threshold between undefined, interminable expansion through time and space and contextual subjective coherence. Camp, in short, allowed its practitioners to dwell in the ecstatic spaces of the "betwixt and between."[4]

Clip 2: The Battle of Tuntenhaus. *Dir. Juliet Bashore, 1991.*

Perhaps a few examples are in order here. In a particularly outrageous performance at the Mainzer Strasse *Tuntenhaus*—a notoriously kitschy locale replete with "curtains in the windows and any number of pretty pictures on the walls, and frilly candle holders and pink chiffon around the lamps" (qtd. in Arndt 45)—a group of men, some of whom were dressed in drag, donned Free German Youth (FDJ) uniforms as they sang socialist songs and waved the East German flag in front of a raucous and appreciative crowd (Bashore). One might reasonably look on this episode merely as an indication of the countercultural left's terrible taste, but it is difficult to deny the truly astounding nature of the performance. Here we see a group of (presumably) western autonomous activists in drag, wearing uniforms from an East German youth organization, all the while illegally occupying a building in the heart of East Berlin, which at that point was still the capital of the GDR—a historical carnival indeed! The actors and the audiences in these campy performances occupied a position of extraordinary power. In the interstitial spaces of the squatted landscape, they took centre stage in the reconfiguration and rescaling of ideological totalities and created new forms of oppositional sociability that were premised on campy misappropriations of volatile episodes from the German past. This was historical pastiche as subjective liberation, a campy masquerade ball that mocked time itself.

In another example from the Mainzer Strasse, squatters mocked the legacy of the West German left by holding a dinner party at which the attendees, most completely naked save for their ski masks, sat down for coffee and cake at the famous table from the late 1960s Kommune I in West Berlin, which they had previously stolen from the offices of the *tageszeitung*.[5] In a flyer announcing the fact that the table was stolen, entitled "Be wild and do awesome things!" and signed by the "Central Committee of the Roving Hash Rebels," they wrote: "This table is a social-revolutionary relic and has for a long time had no business being with you. You have nothing to do with social or revolution" (Zentralrat der umherschweifende HaschrebellInnen). The editors of the *tageszeitung* promptly responded in an article with the comparatively underwhelming title "Give the table back!" in which they angrily wrote: "The table has served the antiauthoritar-

Fig. 1: Mainzer Strasse squatters standing beside the Kommune 1 table they previously stole from the tageszeitung *newspaper. Umbruch Bildarchiv Berlin.*

ian and leftist movements over the past twenty-one years ten times more than it will a group of West-squatters in an East Berlin house" ("Gebt den Tisch zurück!"). The editors of the *tageszeitung*, it seems, were clearly not in on the joke.

The mystical, pagan-inspired practices associated with the far right were also campily incorporated into the squatted urban landscape of East Berlin. In a flyer entitled "Germaneninfo Nr. 1" from August 1990, the authors initially conformed to the established patterns of a formulaic self-introduction. They began by noting that they were a group of Westphalians who wanted to convey their ideas to the public. These ideas, however, were far from typical. They included: "the retention of archaic shamanism […] the conservation and protection of magical places of worship and hallucinogenic plants […] complete information against collective stultification [*Verdummung*] and the creation of a creative chaos—using all media from computers to telepathy" (18). This same group also submitted a video to AK Kraak, which opened in a wilderness setting with people in leather jackets and jeans methodically building a phallic shrine atop a spiritually significant rock formation. After a few minutes a naked man emerges from the nearby pond and begins drinking from a skull while another semi-naked man discusses the politics of squatting, the healing power of the sun, and the fascist misappropriation of mysticism. Contributing yet more absurdity to the scene, a cat scrambles to remain perched on the speaker's almost naked body, eliciting pained breaks in the mystical soliloquy as well as peals of laughter from the camera crew (AK Kraak, *Magazin #3*).

Clip 3: Video Magazin # 3. *Dir. AK Kraak, 1990.*

In another particularly telling instance, the electronic musician and club pioneer Daniel Pflumm transformed the name and the damaged aesthetic of the sign on the electrical shop he squatted into the label "Elektro," which he then put on t-shirts, records, and advertisements for his events. This tactic of ostentatiously incorporating aesthetic traces of the German past into the squatted landscape was quite common in these years. Indeed, other locales such as Farben, Friseur, Obst & Gemüse, and WMF also assumed the buildings' names in East Berlin that they had illegally occupied. For Ulrich Gutmaier, such aesthetic appropriations of socialist culture were a "stroke of genius" since a "damaged logo is more seductive than one that is intact because it conveys a sense of ephemerality." He goes on to argue that Pflumm's logo for Elektro managed to "compress a particular time and a particular place into one sign" (193-94). In other words, Pflumm and his colleagues combined the fragments of the past with what they envisioned to be the sounds of the future in order to produce new constellations of experience in the present.

Other countercultural activists went well beyond the incorporation of aesthetic traces of the GDR and, like the squatters at the Mainzer Strasse Tuntenhaus, began incorporating material objects from the socialist past into their everyday lives. Some used the abandoned objects of socialism as fashion accessories; Marco Bölke, for example, remembered taking protective helmets and masks from an abandoned factory to create clubbing costumes (qtd. in Denk and von Thülen 170). Similarly, Ulrich Gutmaier recounted a particular instance in which a group of squatters were thrilled to find a box of hats from the East German children's circus that they could use in their own performances (107). Others took furniture to decorate their clubs, bars, and homes (Denk and von Thülen 108). Bastian Maris happily remembered how he and his friends drove by the Humboldt University every Wednesday to pick through the refuse of "forty years of GDR history in the form of scientific equipment," which they then installed as art pieces at the Glowing Pickle, one of a number of experimental art galleries that popped up in the Scheunenviertel in the early 1990s (qtd. in Fesel and Keller 184). The group of artist provocateurs connected to the Mutoid Waste Company took this proclivity for exhibiting the abandoned objects from the socialist past to new heights when they displayed tanks and even abandoned jet fighters throughout the city. Refusing to abide by accepted temporal frameworks and to respect the borders of historical epochs, the activist-artists of this period thus took part in an effervescent carnival of history, a transgressive reenactment of multiple temporalities at once.

The musical practices associated with techno were also important elements in this campy reconfiguration of the past. According to Dmitri Hegemann of the Tresor club, historically saturated venues such as the Tresor generated "a sense of astonishment at the real history of the building [that] went hand in hand with the pleasure of appropriating the locations. […]. History had washed up this space at your feet, and now it was a matter of making it your own somehow" (qtd. in Rapp 63). The repetitive beats and pell-mell sampling associated with techno proved to be a particularly useful tool for making the past one's own. Music, according to the theorist Simon Frith, is one of the preeminent media for experimenting with time: it "enables us to experience time aesthetically, intellectually, *and* physically in new ways. […] Music, to put this another way, allows us to stop time, while we consider how it passes" (149). He goes on to argue that musical performance "offers us not argument but experience, and for a moment—for moments—that experience involves *ideal time*, an ideal defined by the integration of what is routinely kept separate—the individual and the social, the mind and the body, change and stillness, the different and the same, the already past and the still to come, desire and fulfillment" (157). Writing about the proclivity of current music to reenact the past, Simon Reynolds makes a similar argument concerning the nature of recording and sampling. As "ghosts you can control," he argues, recorded music "is pretty freaky, then, if you think about it. But sampling doubles its inherent supernaturalism. Woven out of

looped moments that are each like portals to far-flung times and places, the sample collage creates a musical event that never happened; a mixture of time-travel and séance" (313). As a musical form that consists of fast beats and sampled quotations from other musical genres and from everyday life, techno fits these descriptions well. It enabled dancers and musicians to reorganize the rhythms of the body and of the location into a collective algorithm for experiencing and experimenting with space and time.

Reminiscing about his experiences in these years, David Wagner, a participant in the scene, wrote:

> *Once upon a time, Berlin-Mitte was a wish-fulfilment zone […]. Mitte was a frenzy of repurposing. The magic phrase was "temporary use." Jet fighters abandoned by a retreating superpower managed to become monuments in the very heart of the city. And the names of the new occupying forces? Art and amusement. Empty streets, crumbling façades—was the war still on? Or had it perhaps not even taken place here? Didn't everything look like the 1920s, didn't it all look like a film set? […]. It was so easy to be amazed. Mitte had dropped out of time—and was stuck in several different pasts at once. Pre-war and pre-pre-war, partly GDR and partly some strange inbetween-era where once again Germany had ceased to exist but its new version hadn't actually come about yet. Mitte was in a gap. It became the magic city of the inbetween. It became a wish-fulfillment zone, everything was possible. There was dancing. There was dancing and drinking. And the eyes of the ruin-dwellers sparkled with the happiness of those who are in the right place at the right time […]. It was tremendous in the rubble, it was a gigantic playground. (5)*

This unique combination of the unsettled temporal landscape of East Berlin with the transgressive cultural forms developed by Western countercultural groups gave the "Zone" its extraordinary affective power and made life in the rubble so shockingly tremendous. In spaces such as Tresor, Tacheles, Elektro, Friseur, and the Mainzer Strasse, countercultural youth could travel through various historical epochs and dwell within the world-historical ruins of crumbled utopias and, in so doing, they could both undermine the putative inevitability of temporal progression and joyfully transgress the boundaries of time. Much like the participants in the youth movements of the early 1980s, the anarchists of the *Wende* felt themselves to be "the fleeting mercenaries of humor, […] the world bandits, driven by the wonderful essence of the unreal, drunk and living in the here and now" (Vidon 305). In 1989-90, anarchism reigned supreme in Berlin once again.

IV. An End and a Beginning

Yet once again, the chaos and anarchism of these years fell victim to the world's harsh realities. Indeed, the efflorescence of campy experimentation met a serious roadblock with the brutal eviction of the Mainzer Strasse squatters in November 1990. The chain of events leading to the eviction of the Mainzer Strasse commenced on November 12th, as activists gathered to protest the clearance of the Pfarrstrasse 112 and the Cotheniusstrasse 16.[6] The situation quickly escalated over the following days as masked activists from across northern Europe—and, if the authorities are to be believed, particularly from the Hafenstrasse squat in Hamburg—built barricades in the streets, threw rocks and Molotov cocktails from rooftops, and adamantly refused all demands that they vacate the area. Thousands of police officers moved in on the morning of November 14th and, after hours of violent conflict with squatters and their supporters, successfully took control of the street. In the wake of the eviction, in which numerous people were injured and almost 350 arrested, many reacted with anger, sadness, and disbelief. Whereas conservative city officials depicted the events as mere criminality and argued that the Mainzer Strasse residents "manifested an appalling rejection of all the peaceful values that constitute our society" (Senatsverwaltung für Inneres 2), others harshly criticized police violence and state duplicity. An essay written in the wake of the eviction, for example, noted: "the fact that leftist and antifascist literature was destroyed, reminds us of bygone times and throws a large shadow on your supposed 'understanding of democracy'" ("Herr Momper, Herr Mendiburu!"). Many of the neighbourhood residents joined the critical chorus with some claiming that the police actions were reminiscent of fascist times and others lamenting the fact that without all of the squatters, the Mainzer Strasse was once again "damned gloomy" (qtd. in Engwicht and Engwicht 5).

In the wake of the Mainzer Strasse eviction, the boundless optimism and the campy anarchism of 1989-90 began receding into the background. Following the "Müsli" strategy of the early 1980s, a number of squatters shifted their focus towards developing alternative lifestyles within the squats and securing long-term rental agreements.[7] Activists in Mitte even looked into the possibility of following the example set by squatters in the early 1980s by securing *Paten* (sponsors) in order to insure "that the squats can remain as cultural and social food for thought [*Denkanstoss*]" (Form Letter to Potential Paten). Others followed the pattern of the "Mollis" by abandoning countercultural infrastructure in favor of ever more radical modes of violent opposition.[8] In the Volxsport declaration, "Klarheit für Berlin" ("Clarity for Berlin"), for example, the authors noted that they "deglassed" the SPD offices and desecrated those of the Alternative List. They then reproduced statements of solidarity from cities throughout Germany and Europe. One statement from Hannover seethed: "Our hate is boundless. We know that it is not just about Berlin but about all of the squatted buildings and centers, and about all those who are involved in the fight" (Volxsport 10). A solidarity declaration from Italy entitled "A Fire Unites Us" noted:

> *[A] line of fire and revolt against the ruling classes has erupted, against their banks, their cities, and their decisions. It is a fire that leaves marks, a fire that unites us and above all our indestructible joy and anger to fight, to destroy the linchpins of the imperial society, to weave a network of oppositional forces and to work our way along the path of liberation. (Volxsport 12)*

Employing the violent rhetoric of the *Autonomen*, they argued that the battle must be taken to new heights, that Berlin represented one small theatre in the increasingly global conflict between Us and Them. Although it lies beyond the scope of this essay, it is safe to assume that many of the more radical activists of these years subsequently shifted their attention to the anti-globalization movements of the late 1990s and 2000s such as the 1999 Carnival against Capitalism, the anti-G8 protests in Genoa in 2011, and the recent Blockupy protests in Frankfurt/Main.

The eviction of the Mainzer Strasse may have signaled a nascent split in the countercultural left of the *Wende* period, but it was far from the end of the campy cultural forms that rose to prominence in these years. Just as the West German youth movements of 1980-81 left an indelible mark on the culture and the politics of the 1980s, so would the campy activism of 1989-90 fundamentally transform the cultural landscapes of 1990s Berlin. Indeed, those who experienced the Neverland of East Berlin in the months and years after the fall of the Wall are still leading groups of eager pilgrims back to the future. They come from London, New York, Tokyo, and Barcelona in search of the city's oft-touted alternative atmosphere. After making a quick pass through the city's official sites such as the Brandenburg Gate and the Museum Island, they flock to the techno clubs, art galleries, street cafes, and cultural centres to experience the *Rausch* (intoxicating electricity) of Berlin.

Some of the main venues for experiencing the effervescence of the idealized Berlin are the techno clubs that stubbornly cling to the city's landscape. Indeed, whereas many of the illegal squats were cleared (or legalized as alternative housing) in the early 1990s, the techno clubs remained open spaces. According to Anton Waldt these clubs represented "states of exception" that bore "striking similarities" to the "energy, intensity, [and] brutal pathos" of the three-day long battle over the Mainzer Strasse. The Tresor club, Waldt goes on to argue, was premised on a radical sense of inclusion. Indeed, the dance floor was a point of subjective "intersection," which, at times, seems like the "navel of the whole damned universe" (130). Located in an old industrial building near the River Spree, the Berghain offered similar experiences:

> *[It was the] birthplace of memories, Heimat for drag queens, shelter for the insane […] and the residence of atmosphere […]. No one who entered Berghain could ever forget the moment when they moved from the steel steps to the dance floor. The spirit was palpable in the entire Berghain that here everything was possible. […]. The moments in Berghain were always enormous. The feelings were too intensive to be real. You didn't know whether you had landed in the middle of hell or heaven. You just constantly transgressed your own boundaries and when you finally came out into the old world, you needed days to work through everything that you had done, seen, and heard in these twenty hours. (Aire 187-88)*

At times, the dancefloor ecstasies spilled out onto the streets and began to resemble political protests. Writing about the Love Parade, in which tens of thousands of Berliners and visitors danced their way through the streets, Slavko Stefanoski noted that "it was a movement, a philosophy of life. We were living at the center of the world" (qtd. in Gutmaier 207).

Although techno clubs are certainly among the most popular locations for experiencing the uniquely campy subjectivities associated with fin-de-siècle Berlin, they are far from the

only such venues. Describing a peculiar bar named Sniper, for example, Andreas Busche writes:

> *The Sniper knows no beginning and no end: a loop that one can enter and leave like a video installation in a museum. The club as temporal medium. […]. On a screen in the back of the shop the most bizarre video collages were running every evening: news clips, B-movies, pornos, carpet bombs over Baghdad, obscure music clips from 3rd generation VHS, everything cut together, chopped up, superimposed, reassembled, looped, stretched into eternity. [These loops] put the audience into a moronic [*debilen*] trance-like state. (171-173)*

Added to all of this was a "nerve inducing sound […] an unrelenting muzak of Euro-Disco, gabbers, classical, white noise, Asian plastic pop, easy listening, and trashy film dialogues. Plunderphonics."[9] Despite all of this, "the chaos had its method, every object had its place" (171-73). As the aesthetics of the Sniper bar illustrate, the camp consciousness developed by the urban countercultures during the *Wende* is not only far from extinct, it seems to be an all-pervasive mode of alternative expression in post-unification Berlin and, increasingly, in experimental youth scenes from London and New York to Tokyo and Seoul.

Performance art, especially in and around the formerly squatted apartments and cultural centers of the eastern sections of the city, also remained an important vehicle for initiating curious onlookers into the peculiar rites of anarchist camp. Visitors to the increasingly fashionable neighbourhoods of Berlin-Mitte in the late 1990s, for example, would likely have been struck by the absurd activities taking place in and around the formerly squatted building on Auguststrasse 10, better known as the Kultur und Leben (Culture and Life) Project, or KuLe. The slogans painted outside of the building read: "Destroy what," "Resistance requires," and "are pigs"—all of which were comically incomplete versions of popular political slogans from the squatting movement of the early 1990s. The resident artists created a wide variety of subversive theatre performances.[10] For example, in one piece entitled "Moths in the Light," two artists from Prague problematized the relationship between public and private spaces by engaging in an intimate, acrobatic dance on the outer scaffolding of the building, thus transforming the façade of the house into a "vertical stage" for the "public performance of private intimacy" (Rada). Another project, entitled "Catwalk," also played with the borders between public and private by projecting scenes from inside of the building onto the outer façade such that onlookers could, in a sense, see through the walls.

V. Camp, Capitalism, and "Profane Illuminations"

Whereas alternative tourists visiting Berlin tend to find such experimental cultural forms highly appealing, a number of leftist critics in the city have called attention to the urban counterculture's troublesome lack of political perspectives. Uwe Rada, for example, published an article in the *tageszeitung* in which he was simultaneously amused and perturbed by these performances: "where does the space of self-irony end, and where does seriousness begin" (Rada)? The author of a shorter article accompanying Rada's piece was much less ambivalent, acerbically noting that the "Tacheles is now nothing but a ruin of its former self and simply waits to be cleared. There are hardly any more political impulses coming from the squats," and the only thing remaining of the once politically powerful squatting movement in Berlin, the author concluded, was "Art, commerce, fashion" (wera). Joining a long and illustrious line of leftist critics ranging from Jürgen Habermas and Rudi Dutschke to Wolfgang Kraushaar and Bernd Rabehl (who was well on his way to becoming the voice of right-wing nationalism that he is today), these commentators thus dismissed the anarchist absurdity and campy cultural forms of the counterculture as apolitical, unreflective tools of capitalism. Indeed, in much the same way that the ideologues of the 1970s had laughed off the counterculture, and just like the Müslis and their supporters in the mid-1980s had dismissed the absurd experimentation and outrageous anarchism of the non-negotiators, so again did the "serious" leftists of the mid-1990s deride the irrational performances and hedonistic dance parties as counterproductive and fundamentally narcissistic harbingers of gentrification and commerce. As Andreas Huyssen has perceptively noted, "the left's ridiculing of postmodernism" should be considered as part and parcel of its "often haughty and dogmatic critiques of the counter-cultural impulses of the 1960s" (Huyssen, "Mapping" 199).

To a certain extent, these critics have a point. Late-20th and early-21st-century Berlin is indeed a hip locale of art, commerce, and fashion, a "creative city" to which artists, musicians, and alternative tourists flock for inspiration.[11] This has not escaped the notice of place marketers within the city who have sought to capitalize on Berlin's particular appeal for the global youth market by explicitly championing the city's clubs, nightlife, and creative art scene.[12] A 2009 brochure from the Berlin Partner's marketing group, for example, noted: "Here you can be whatever you want [because] Berlin is the place to be for individuality" (qtd. in Colomb, *Staging the New Berlin* 239). Nor has it escaped the notice of property developers throughout the city who have attempted to capitalize on Berlin's reputation for hipness by enthusiastically "flipping" desirable properties in neighbourhoods such as Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg. The alternative spaces of Berlin are, so it seems, slowly being incorporated into the urban landscape as the unique quirks of a "creative city," as the unwitting pawns of commodity capitalism. For Marxist geographers such as David Harvey, this incorporation of urban difference into strategies of capital accumulation would come as no surprise. Indeed, in his essay "From Space to Place and Back Again," Harvey argues that political projects based on oppositional identities are "easily dominated by the power of capital to co-ordinate accumulation across universal fragmented space" (24). As an alternative, Harvey, like many other Marxist critics, calls for a mode of oppositional place construction that refuses to succumb to the dangers of, on the one hand, romanticizing place as the locus of authentic being and, on the other hand, propagating a naïve belief in the innate progressivism of mass culture, subjective fluidity, and endless becoming. The only solution, it seems, is for the countercultural left to ground its anarchist cultural practices in a more responsible, more serious form politics.

It is undoubtedly true that the experiential transformations wrought by the countercultural anarchists of the *Wende* period have contributed to the expansion of consumer capitalism. The countercultural activists of the late-20th century and the cultural objects they produced have indeed largely reentered the profane world of exchange values and circulating commodities. Yet the fact that one can purchase an album or pay to enter a club does not, I would argue, neutralize the experimental spatial and temporal visions that have been encoded into these objects and spaces. Commerce and atmosphere, certainly. But commerce and atmosphere need not be seen as necessarily anathema to revolutionary shifts in perception and experience. Far from leading to their immediate neutralization, the commodification of these peculiar, utopian anarchist practices can serve as a vehicle, a Trojan horse, for spreading the regenerative, campy temporalities of 1989-90 to ever larger audiences around the world. They can serve as catalysts for moments of what, drawing from Walter Benjamin, we might call "profane illuminations," moments at which we realize that the temporal structures that define our everyday lives are themselves largely illusory, that the world is open and that it can thus be changed.[13] Although these fleeting moments of illumination might not be in-and-of-themselves revolutionary acts, they can pave the way for political transformation by serving as "stepping stones to 'another reality'" (Unverzagt 11).

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Clip and Image Notes

Clip 1: *Sag niemals nie*. Dir. Kollektiv Mainzer Strasse, 1991.

Clip 2: *The Battle of Tuntenhaus*. Dir. Juliet Bashore, 1991.

Clip 3: *Video Magazin # 3*. Dir. AK Kraak, 1990.

Fig. 1: Mainzer Strasse squatters standing beside the Kommune 1 table they previously stole from the *tageszeitung* newspaper. Umbruch Bildarchiv Berlin.

Endnotes

1 On urban restructuring and its discontents, see among many others Bodenschatz; Colomb, *Staging the New Berlin*; Holm; Holm and Kuhn; Strom; and Vasudevan. On the politics of memory in relation to Berlin's urban spaces, see Huyssen, *Present Pasts*; Jordan; Ladd; Meng; Rubin; Till; and Young. For an overview of the debates in these years, see Geyer.

2 On the temporal crisis of the late-20th century and its relationship to urban space, see Huyssen, *Twilight Memories*, as well as the essays in Hell and Schoenle.

3 Although I focus here on the role of Western countercultural groups, it is important to note that similar impulses emerged in the East. See, for example, the excellent set of essays in Felsmann and Gröschner. See also the discussion of late Soviet experimental artistic practices in Yurchak.

4 On this concept see Turner.

6 These squats were targeted because both had been occupied after July 24th, the date at which the Magistrat of East Berlin declared no new squats would be tolerated.

7 *Müslis* (granolas) refers to activists in the early 1980s West German squatting movement who advocated for a de-escalation of violence, for a compromise with the city administration, and for individual rather than collective leases.

8 *Mollis* (Molotov cocktails) refers to the activists in the early 1980s squatting movement who refused to negotiate with the city administration and advocated for violent resistance to any attempts to evict the squatters.

9 On the concept of "plunderphonics" and similar experimental music genres like "hauntology" and "echo jams," see Fisher; and Reynolds.

10 For a discussion of this mode of subversive theatre, see Vasudevan.

11 See, for example, Bader and Scharenberg; Heinen; Lang; and Novy.

12 See, for example, Colomb, "Pushing the Urban Frontier"; Stahl; and Stevens and Ambler.

13 See Cohen; and Buck-Morss.

ARCHIVES FOR THE FUTURE: THOMAS HEISE'S VISUAL ARCHEOLOGY

TOBIAS EBBRECHT-HARTMANN

Abstract | *Visual media played a crucial role on nearly all levels of everyday private and public life in the GDR. This essay intends to readjust the focus on GDR visual history by investigating its margins, including ephemeral and semi-official film archives beyond the "official" state-controlled production of images. It does not reexamine such ephemeral cinematic remnants as historical sources but rather as traces that have to be understood in context and appropriated, arranged, and re-read, assembling them as fragments of the past. The specific focus here is on the works of Thomas Heise, a filmmaker who—although prohibited from producing and publicly releasing films during the existence of the GDR—managed to create during that time various audio and visual artifacts as contributions to archives for the future.*

Résumé | *En la RDA les médias visuels ont joué un rôle crucial dans presque tous les domaines de la vie quotidienne, qu'elle soit privée ou publique. Cet essai a pour but de réajuster le focus sur l'histoire visuelle de la RDA en examinant ses marges, en incluant les archives éphémères et semi-officielles au-delà de la production "officielle" d'images. Cet essai ne réexamine pas ces vestiges cinématographiques éphémères en tant que sources historiques, mais comme des traces devant être comprises dans un certain contexte, approprié, arrangé et re-lu. Cette discussion sur les traces cinématographiques éphémères ainsi que les techniques d'assemblage de fragments du passé explore l'oeuvre de Thomas Heise, un réalisateur unique dans son genre qui – bien qu'il soit interdit de produire et de mettre en circulation publiquement des films sous le régime de la RDA – a créé pendant ce temps des artefacts audios et visuels comme contributions aux archives pour l'avenir.*

Title Image: Remnants of postponed futures from Material; still from Material. Dir. Thomas Heise, Germany 2009. DVD Edition Filmmuseum 56, 2011.

Born in 1955, Thomas Heise belongs to what has been called the GDR's first generation, born and raised under socialism. His father, Wolfgang Heise, was a well-known professor of philosophy at the Humboldt University, a member of the GDR's intellectual "nobility" whom dissident poet Wolf Biermann praised as the only real philosopher in the GDR. After graduating from secondary school, Thomas completed a traineeship in a printing factory and, following the obligatorily military service, he began working as an assistant at the state-controlled DEFA film studios. From there he was delegated to study at the GDR's state film school in Babelsberg during the late 1970s and early 1980s. However, after the school's film production committee rejected one of his student films and severely criticized and then banned his follow-up projects, Heise left the school before finishing his studies and was prohibited from producing and publicly releasing any films. In the centralized and highly controlled GDR cultural sphere, this meant he had to seek alternative places to realize at this point his creative vision.

The possibility of working with dramatist and theater director Heiner Müller at the Berliner Ensemble theatre in East Berlin provided Heise with just such a space; he started working there in 1987, during the last phase of the GDR's existence. According to Heise, he received a Panasonic MV 5 VHS camera from a West German film producer who had planned to make a documentary about Müller (Heise, "Arbeit" 272), which enabled him to collect visual material during the GDR's last years. As Müller's assistant he began observing and recording scenes at the theatre and documented social and political changes in East German society. Combined with other remnants of various film projects, Heise later gathered this footage in his film *Material* (2009). "Something's always left over," he states in the opening sequence of this film, echoing Heiner Müller's dictum on "lonely texts waiting for history" (Müller 187). The voice over continues: "Remnants that don't work out. So images lie around waiting for a story." *Material* gathers these fragmented remnants of GDR history and develops strategies for making them readable in the present. In this sense, many of Heise's projects since the fall of the Berlin Wall have focused on the status of films as archives and on archived films. His interest in these films lies not in their capacity to reveal otherwise missing knowledge about East German society but rather as testimony to potential and unrealized futures in the GDR, at least in the case of his own work. His methods of archiving and his archived films present aspects of political and social life that were mostly invisible in official visual records, even in those East German films and documentaries that attempted to communicate hidden and coded messages about social reality. As a result, these unfinished or locked-away movies are archives for the future, a collection of rejected, banned, and lost fragments that had a delayed entry into the GDR's visual memory, after the country and its regime had disappeared.

Meanwhile Heise has become a renowned documentary filmmaker who has produced nineteen films in the past twenty-five years. Footage for five of them had been shot in the GDR but was never publicly screened. In addition to *Material*, which contains some of the footage that Heise shot between 1987 and 1991, these films include: *Wozu denn über diese Leute einen Film?* (*So Why Make a Film about These People?*), made in 1980 but publicly shown only after 1990; *Das Haus 1984* (*The House 1984*) and *Volkspolizei 1985* (*The People's Police Force 1985*), both released in 2001; and *Der Ausländer* (*The Foreigner*, 1987) about Heiner Müller, which was finished in 2004. The first film that contained footage from the 1980s was *Vaterland* (*Fatherland*, 2002), and already Heise's first full-length documentary made after 1989/90, *Eisenzeit* (*Iron Time*, 1991), was based on a previously unfinished project from 1981 (Dell and Rothöhler 13). These cinematic works function as archives for the future that introduced a specific form of visual archeology from the margins of East German society. After the Babelsberg film school administration rejected *Wozu denn über diese Leute einen Film?* Heise stored and preserved his footage in mostly hidden spaces or semi-official archives, among them the archive of the Babelsberg school itself and the GDR's State Film Archive.[1]

What is an "archive for the future"? The notion is informed by Jacques Derrida's proposition to consider not the archive's function to preserve the past but its prospective function:

> *[T]he question of the archive is not […] a question of the past. It is not a question of a concept dealing with*

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> *the past that might already be at our disposal or not at our disposal, an archivable concept of the archive. It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility of tomorrow. The archive: if we want to know what that will have meant, we will only know in times to come. (37)*

The footage that Heise collected for the selected films I discuss here constituted archival material in precisely this sense: for an unknown and unspecific future, for frictions and transitions "to come." Edited from this footage and screened after years of delay, these films respond to Derrida's unrealized futures. As such, they resemble what Siegfried Kracauer in his final, unfinished book on history defined as "lost causes" and "unrealized possibilities" that constitute traces to be unraveled only in retrospect (199). Several of Heise's films provide a model for this concept of the archives for the future and suggest the need to reevaluate these remnants and leftovers of East German visual culture as "lost causes" that simultaneously reveal a vanished East German reality and potential but unrealized futures.

Images Waiting for a Story

Heise's insistence in the opening statement of *Material* that the "images lie around waiting for a story" ascribes a certain agency to the archival images appropriated in the film. Not merely resting passively in archives, this material is also actively "waiting for a story." Horst Bredekamp calls this independent activity of images a *Bildakt* or image action. Referring to paintings and visual arts more generally, he claims that the interdependency of image and recipient includes an active role on the part of the image in which it can adopt the position of enunciator (59). In this sense, images not only passively reflect the past but also exercise a "formative power of form" that, like social actors or institutions, has the ability to shape history (Paul).[2] *Material* contradicts the dominant perception of the *Wende* (the transition to German unification in 1989–90) as a narrative of progress, seeking a different mode that would create a different perspective on the same events. And indeed, Heise's footage participates in the (re)shaping of history in just the sense of active images. Heise apparently assembles the footage from the years before and after 1989/90 in a contingent and unsystematic order: images of ruined houses in Halle give way to squatted streets in East Berlin; from Heiner Müller's work in the theatre the film shifts to the mass rallies at Alexanderplatz in November 1989; statements from prisoners and prison guards are followed by images of left-leaning activists interrupting the premiere of Heise's documentary film about East German skinheads, *Stau—Jetzt geht's los* (*Jammed—Let's Get Going*, 1992). This loose order provides no coherent chronology of the events, yet its fragmentary form challenges the viewer with demands to deal with the footage actively.

Historians of the GDR have coined the concept of *Eigensinn* or obstinacy to characterize a widespread but subdued form of agency practiced in East German society that complicates its image of an oppressive, totalitarian society. According to Andrew Port, *Eigensinn* has "become one of the most popular concepts used to describe a wide range of behavior in East Germany, all of which suggests that the so-called masses were not just passive victims, that they held 'agency'" (5). Thomas Lindenberger specifically sees in *Eigensinn* an expression of a "sense-of-oneself" (32), a sensibility for individual agency based on "perceptions and interpretations of reality, conceiving of them as a factor of creativity in their own right" (51). Moreover, Alf Lüdtke, one of those historians who popularized the concept, relates *Eigensinn* to the medium of GDR photography and the constructive dimension of producing and perceiving images. In this context, he explicitly refers to examples from the margins of established and officially accepted image production, including images made by semi-professional and even amateur photographers (232).

Semi-official and semi-professional images such as those appropriated in *Material* constitute a specific visual element shaped by incompleteness and fragmentation. As documentary footage, it serves both as a source in the historians' sense—i.e., a container of historical information that needs to be evaluated and critically interpreted—and as a trace in the Kracauerian sense mentioned above. The term trace itself, however, introduces ambivalent meanings. First, much like a footprint, a trace indicates an indexical remnant of past events. As a referent it connects different temporalities, but as a signifier, not by preserving the event itself. Second, a trace is often a detail that, much like a clue, can suggest a larger context. This dimension correlates with Kracauer's notion of "lost causes." A trace is a vestige, a part of a whole that exists only as a mosaic of fragments and voids. Hence, the concept of traces also corresponds to the practice of archeology as a technique of excavating past remains.

In his recent study on visual culture and memory Steve Anderson refers to archeology in a manner that can also illuminate Heise's projects: "the process of understanding how the past is transformed into memory may be best described as an archeology in which the goal is not simply to uncover something that has been buried but also to discover how and why its meanings have changed and additional layers have been built up on it" (51). Films too can actively participate in this archeological undertaking through their specific visual techniques for exploring photographic material and cinematic documents. Simon Rothöhler, for example, identifies the independent agency of Heise's visual remnants as the "Eigenrechtlichkeit des Materials," an intrinsic right incorporated in the footage (97). He argues that documentary films pursue historiographical ambitions, not only by retelling stories from the past but also by actively writing history (10). Citing Kracauer's analogy between film and history, Rothöhler claims that film's inherent ability both to bear witness and to provide multiple perspectives on the past contributes to the understanding of past events (21). Thus, the collection of details and the focus on seemingly irrelevant aspects (23) resemble Kracauer's idea of "lost causes," which are constitutive for a visual archeology of GDR society.

When Heise presented his film compilation Material at the 2009 Berlin Film Festival, his visual archeology had reached full fruition. Comprised exclusively of footage he had shot privately in the 1980s and during the Wende and its immediate aftermath, the film develops a set of specific cinematic techniques to investigate visual traces of the GDR with the goal of contributing to the writing of East German history. These include recognizable Brechtian strategies such as the use of camera angles that differ from iconic television images, the integration of intertitles to comment and reflect on the screened footage, and voiceover commentary to explain the film's archeological approach—all aiming to "thematize the very historical apparatus and draw our attention to a set of unresolved historical contradictions" (Koutsourakis 252–53). In a significant sequence, for example, Heise appropriates footage of a protest rally from November 4, 1989 at Berlin's Alexanderplatz. [Clip 1] We approach the speakers, some recognizable as leading figures of the regime, from an odd angle unlike official media representations. The image is peripherally located at the margins of the historical moment, embedded within the protesting crowd but not absorbed by it. This distanciation becomes obvious in the second part of the sequence when the camera—acting as what Dell and Rothöhler term a "micro-historical countershot" (12)—pans the protestors as they sing the communist anthem "The International." Knowing neither the story these images would tell nor the history they could document, the footage captured a particular or even paradoxical measure of time. Because it clearly differs from the now-familiar television images of the Wende, it enables a different view on the over-mediated events. Simultaneously it preserves the potentiality of a future course of history that was never realized. When the camera turns away from the speaking politicians and focuses on the ordinary participants who start chanting "The International," it points to the moment of an unrealized future through a precise interplay of images, voices, and intertitles that highlights the lines of the anthem and resonates as a response to the future from the past.[3]

Clip 1: Sequence depicting the protest rally on November 4, 1989, from Material (2009). Dir. Thomas Heise, DVD Edition Filmmuseum 56, 2011.

Focusing specifically on the peripheral visual angles, Rothöhler links this formal perspective to Kracauer's thoughts about micro-history. While macro-history refers to a broad and universal concept that suggests a process of filtering and harmonizing divergent, fragmented, and ephemeral perspectives, a micro-historical approach respects the material's inherent needs and demands (Rothöhler 97). Furthermore, the objects of history, here the footage itself, participate actively in the writing of history. The images gain historiographical agency. Indeed, Heise states: "The material provides the form. It's like digging something up or turning it over. There is this strange idea that came to me all of a sudden and has never gone away: a story, considered longitudi-

nally, is actually a tangled mass" ("Thoughts" 228). Heise's film proposes new audiovisual constellations, which reveal hidden relations and at the same time refuse the common perspective of the always far-too-close or far-too-distant television images that define our visual memory of the Autumn 1989 events.

This formal strategy gives rise to a paradoxical temporality, which Kracauer describes as "historical relativity": "Because of the antinomy of its core, time not only conforms to the conventional image of a flow but must also be imagined as being not such a flow" (*History* 199). This antinomian temporality is best expressed, according to Kracauer, in a spatial image: the "cataract of times" that is characterized by "'pockets' and voids […] vaguely reminiscent of interference phenomena" (199). Films such as *Material*, which explore ephemeral "lost causes" through visual archeology, can be elucidated by the metaphor "cataract of times." The montage of archival images as a tangled mass of visual remnants constitutes a cinematic cataract, which on the one hand establishes a visual flow *through* time and on the other encapsulates specific moments in time. Furthermore, Material's temporality creates "'pockets' and voids" in which "unrealized possibilities" can surface. As thematic clusters, which dwell on specific, often even random and contingent situations, these pockets and voids interfere with the image flow. This disruption produces what Kracauer describes as "a Utopia of the in-between—a terra incognita in the hollows between the lands we know" (*History* 217). In such a cinematic constellation, the images themselves can incorporate *Eigensinn* as a form of agency, waiting, as Heise emphasizes, for a story and then providing the form for this story. Both Heise's films and the visual remnants they appropriate possess the agency of Eigensinn. In this context, it is no coincidence that the idea of active images as it was famously introduced by W.J.T Mitchell in his book *What do Pictures Want* is derived from Marx's concept of fetishism, which Mitchell defines as "the subjectivity of objects, the personhood of things" (30). It should be noted that Heise's archeological approach also adopts basic ideas of Marxist thought but then inverts them; his work transforms the Marxist concept of fetishism into an agency of images that undermines the ideological position of East German media in the same manner as his archives for the future invert the future-oriented pathos formulae of state officials (Sabrow).

Memories of Missed Opportunities

This inversion of the future-oriented but empty pathos of the GDR's ideology resonates strongly in the 1991 film *Eisenzeit*, Heise's first attempt to collect and preserve material for the future. Shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall he had visited the city of Eisenhüttenstadt, located close to the German-Polish border. Established in 1950 as Stalinstadt, the industrial city anchored by a new steel foundry was laid out as a socialist model town (the name was quietly changed in 1961). Yet when he visited once again in 1990–91, the city had started to decline, in tandem with the state that projected its ideology of scientifically planned progress at this site. *Eisenzeit* was not just intended as a portrait of a declining East German industrial area. Already in 1993, Marc Silberman had recognized in the film a "structural fragmentation of the film images and the textual commentary, a kind of aesthetic correlative for the memory of illusions and missed opportunities" (28). Indeed, *Eisenzeit* incorporates the memory of potential futures and departs from the lost causes of an unfinished film. A decade earlier, as a student at the Babelsberg film school, Heise had already envisioned a film project about young people in Eisenhüttenstadt. In this 1981 film with the working title *Anka und…* (*Anka and…*), Heise set out to portray the first generation of children born in what was called the "First Socialist City of the GDR." Perhaps fittingly, the film about an abandoned youth generation, lost in a shattering storm of alleged progress that felt like permanent stagnancy, was never made. Heise later described the end of the project. When the team arrived at Eisenhüttenstadt, a production student from the film school told him that the municipal authorities had withdrawn permission to shoot in the city: "We didn't manage to do any shooting, […] I could only make some audio recordings with Tilo Paulukat, one of the four heroes in the film" (Heise, "Thoughts" 224). Despite earlier support on the part of his teachers, the film project was ultimately cancelled by the school in cooperation with the municipal administration. The only traces left are a letter from the film school's head of production to the city council of Eisenhüttenstadt, preserved in production files of the school, and the songs performed by the projected film's protagonists, which Heise had taped and stored in his private archive.[4]

Ten years later, after the GDR had ceased to exist, Heise returned to Eisenhüttenstadt and began working on a film that was to take up and continue the unfinished project. What had been planned originally as a portrayal of the city and its disenchanted youth—and implicitly a larger story about the GDR—became a visual essay about the vanishing state, a fracturing society, and a generation lost between the renounced past and a precarious future. The first full-length film produced by Heise, *Eisenzeit* negotiates these complex temporalities. On the one hand it is a cinematic time capsule, preserving a particular moment of transition, and on the other it assembles traces and remnants that were collected in the past for an indeterminate future, a future after an as-yet-unimagined transformation or end of the GDR:

> *Heise's collage narrates the past by breaking off and recommencing again and again, as if the memories of friendship, home, lost dreams, and an unrealized film were open wounds. As with many such documentaries, the use of historical footage (here from 1980) serves both as a contrast to and an explanation for change: the present is meaningful only when seen historically. (Silberman 28)*

Eisenzeit proceeded from and secured its unfinished predecessor. According to Vrääth Öhner, it incorporates a cinematic search for the leftover traces of the proposed *Anka und…* protagonists. Experiences, memories, and material remnants had been stored away, preserved for later use, and in the revitalized 1991 film project embody Heise's search for traces of his own past and for remnants of an unfinished film (60–61). As Heise himself explained: "we used them [the audio recordings with Tilo Paulukat made in 1981] ten years after for the film *Eisenzeit* that I shot in 1991. At that time Tilo was already dead. He hang [sic] himself on a holiday week-end during his national [military] service. The only things remaining were the old recordings of his Neil Young song interpretations" ("Thoughts" 224). Once again "lost causes," the tapes, and an unfinished film caught in a

Figure 1: Wall mural from the opening sequence of Eisenzeit (1991). Dir. Thomas Heise, VHS, Unidoc, 1993.

condition of waiting and postponed time initiate a cinematic dialogue between the present and the future.

Eisenzeit links this concept of postponed futures to the experience of time in the late GDR, serving as a blueprint for Heise's method of accumulating material and fluid experiences as "lost causes." These possible futures are not realized, thwarted, or rejected paths of life and dead ends; they do not emerge from the course of history understood as a story of progress and success or of making sense. They exist instead in an in-between space, which is in our case the elusive space of film that absorbs the ephemeral phenomena of the physical world to protect them from forgetting. *Eisenzeit* condenses these thoughts already in its opening sequence. First the camera pans a wall mural depicting figures in the mode of the "revolutionary romanticism" that typified 1950s socialist realism, celebrating a vision of the future that never came to pass: workers, engineers, teachers, youth, and young families enjoying the Labour Day holiday [Fig. 1]. The colorful mural conveys a dynamic but uniform striving toward the future. The traveling camera intensifies this energy, animating the idealized storyline of constant progress. However, the contrastive interplay of image and sound emphasizes the implicit notion of postponement. Heise attaches to the images of a failed socialist dream a song about the failed capitalist dream: Neil Young's "After the Gold Rush." Here, different temporalities of past, present, and future merge, yielding the interplay of the agency of lost causes, the socialist self-image embedded in the wall mural, and the songs taped by disillusioned socialist youth. Young's song is explicitly linked to the story of Tilo and his friends, which was never told because Heise's student film project had been cancelled. What remained ten years later was only his taped singing voice. The abruptly appearing film title dedicates *Eisenzeit* to Tilo and his friends. The sound of a moving train accompanies this title sequence, although we only see the image of a train after several more minutes (filmed through the window of another train arriving in Eisenhüttenstadt). The train is not only a vehicle that brings the viewers into the city, which comes into focus when it arrives, but the train also signifies the passage of time and resonates with Heise's voiceover describing his archeological concept: "Something is always left over. Remnants that don't work out."

Failed Futures and Ephemeral Pasts

The way cinematic remnants of the East German past both encapsulated and preserved traces of possible but unrealized futures as well as failed opportunities is distinct. Official GDR imagery ignored such failures; evidence of failed opportunities documented accidentally was in most cases censored, suppressed, or concealed. Heise once described the difficulties of visually expressing reality in a society in which artificiality characterizes the visible and hidden clues or implicit references communicate the real. He transformed this specific East German interplay of the visible and the non-visible into an aesthetic and historiographical approach: "In a dictatorship the idea is to amass hidden stores of images and words, portraying the things that people living under the dictatorship might have actually experienced, but that could not necessarily be seen or heard. Then, when the dictatorship was no more, those images bore witness to it" ("Archeology" 9). In other words, Heise reverses the direction of encounters with past time. While the historian seeks material, memories, and traces that persist in the present in order to reconstruct the past, Heise collects in the present material for the future, like an archivist or archeologist, hoping that the hidden traces safeguarded in this material reveal in hindsight the encapsulated time. Given the impossibility of contemporaneously releasing any of his films shot in the GDR, they functioned like messages in a bottle. As postponed documents they did not aim to address the present, but rather responded to an unknown future that was still inconceivable, potentially beyond the existing socialist state.

The primal scene of Heise's archives for the future originates in his inadvertent experiences as a student at the Babelsberg film school. Located close to the West Berlin border in a suburb of Potsdam, the school was a paradox. While it provided a place to try out different approaches to filmmaking, its goal was to prepare students for employment in the state-controlled media. They learned about creative, even oppositional traditions of cinema history, but student films were criticized for being Neorealist or infected by New Wave tendencies in Poland or Czechoslovakia. Heise later recalled the film school as a "schizophrenic" place:

> *The rectory was in Stalin's house, in the building where he lived during the Potsdam conference […]. I remember the dominant feeling was suspicion, coupled with a calm that simply ignored this suspicion, and an underlying fear. It was all schizophrenic and obviously not healthy. I latched onto the few foreign students and moved around as if I were in enemy territory. But I was obviously a native of this land, part of this. In any case, I was rather a loner.* ("Thoughts" 223)

Today the Film University Babelsberg "Konrad Wolf," successor to the former state film school, contains a continually growing catalogue of approximately 4,000 films of different genres and types from all six decades of the school's history (Brombach, Ebbrecht-Hartmann, and Wahl 81). These include, for example, the earliest student films produced in 1956–57 by later well-known DEFA directors such as Jürgen Böttcher, Kurt Tetzlaff, Hermann Zschoche, and Ingrid Reschke. The erratic and unsystematic archive kept conformist and idealizing documentaries about East German society as well as films the administration criticized and even banned, premature exercises that randomly depicted GDR life as well as films that offer the perspective of the school's foreign students. However, there are also archival voids and gaps, making it difficult to reconstruct the history of films that were produced but did not make their way into the archives (Löser). In the 1970s the school formalized the process of archiving, but only after the transformative turmoil following 1989 did the archive become an inventory to be explored in other contexts. This is how *Wozu denn über diese Leute einen Film?* came to see the light of day.

After two short film exercises in the first years of his studies, Heise completed a documentary about two brothers in East Berlin's inner-city Prenzlauer Berg neighbourhood who starkly deviate from acceptable role models of socialist youth. Surviving as small-time criminals, Bernd and his brother Norbert lack any prospects for meaningful employment yet possess a vivid sense of self-confidence (Öhner 57–58). Heise depicts the two protagonists as free spirits and situates them as antipodes to the dominant concept of the socialist hero. In contrast to traditional GDR documentaries focusing on thoughtful and socially responsible working-class heroes, this film draws attention to unemployed criminals. While the classical socialist hero incorporates ideals such as collectivity and solidarity, Heise's protagonists are introduced as defiant individualists with a strong sense of self. Certainly, other GDR filmmakers such as Jürgen Böttcher had already undermined and transformed the concept of the socialist hero. Although Böttcher often featured representatives from the working class, the patient, observational mode of his films as well as the speaking subject in front of the camera communicate less visible and even hidden dimensions of social reality. Indeed, Heise's film echoes Böttcher's own student film from twenty years earlier, *Notwendige Lehrjahre* (*Necessary Years of Apprenticeship*, 1960), which also portrayed criminal youth but in this case living in a GDR reformatory. While Böttcher structures his film around the contradiction between a freedom-seeking, searching camera and a conformist voice over, Heise explores through his deviant and non-conformist protagonists the margins of GDR society with its ambiguities and inner contradictions.

When Heise test-screened his documentary about the brothers before a committee of film school teachers and administrators, they were shocked: "Why should one make a film about these people?" one of the teachers allegedly commented (Keuschnigg and Heise). This statement became the film's title: *Wozu denn über diese Leute einen Film?* The committee requested that he rework the film. Although he changed some parts for the second screening, it was subsequently banned. As a result, following two more cancelled projects, one of which was *Anka und…*, Heise decided to leave the school.[5] "The reason it was banned," recalls Heise, "was the casual way the film portrayed those young men living their lives untouched by ideology, including taking their careers as petty criminals for granted, meaning the film's author accepted their existence, as is, and simply wanted to explore it" ("Archeology" 9). This interest in exploration turned *Wozu denn über diese Leute einen Film?* into an archeological project. It contained images and sounds that could bear witness for the future, a way of life that was not shown in the offi-

Figure 2: TV-still from Wozu denn über diese Leute einen Film? (1980). Dir. Thomas Heise, DVD Edition Filmmuseum 56, 2011.

cial East German media. Although never screened publicly, it did land in the school's archival storage. Locked there, it survived the GDR and preserved the voices and faces that were encapsulated in the material. Now, in hindsight, it offers the viewer significant hints about how to read the material. Some scenes address, for instance, the concept of archives for the future by referring to the formulaic pathos of East Germany's ideology: "How do you imagine the future?" Heise asks his young protagonists in one of the film's most striking scenes. Bernd answers that he cannot. The GDR's ideologically overdetermined concept of the future cannot be applied to their world. Their small apartment is both a safe haven and a prison, a reality excluded from the state's official self-image. Here, at the margins of society, the future only exists as an empty phrase proclaimed by socialist rhetoric, not unlike the desire for a peaceful world, Norbert's girlfriend Regina's response to Heise's question. Bernd immediately counters by asking, equally rhetorically: "Do you really believe there will be another war? Then you can fight." The film preserves communicative acts, statements, and attitudes absent from the official media. At the same time it formulates elements of a random "archeology of real existence," as Heise once described his approach in the subtitle of a publication about his works (*Spuren*).

Beyond observation and conversation, the audience also encounters visual sources such as photographs, which become "an essential part of Heise's 'archaeological' work" (Estrada 46). Mostly taken from a family album, the photographs reveal the unfulfilled longing for nostalgically transfigured "better times," but also trigger a mutual act of communication within the fragmented family. In contrast, another sequence uses audiovisual sources in depicting the silent gathering of the brothers and Regina in front of a television. [Clip 2] The broadcast images situate the moment through the West German live news footage, which relay the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran and mass demonstrations in Cairo. At first sight, this scene refers to the commonly known but tabooed fact that many GDR citizens had more interest in watching West German broadcasts than their own media. This particular news footage also introduces not only the trope of mass protest and revolution but also international solidarity, all examples of the GDR's *pathos formulae*. More to the point, however, the television images self-reflexively comment on the film itself. For a brief moment Norbert switches to a TV report about archeologists, which suggests the film's own approach, an archeological excavation of social existence. Furthermore, the sequence's final images from an adventure film or a fairy tale movie show a flying horse falling to pieces, a visual metaphor for the fragmentation of life as depicted in the film as well as for the fragmentary character of the archives for the future. [Fig. 2] *Wozu denn über diese Leute einen Film?* became a postponed document of everyday existence that revealed its traces only after the fall of the Wall.

Clip 2: Sequence with television footage from Wozu denn über diese Leute einen Film? (1980). Dir. Thomas Heise, DVD Edition Filmmuseum 56, 2011.

Hidden Traces and Unrealized Possibilities

Many of the student films produced at the Babelsberg film school, even the more conformist examples preserved in the school's archive, can be conceptualized as "lost causes" in the GDR's visual memory. Produced in a protected, semi-official environment, they rarely realized their potential because they were screened only for a limited public or not at all. This characterizes their complex temporal character: a mode of existence I call archival delay. *Wozu denn über diese Leute einen Film?* not only documents and preserves social reality more or less randomly, but it also helps us see the invisible by means of the visible. Like *Material* and *Eisenzeit*, this film serves as a historiographical agent. Again, Kracauer's comment on the "revealing power" of photographic film helps us read these films in hindsight as a cinematic trace (*Theory of Film* 16). Establishing the parallel between historiography and the photographic medium, he states: "History resembles photography in that it is, among other things, a means of alienation" (*History* 5). If the camera gives access to the margins of social reality, it also maintains a position of observation, which is an important precondition for a potentially reflexive approach. This interplay of closeness and distance, which is constitutive for both photography and film, points to an "intermediary area" (Kracauer 16), which historiography shares with the photographic. Kracauer then links this approach to the interest of the explorer: "Owing to the camera's revealing power, he [the photographer] has also traits of an explorer who, filled with curiosity, roams yet unconquered spaces" (55). This too resembles the traits of an archeologist in Heise's mold, bringing together cinema, historiography, and archeology.

Having quit the film school and faced with a dead end, Heise started to collect sound, footage, and other visual material that he deposited in his private collection or even in official archives—the only way to conceal his own images and thoughts in the "enemy's institutions" (Stöhr 112). In the mid–1970s the GDR State Film Archive established the Staatliche Filmdokumentation (State Film Documentation) to archive raw film footage of everyday life not included in officially produced documentaries (Barnert 30). The idea behind this project was that in future times such raw footage would be useful for films that would retrospectively document GDR progress over the course of time. In other words, its goal was to preserve audiovisual documents of events and living conditions that were not expedient for the present self-depiction of the state but could be used to illustrate the past in future films. As a result, the Staatliche Filmdokumentation collected footage of inadequate housing conditions, poverty, and even the Berlin Wall, which would never have been shown in official documentaries. It did not exist to document taboo aspects of life in the GDR, but—corresponding to the concept of socialist realism—to record and archive typical aspects of everyday life (Barnert 31). For Heise this institution came closest to what he saw as a counter-archive within an official archive because it supported the collection of footage "for an unknown, far-off future" ("Archeology" 12). Hence, in 1984 and 1985 Heise was able to make two films for the State Film Archive, one about state bureaucracy and the other about the East German "people's police." Both projects were driven by his general interest in investigating how the state communicates with its citizens, but instead of cinematic documents of everyday life, which the Staatliche Filmdokumentation intended to collect, he produced traces. Moreover, embedded in the footage were nuanced instructions about how to read the visual documentation. Hence, these "preliminary films" were actively fabricated remnants *to be preserved*, which could be construed as a unique form of reversed archeology (Öhner 59).

Figure 3: The administrative building at Alexanderplatz from Das Haus 1984. Dir. Thomas Heise, DVD Edition Filmmuseum 56, 2011.

For *Das Haus* Heise collected footage together with his cameraman Peter Badel in an administrative building near East Berlin's governmental center at Alexanderplatz. [Fig. 3] The film observes different departments of a district administration. It documents requests for state support, housing problems, and a civil marriage. Structured by weekdays, the preliminary editing emphasizes typical procedures within the administrative process, following the demands of

the Staatliche Filmdokumentation. Yet the film also makes visible structures of power and the automation of the bureaucratic process. To this end its distinctive stylistic devices are long shots and repetition. Both emphasize the exhausting administrative routine and its machine-like operations. These cinematic devices parallel techniques of observational documentaries and the specific style of ephemeral films. Heise and Badel repeatedly witness the encounters of public servants with ordinary people and preserve on film the same phrases and unsatisfying answers about the critical housing situation. What counts as typical is the repetition of the same, revealing the bureaucracy's structural dysfunction while articulating shattered dreams and disenchanted hopes.

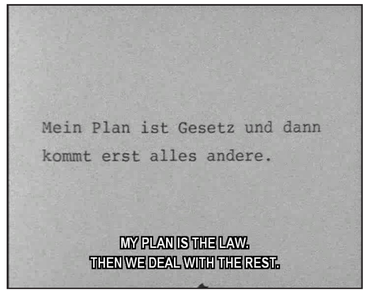

Figure 4: Inter-title from Das Haus 1984. Dir. Thomas Heise, DVD Edition Filmmuseum 56, 2011.

Although the mission of the Staatliche Filmdokumentation allowed only for raw film footage that could be used in the future for retrospective compilation films, Heise succeeded in producing meaningful films with commenting intertitles and carefully ordered montage. In contrast to the expected approach, he not only documented what he witnessed as GDR bureaucracy, but he also introduced a level of self-reflection or irony by emphasizing discrete sentences or phrases, which served as printed headlines for the film's chronological chapters. [Fig. 4] This ambiguous interplay of captions, voices, and images furthermore foregrounds the relationship between word and image. These compositional techniques—contrast, captions, repetition—construct a communicative relationship with the viewer that makes possible its legibility in hindsight. This preliminary editing, which created a sense of ambiguity, transforms the archival footage into active images in Bredekamp's sense, even as the films vanished into the archive, waiting for their time to arrive: "The workprint and the negative were expertly and safely warehoused and survived the frost, safe in the ice" (Heise, "Archeology" 12). Only after the end of the GDR did Heise manage to retrieve and publicly screen them on television and in cinemas; only then could those films, originally made for "archival purposes," reveal their archeological potential (Heise, "Arbeit" 264).

Conclusion

The exploration of Thomas Heise's unfinished cinematic material from the GDR leads to the concept of archives for the future as a strategy in-the-making that originated in his experiences as a student at the Babelsberg film school. Both the school's film archive and the film collection of the Staatliche Filmdokumentation comprised alternative spaces where footage survived while waiting for an unknown future when it could reveal traces preserved from GDR social reality. Although institutionalized and part of the state-controlled system, these collections were characterized by their ephemeral status. Within a system of political control and inclusion, their ambiguity lent them the status of a partially extraterritorial space in Derrida's sense of the archive (11). Heise was able to appropriate this space and create his own archives for the future as a place of consignment that would reveal its substance only in a state of delay. For this reason, my examination does not treat these ephemeral cinematic remnants as historical sources but rather as traces that need to be understood in a certain context, appropriated, arranged, and re-read.6Such visual exploration—in Heise's words, a form of archeology—discovers the agency incorporated in the preserved images. Films from the archives of the future are driven by what Hal Foster has described as "an archival impulse." Such works "make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present, [are] fragmentary rather than fungible," and are less concerned "with absolute origins than with obscure traces […] or incomplete projects—in art and in history alike—that might offer points of departure again" (Foster 3–5). Heise's archiving films generated techniques of visual archeology, while their fragmentary character evoked a future archive in-becoming, an effect he described as the unique character of *Material*, which he argues:

> *[…] does not provide a finished product. And it stands in open contradiction to the generally remembered images on public television of the fall of the Wall, which was called "The Change" [Wende] in German, and the annexation of East Germany by West Germany that was its goal. The film depends on the reality of possibility, such as it could be found in the utopian pictures from that era. It is about the audience and the stage, about up and down, the first words spoken after a long silence, and a silence that returns after that brief moment of freedom. ("Archeology" 15)*

His films preserve traces simultaneously of a vanished state and of the rapid return of another precarious future. As a last, unrealized attempt to continue such an archive for the future, he proposed to document a meeting of DEFA filmmakers and personnel during which they could talk about concealed accusations, suspicions, hopes, and dreams. In Heise's opinion such visual documentation would constitute an important archeological artifact, essential for writing, in the future, the history of East German cinema (Dell and Rothöhler 9). However, such a meeting never took place and no cinematic records from such a discussion were preserved. Yet in his postponed work as a GDR filmmaker Heise collected fragments and remnants and demonstrated how to use them as a starting point for visual archeology, understanding film as a mediator between the contingent present and an undefined future. In Heise's words, "Archeology is about digging. It's like the work of moles, who live underground. A mole is virtually blind, but it has a nose and a feel for finding what it needs. And it has the patience to collect what it finds. It collects provisions to last through the winter" ("Archeology" 9). By revealing traces instead of subordinating his footage to an artificial image of the past, his films enable the preserved images to actively disclose their present contingency to a future audience: to us, in a subsequent present.

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Image and Clip Notes

Title Image: Remnants of postponed futures from Material; still from *Material*. Dir. Thomas Heise, Germany 2009. DVD Edition Filmmuseum 56, 2011.

Clip 1: Sequence depicting the protest rally on November 4, 1989, from *Material* (2009). Dir. Thomas Heise, DVD Edition Filmmuseum 56, 2011.

Figure 1: Wall mural from opening sequence of *Eisenzeit* (1991). Dir. Thomas Heise, VHS, Unidoc, 1993.

Clip 2: Sequence with television footage from *Wozu denn über diese Leute einen Film?* (1980). Dir. Thomas Heise, DVD Edition Filmmuseum 56, 2011.

Figure 2: TV-still from *Wozu denn über diese Leute einen Film?* (1980). Dir. Thomas Heise, DVD Edition Filmmuseum 56, 2011.

Figure 3: The administrative building at Alexanderplatz from *Das Haus 1984*. Dir. Thomas Heise, DVD Edition Filmmuseum 56, 2011.

Figure 4: Inter-title from *Das Haus 1984*. Dir. Thomas Heise, DVD Edition Filmmuseum 56, 2011.

Notes

1 There are additional archives that preserved semi-official and sometimes even subversive films. Among these collections are films made in amateur film circles and in semi-professional studios related to companies and factories as well as works produced by underground filmmakers. See Forster; Löser (*Strategien der Verweigerung*); Löser and Fritzsche.

2 In this context see also Mitchell's observation that we often "talk and act as if pictures had feeling, will, consciousness, agency and desire" (31).

3 The script of *Material* and additional documents are published in Heise (*Spuren*).

4 The letter can be found among a collection of files from the school's film production department, which are today stored in the archive of the Potsdam Film Museum.

5 Heise (*Spuren*) includes additional documents about Heise's early film projects during his studies at the Babelsberg film school as well as files the Stasi collected about Heise with the help of several unofficial informers—fellow students and teachers alike.

6 Heise's own collection of texts and documents emphasizes this character of archival material by choosing the title "Spuren" (trace-es) for the presentation of material, leftovers, and written remnants (*Spuren*).

WHOSE EAST GERMAN ART IS THIS? THE POLITICS OF RECEPTION AFTER 1989

APRIL A. EISMAN

Fig. 16 – "Outbreak and Disintegration," room in Abschied von Ikarus, 2013

***Abstract*[1]** | *Beginning with an overview of painting in East Germany, this article examines the German-German Bilderstreit (image battle) of the long 1990s and two major art exhibitions in the new millenium, Kunst in der DDR (Art in the GDR, 2003) and Abschied von Ikarus (Farewell to Icarus, 2012-13). It ultimately argues that the history of East German art has been rewritten since unification in ways that reflect Western expectations and desires more than socialist realities, and shows how art historians, scholars of the German Democratic Republic (GDR, or East Germany), and those seeking alternatives to the neoliberal present can benefit from a less biased view.*

***Résumé*[1]** | *Commençant par un résumé de la peinture en Allemagne de l'Est, cet essai examine la bataille de l'image allemande-allemande dans des longues années 1990 et deux grandes expositions d'art dans le nouveau millénaire, Kunst in der DDR (L'Art en la RDA, 2003) et Abschied von Ikarus (Adieu à Icarus. 2012-13). Il fait valoir en fin de compte que l'histoire de l'art est-allemand a été réécrit depuis l'unification d'une manière qui reflète les attentes et désirs occidentales plus des réalités socialistes, et montre comment les historiens de l'art, les chercheurs de la RDA, et ceux qui cherchent des alternatives au présent néolibéraux peuvent bénéficier d'une perspective moins préjugé.*

East German studies today is thriving in English-language scholarship. From history to cultural studies and especially film, scholars have shown us the complexity of East German society, which was not just a top-down repressive system but also a place where culture played an important if contested role in the making of the socialist person.[2] This scholarship, which started primarily in the field of literature in the 1970s and 1980s, expanded into history, film, and material culture in the wake of the Cold War.[3] But the visual fine arts—including painting, graphics, and sculpture as well as performance and installation art—have been almost completely overlooked.[4] In English-language scholarship, for example, not a single monograph has been published on painting despite its centrality in the East German art world.[5] In Germany, by comparison, the visual fine arts have been the focus of numerous studies and several large exhibitions. Much of the German scholarship written after unification, however, is permeated by lingering Cold War-era stereotypes and contemporary political agendas.[6] A similar tendency can be seen in most areas of East German studies, but it has been challenged by scholars, often working outside of Germany, who take a more nuanced approach (Port 15). In art history, by comparison, such correctives are rare, so although one might assume that greater access to archival material after the fall of the Berlin Wall has led to a deeper understanding of the art scene and the mechanisms at work, the reality is that much of what is written today is more biased than scholarship on either side of the Wall in the 1980s.[7]

In this article, I show how our current understanding of art created in the German Democratic Republic (GDR, or East Germany) is quite different from what it was thirty years ago and argue that it has been rewritten to fulfill Western expectations. Although some changes to the narrative have expanded our understanding, others have significantly distorted our view of East Germany, thus depriving us of an alternative perspective from which to understand the capitalist West. Such distortions also deny us a source for alternatives to the neoliberal present. I begin by looking briefly at the development of art in East Germany, focusing on painting, the most prestigious visual arts medium, in order to establish a baseline for understanding the history that has been subsequently rewritten. I then turn to the German-German *Bilderstreit* (image battle) of the long 1990s, a series of vehement debates in the German press about what role East German art and artists should play in the new Germany. These debates offer insight into the larger issues at stake and the actors involved, and thus allow us to better understand the more recent rewriting. I then argue that the *Bilderstreit* entered a new, quieter—and therefore more insidious—phase in the new millennium, a shift that began in 2003 with *Kunst in der DDR, eine Retrospektive* (Art in the GDR, a Retrospective), a blockbuster exhibition held at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin. This highly praised exhibition marks a high point in East German art's reception after 1989/90, but it also inadvertently opened the door to a significant rewriting of East German art that reached its culmination in the 2012 *Abschied von Ikarus* (Farewell to Icarus) exhibition in Weimar. I consider how both of these exhibitions presented East German art before explaining why the rewriting of this art matters for both art historians and scholars of the GDR.

Art in East Germany

In Anglophone scholarship, East German art is virtually unknown, the result in part of the Cold War era's polarization—and politicization—of the visual arts, which were divided roughly in two since the late 1940s: abstract vs. realist, good vs. bad, Art vs. non-Art. According to these binaries, East Germany did not create art, merely political propaganda and kitsch. It is a stereotype that, despite the passage of more than a quarter century since the end of the Cold War, remains largely unexamined and therefore dominant in the minds of most Anglophone academics who, if asked to describe "East German art," would probably mention the term "Socialist Realism" and imagine paintings of Communist leaders or happy workers portrayed with an almost photographic realism. While such images were created throughout the forty-year history of the GDR, they reached their

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Fig. 1 – Otto Nagel, Junger Maurer von der Stalinalle, 1953. Oil on canvas, 116 x 79.5 cm. Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

official apex in 1953 with works such as Otto Nagel's *Junger Maurer von der Stalinallee* (Young Bricklayer from Stalinallee, 1953) [Fig. 1].

In the wake of Stalin's death and the workers' revolt in June 1953, East German artistic policy loosened, and visual artists began to experiment openly with modernist styles in the vein of Pablo Picasso and Fernand Léger. In fact, there was a multi-issue discussion of Picasso as a possible role model for East German artists in these years in *Bildende Kunst*, the GDR's main art journal. Picasso seemed a particularly interesting figure because he combined a modernist aesthetic with a political commitment to communism (Lüdecke). His influence can be seen in the flattened space and simplifed forms visible in paintings by Willi Sitte [Fig. 2] and Harald Metzkes, among others.[8]

By the mid-1960s, artists in Leipzig—and, in particular, Bernhard Heisig, Wolfgang Mattheuer, and Werner Tübke, along with Willi Sitte from neighboring Halle—had developed a uniquely East German style of contemporary art that would come to represent the GDR in the more relaxed cultural atmosphere of the Honecker era in the 1970s and 1980s. Paintings such as Heisig's *Der Weihnachtstraum des unbelehrbaren Soldaten* (The Christmas Dream of the Unteachable Soldier, 1964) [Fig. 6]—multivalent works that reflect a commitment to the modernist tradition—would

Fig. 2 – Willi Sitte, Raub der Sabinerinnen, 1953. Oil on hard fiber, 126.5 x 165 cm. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Nationalgalerie. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

be exhibited in the West to great praise in the final decades of the Cold War era. Although this generation of artists includes East Germany's best-known artists today, they were not the only ones working in a modernist style but rather the first of several generations.

In the 1970s, their students emerged with works that looked not only at the Expressionist tradition but also at Neue Sachlichkeit and Surrealism. Arno Rink, for example, responded to the 1973 putsch in Chile with a Daliesque painting about the Spanish Civil War, *Spanien 1938* (Spain 1938) that was

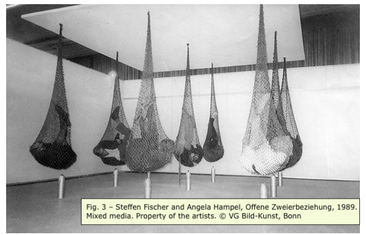

Fig. 3 – Steffen Fischer and Angela Hampel, Offene Zweierbeziehung, 1989. Mixed media. Property of the artists. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

exhibited to great praise at both the district and national levels (Feist 223). By the 1980s, a third generation of artists was creating large, Neoexpressionist canvases not unlike those of their *Neue Wilde* (new Fauves) counterparts in West Germany, and both installation and performance art were gaining in popularity and were even recognized by the official art world. Steffen Fischer and Angela Hampel's installation, *Offene Zweierbeziehung* (An Open Relationship, 1989) [Fig. 3], for example, was included in the District Art Exhibition in Dresden in 1989. The work shows a number of men and women strung up individually in nets that hover above upright missiles, a reference to the difficulties of sexual entanglements.

As this brief overview reveals, art in East Germany was much more complex than is often assumed in the West. Rather than uniformly repressive, the East German system was marked by a series of freezes and thaws in artistic policy, but with an ever increasing openness to modern and contemporary art, such that by the late 1980s no style was completely taboo, not even performance and installation art.[9]

The Bilderstreit and the Staatskünstler Label

In sharp contrast to the lack of knowledge in the Anglophone West, the development of art in East Germany after 1953 is better recognized in both scholarship and museum exhibitions in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG, or West Germany until 1990, unified Germany thereafter), albeit problematically so. Already in the late 1960s Eduard Beaucamp was writing about Heisig, Mattheuer, Sitte, and Tübke—the so-called "Leipzig School"—in the major daily newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. A few years later, in 1977, these same four artists were invited to exhibit works at the international art exhibition *documenta 6* in Kassel, West Germany. This event marks the emergence of contemporary East German art onto the Western art scene.[10] In its wake these four artists would become virtually synonymous with East German art in the minds of many West German curators, and their work the most highly praised, collected, and exhibited in the 1980s.[11] In the wake of 1989/90 they were also the artists most frequently at the center of controversy in the German press, which labeled them "*Staatskünstler*," or State Artists. The controversy around artists such as Heisig, Mattheuer, Sitte, and Tübke was not new to the *Mauerfall* (fall of the Berlin Wall), but rather began already with their inclusion in *documenta 6* (Schirmer, *DDR und documenta*). Protestors delivered leaflets and conducted a sit-in; the artist Georg Baselitz pulled his work from the show. Yet these voices did not command the press's attention the way they would in the wake of November 1989. In large part this was due to the leftist leanings of West Germany in the 1970s and 1980s. With the sudden collapse of the GDR, however, the authority that leftist intellectuals had enjoyed since Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* (also known as détente) was undermined, and conservative voices came to the fore in a wave of victor's glory.

The change in East German art's reception after the *Mauerfall* occurred almost immediately. A major exhibition of Heisig's work that had opened in West Berlin to positive reviews in October 1989 was being criticized by the end of November. What became known as the German-German *Bilderstreit* began a few years later when, in 1993, eighteen prominent West Germans—including the GDR emigrants Georg Baselitz and Gerhard Richter—left the visual arts department of the western Berlin Academy of Arts in protest against the en-bloc acceptance of colleagues from its eastern counterpart when the two academies were merged (Gillen). The following year the Neue Nationalgalerie in western Berlin became the center of controversy for an exhibition of postwar art from their permanent collection that placed masterpieces from the East and West side by side. The right-of-center Christian Democratic Party (CDU) in Berlin ignited the debate, likening the museum to a *Parteischule* (school of the Communist Party) because of its inclusion of Heisig, Sitte, Tübke, and Mattheuer (Kahlcke). A third major confrontation took place in 1998 when Heisig was invited—as one of only two East German artists—to contribute work to the Reichstag building in Berlin. Heisig was attacked for being a teenage soldier in the Waffen SS and for being a *Staatskünstler*. In fact, the two were conflated by the politician Uwe Lehmann-Braun from the CDU, who stated that Heisig had "loyally served two dictatorships" (quoted in Hecht 3).

The height of the *Bilderstreit*, however, was reached the following year with the exhibition *Aufstieg und Fall der Moderne* (The Rise and Fall of Modernism) in Weimar. In this exhibition, the western German curator's contempt for the East German works on display was obvious—the paintings were crowded together and hung up haphazardly against drop cloths in a space without climate control (Wolbert; Osmond). Moreover, a more carefully considered exhibition of Nazi works elsewhere in the building suggested not only a connection between the two regimes, but also that the Nazi works were more valuable. This was followed by one final clash over the planned 2001 exhibition of Willi Sitte's work at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg for his 80th birthday (Grossmann). Ultimately, the furor in the press over Sitte's connections to the East German state—his position as *Staatskünstler*—led to Sitte cancelling the show.

The various debates within the *Bilderstreit* fall into two main categories, both of which draw upon Cold War-era prejudices about East German art. The first dismissed East German art and artists as inferior to their western counterparts. This view was often accompanied by the term *Auftragskunst* (commissioned art) and by images like Heinrich Witz's *Der neue Anfang* (The New Beginning, 1959) [Fig. 4], which were readily accessible in the 1990s in exhibitions at history museums such as the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin (see Flacke). This focus on an assumed inferior quality can be seen in the controversy over the decision to unify the East and West German Academies of Art and in the *Aufstieg und Fall der Moderne* exhibition.

Fig. 4 – Heinrich Witz, Der neue Anfang, 1959. Oil, 95 x 120 cm. Kunstsammlung der Wismut GmbH Chemnitz.

The second category of the *Bilderstreit* focused on dismissing East Germany's most important artists—those previously praised and collected in West Germany—based on their biographies and, in particular, their largely positive relationship to the state. In these cases, the art itself could not be dismissed as "bad art," and thus the focus shifted to the person. Examples of this type of dismissal appear in the controversies around the exhibition of postwar art at the Neue Nationalgalerie, Heisig's commission for the Reichstag building, and Sitte's cancellation of his solo exhibition in Nuremberg. These artists were labeled *Staatskünstler*, meaning "state artist," a term that requires unpacking in order to be able to understand the reception of East German art in Germany today.

On the surface of it, the term *Staatskünstler* is not a negative one. The history of art is filled with them, from the Romans to Jacques-Louis David, artists who fulfilled commissions for—and whose art came to represent—the state. From this perspective, Heisig, Mattheuer, Sitte, and Tübke—among many other East German artists—were indeed *Staatskünstler*. They fulfilled artistic commissions, and their work represented the GDR in major international exhibitions. Yet the term *Staatskünstler* in the context of East German art has a number of negative connotations that upon closer examination do not apply, at least not to most of the artists so labeled. The example of Bernhard Heisig—who was not only one of East Germany's best-known and most successful artists but also a key figure in the *Bilderstreit*—should suffice to illustrate some of the problems with this label.

The first connotation of the term *Staatskünstler* is that these artists forfeited artistic integrity in exchange for fame and power. In Heisig's case, however, it was just the opposite. He changed from an Adolf von Menzel-inspired realism in the 1950s, as evidenced in *Zirkel junger Naturforscher* (Circle of Young Natural Scientists, 1952) [Fig. 5], to one inspired by German modernists such as Lovis Corinth, Max Beckmann, and Otto Dix in the early to mid-1960s, as visible in *Der Weihnachtstraum des unbelehrbaren Soldaten* (The Christmas Dream of the Unteachable Soldier, 1964) [Fig. 6]. That is, he changed from an artistic style that was acceptable to conservative political functionaries to one that was not.

Fig. 5 – Bernhard Heisig, Zirkel junge Naturforscher, 1952. Oil on Canvas. 120 x 190 cm. Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

This change in style led to a number of clashes with authorities in the latter half of the 1960s that have been largely overlooked or misinterpreted in German scholarship.[12] It was only with Erich Honecker's rise to power in 1971 that Heisig became a highly valued artist at the national level, the result of a change—and considerable relaxation in—cultural policy. One could even argue that Heisig had led the way through his repeated provocations in the 1960s to the modern style for which East German art became known in the Honecker era.

A second implication behind the term *Staatskünstler* is that these artists actively oppressed others. In Heisig's case, the implied accusation is that he, as professor at and rector of the Leipzig Academy (Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst Leipzig), prevented those with a more radical view of art in terms of stylistic innovation from becoming artists. Yet a closer examination of the record reveals that Heisig actually worked with younger artists to make the Leipzig Academy more modern. In the 1970s, he hired Hartwig Ebersbach to create and teach a multimedia class and ran interference with political functionaries in Berlin for years before the class was ultimately shut down (Lang, *Malerei und Grafik* 275; Grundmann and Michael 10-11, 43-46, 48). Similarly, as vice president of the national Union of Visual Artists (VBK), he helped negotiate a compromise for the controversial *Herbstsalon* (Fall Salon) in Leipzig in 1984, a so-called "underground" exhibition of young artists who were able to display works not considered acceptable by the government (Lang, *Malerei und Grafik* 210-11). All of these facts—and more—suggest that Heisig was open to the younger generation and worked to include them and their broadening interests in the system, even if he was not interested in creating such works himself. Indeed, Ebersbach defended Heisig on just such terms during the debate around the inclusion of Heisig's work in the Reichstag in 1998.[13]

Fig. 6 – Bernhard Heisig, Der Weihnachtstraum des unbelehrbaren Soldaten, 1964. Oil. Destroyed through overpainting. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

In the end, however, the truth of whether or not Heisig and the other so-called *Staatskünstler* had actually oppressed others—or sold out their artistic integrity—did not really matter to those making the accusations. What mattered was these artists' high-profile association with the GDR, the collapse of which in 1989/90 seemed to prove it had been an *Unrechtstaat* (illegitimate state). In the highly charged political atmosphere of the 1990s, the so-called *Staatskünstler* were seen by many (western) German conservatives as having helped legitimate the East German regime—and thus having contributed to its longevity—by the very fact that they had not left. This subtly poisonous accusation recalls the exiles vs. *Hierbleiber* (those remaining here) debates of the Third Reich, in which exiles were castigated for abandoning the German people in their time of greatest need, and *Hierbleiber* for tacitly lending their support to the regime by not leaving. Artists such as Heisig were thus castigated for being *Hierbleiber*, for staying in the GDR and attempting to change it from within rather than abandoning it.[14]

Not all of the criticism came from western Germans. There were, in fact, at least three distinct groups of eastern Germans in the art world whose condemnations of the so-called *Staatskünstler* were used to buoy conservative western Ger-

man criticisms. The first came from a younger generation of artists from the GDR, artists whose radicality in terms of formal innovation had caused conflict with the government, and for whom the *Mauerfall* had ended the GDR before such conflicts could be worked out or, in the case of those who had recently emigrated to the West, before they could dissociate themselves from their East German past.[15] This group in particular—artists such as Lutz Dammbeck (b. 1948) and Han-Hendrick Grimmling (b. 1947)—sees the so-called *Staatskünstler* as having sold out their artistic integrity and misused their power to oppress younger, more formally radical artists.[16] Archival evidence and interviews, however, suggest that the issue at stake here is less one of aesthetic repression than a generational conflict.[17] These younger artists were rebelling against the hegemony of the 1920s generation of artists—the so-called *Staatskünstler*—who were not only greatly praised in the GDR and internationally in the final decades of the Cold War but also largely controlled the art academies and institutions and, as such, dictated policy.

A second group of eastern German voices critical of the so-called *Staatskünstler* came from artists who had left the GDR and made international names for themselves as "German" artists. The most notable example is Georg Baselitz, who stated in a much-quoted 1990 interview in *Art* magazine: "There are no artists in the GDR, they all left […] no artists, no painters. None of them ever painted a picture […]. They are interpreters who fulfilled the program of the East German system […] [they are] simply assholes" (quoted in Hecht and Welti 70). Both he and Gerhard Richter left the GDR as adults for the West, where they established international reputations. Until recently, their East German backgrounds—including artistic training—have been glossed over.[18] Yet this background presumably contributed to their positive reception, lending them an aura of Otherness that also seemed to confirm the presumed superiority of the West by their choice to emigrate there.

The third group of eastern German voices is comprised of artists, critics, and art historians from places other than Leipzig or Halle. These individuals have attempted to reconfigure—perhaps unconsciously—the history of East German art in recent years. In particular, they downplay the importance of the Leipzig School. This view was particularly apparent in the *Kunst in der DDR, Eine Retrospektive* exhibition where the Leipzig School had only one small, artificially lit room, while artists from Berlin enjoyed three of the five rooms open to natural lighting. For those unfamiliar with the history of East German art, the Leipzig School would have seemed no more important than Constructivism, which also had a small room in the exhibition.

When examined in context, the *Bilderstreit* reveals itself primarily as a battle for place within the new Germany and, for some, a battle over what role, if any, East German art and artists should play in helping to define Germany's post-Wall cultural identity. In the new millennium, however, the vociferous battles over East German art diminished, in part, because of the passage of time.

The Quiet Rewriting of East German Art

The shift to a new, quieter phase in the reception of East German art began in 2003 when the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin held a major exhibition, *Kunst in der DDR, eine Retrospektive*. Not only did the exhibition avoid controversy in the press, it attracted large numbers of visitors and was ultimately named "Exhibition of the Year" by the International Art Critics Association (AICA). The exhibition benefitted in part from fortuitous timing: the wildly successful film, *Goodbye Lenin*, released earlier that year, marked a high point in *Ostalgie* (nostalgia for the East). The exhibition also addressed a western audience with the intent of showing that East Germany did indeed have art of value. It was intended, at least in part, as a response to—and perhaps the final word on—the controversy sparked nearly ten years earlier when the *Neue Nationalgalerie* exhibited works from both East Germany and the West next to each other.[19] Curated by two former East German curators, Roland März and Eugen Blume, *Kunst in der DDR* included 400 works of painting, drawing, sculpture, photography, and video by 130 artists. The intent was to show that the GDR had a "differentiated and rich variety of artistic voices, especially in the art centers of Berlin, Dresden, Halle and Leipzig," regardless of the politics and limitations of the "closed society" (Blume and März 12).

The exhibition was arranged roughly chronologically. It began in the immediate postwar years with images of wartime destruction, artistic self-reflection in the context of rebuilding, and early artistic experimentation in the Eastern Zone. Paintings included Hans Grundig's *Opfer des Faschismus* (Victims of Fascism, 1946) [Fig. 7], Bernhard Kretzschmar's *Selbstbildnis* (Self Portrait, 1946), and Edmund Kesting's *Land im Versinken* (Sinking Country, 1949), respectively. It

Fig. 7 – Hans Grundig, Opfer des Faschismus, 1946. Oil on hard fiber, 110 x 200 cm. Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

then offered two rooms with paintings and sculpture from the 1950s such as Sitte's *Raub der Sabinerinnen* [Fig. 2] and Metzkes' *Abtransport der sechsarmigen Göttin* (Removing the Six-armed Goddess, 1956), works inspired by Picasso and other modernist artists.

The exhibition then shifted to a number of rooms dedicated to three of East Germany's main art centers—Dresden, East Berlin, and Leipzig—reflecting the importance of districts, or *Bezirke*, in the development of artistic styles. In 1952, the SED had divided East Germany into fourteen districts, each of which had its own local branches of various national organizations, including the Union of Visual Artists (VBK).[20] These local branches interpreted rules passed down from the national organization, dealt with local artistic issues such as commissions and exhibitions, and were the official advocates for their artists. They also organized the juried district art exhibitions held throughout the country every two to three years. These exhibitions enabled each district to display its art to the public and politicians alike, and it was largely from these exhibitions that works were chosen for the national art exhibition held in Dresden every four to five years. Dresden, East Berlin, and Leipzig each had an art school and a unique artistic profile. This emphasis on the regional defines much of East Germany's art, which—unlike the West's—did not develop in terms of movements or styles but rather in terms of regional tendencies. These tendencies were encouraged, in part, by regularly scheduled exhibitions and exchanges among artists at the local level, the unique history of the region, and the specific emphasis of the art school, whether painting (Berlin and Dresden), printmaking (Leipzig), or industrial design (Halle).

For Dresden, the exhibition included images by artists who worked largely outside of official art circles in the 1960s and 1970s, including Peter Graf [Fig. 8], Strawalde (also known

Fig. 8 – Peter Graf, Selbstbildnis mit Papagei, 1971. Oil on hard fiber, diameter 41 cm. Galerie Neue Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

as Jürgen Böttcher), and Ralf Winkler (better known in the West as A.R. Penck). Dresden artists such as these tended to emphasize the painterly quality, if not coloration, associated with German Expressionism, which was founded in Dresden and remained an important inspiration for artists who lived there.

In the rooms devoted to Berlin, the selected artists tended to look to Paris for inspiration, generally adopting a quiet, poetic approach to art—from the "black melancholy" of the 1950s as embodied by Ernst Schröder and Manfred Böttcher to the more colorful images of the 1960s by artists such as Harald Metzkes. In the 1970s and 1980s, a number of artists from a younger generation emerged who looked to *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) for inspiration, as can be seen in Clemens Groszer's *Café Liolet* [Fig. 9], a clear reference to Otto Dix.

Fig. 9 – Clemens Groszer, Café Liolet, 1986.
Mixed collage on canvas, 140 x 120 cm. Brandenburgissche Kunstsammlungen Cottbus, Museum für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Fotografie und Plakat. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

Leipzig, too, had a room, albeit smaller than those for Dresden and Berlin. Paintings from Leipzig tended to emphasize complex compositions and layers of meaning, inspired at least in part because it was a city of books and publishing: artists in Leipzig not only regularly illustrated books but also incorporated literary complexity into their work [Fig. 6]. The size of the room and number of paintings included for Leipzig, however, suggests a downplaying of the city's importance to the history of East German art in comparison to Dresden and East Berlin. This is a revision that reveals the impact of the third group of critical voices about East German art's reception: artists, critics, and art historians from places other than Leipzig or Halle—in this case, two curators from East Berlin. This desire to downplay Leipzig's role stems in part from long-standing rivalries between various districts in East Germany. Whereas Leipzig emphasized highly intellectual content, energetic brushwork, and bold colors, Berlin focused on aesthetics: poetic voicings, subtle colors, and brushwork inspired by the work of French painters like Paul Cezanne (Blume and März 220-21). For some intellectuals in Berlin, the art created in Leipzig was too brash and received too much attention in the press, both before and after unification.[21]

In addition to rooms devoted to the individual art centers, there were also rooms that focused on particular styles or media. There was a small room devoted to Constructivism, a hallway to photography, and in the center, a large room to the brightly painted Neoexpressionist works created by a younger generation of artists in the 1980s, including Trak Wendisch, Klaus Killisch, and Wolfgang Smy. There were also thematic rooms that included artists who did not fit within the other categories, such as Gerhard Altenbourg and Carlfriedrich Claus, two solitary figures in the GDR whose work emphasized drawing, and Willy Wolff [Fig. 10], one of the few artists in East Germany who engaged directly with Pop Art.

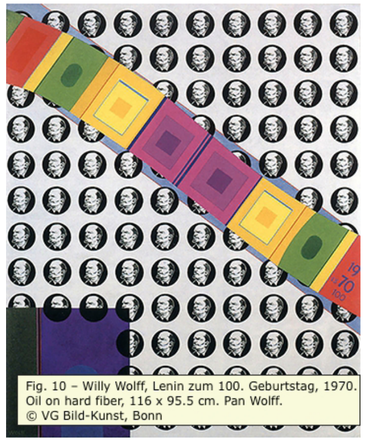

Fig. 10 – Willy Wolff, Lenin zum 100. Geburtstag, 1970.
Oil on hard fiber, 116 x 95.5 cm. Pan Wolff.
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

The exhibition *Kunst in der DDR* succeeded in its attempt to show that East Germany had art of value to Western tastes. Although this may seem obvious, it was an important fact to establish in Germany at this time. In the wake of the many exhibitions—usually in history museums—of lesser quality works, and the denigrations of the *Aufstieg und Fall der Moderne* exhibition four years earlier, the fact that East Germany had a flourishing contemporary art scene was not yet an obvious one. Yet in making this point, the curators were necessarily selective, downplaying Soviet-style Socialist Realist works in favor of those that looked to the modernist—particularly the German modernist traditions of Expressionism and Neue Sachlichkeit (Blume and März 12). The end result was a highly successful exhibition that helped change people's views of East German art. But the curators' emphasis on art *in* the GDR—as opposed to East German Art or Art of East Germany—had unintended consequences: it opened the door for future curators to include anything that was created on East German soil without regard for its importance within East German society and thus to create distorted accounts of art's role and reception (Blume and März 31). The evidence for this appears in the last major retrospective exhibition on East German art to be organized in Germany, one that took place nearly ten years later.

Abschied von Ikarus, 2012-13

Abschied von Ikarus. Bildwelten in der DDR—neu gesehen (Farewell to Icarus. Imagery in the GDR—newly seen) was a major exhibition of East German art held in Weimar from October 2012 until February 2013. It included approximately 279 works by 96 artists and was intended, in part, as a corrective to the controversial *Aufstieg und Fall der Moderne* exhibition held in Weimar thirteen years earlier. This time, however, the art was treated as art and exhibited in an art museum. The Neues Museum Weimar dedicated all seventeen rooms of its impressive two-story building to the exhibition. The first floor focused primarily on the Ulbricht era and was arranged roughly chronologically. After an introductory room of two paintings, the exhibition had a large room [Fig. 11] of well-known Socialist Realist works from the late 1940s and early 1950s. These included paintings such as Otto Nagel's *Junger Maurer von der Stalinallee* (Young Bricklayer on Stalin Boulevard, 1953) [Fig. 1], Kretzschmar's *Die Volkslehrerin* (Teacher of the People,

Fig. 11 – Wall of Socialist Realism in Abschied von Ikarus, 2013

Fig. 12 – Volker Stelzmann, Junger Schweißer, 1971. Mixed media on hard fiber, 121 x 76 cm. Kunsthalle Rostock. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

1953), and Mayer-Foreyt's *Ehrt die alten Meister* (Honor the Old Masters, 1952), works that were absent from the earlier blockbuster exhibition in Berlin. These paintings reflect the officially encouraged emphasis in the early 1950s on realism and optimism, on works that could help educate the people and offer models for behavior in the wake of the Third Reich.

These were followed by rooms on the lesser-known stories of the Bauhaus tradition at the Weimar Academy—the visual arts department of which was closed in 1951—and the modernist painters associated with the Galerie Hennig in Halle in the 1950s. Sitte's *Volkmar im Faschingskostüm* (Volkmar in a Fasching Costume, 1954) and Joachim Heuer's *Tod mit Melone und Mütze* (Death with Melon and Hat, 1948-49) reveal the importance of early modernist movements for these artists. The next room focused on the Constructivist creations of the Dresden artist Hermann Glöckner. The focus was primarily on smaller works he had created, often from non-art materials such as medicine boxes or old broken glasses. Works such as these had been highlighted a few years earlier in a major exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum, *Art of Two Germanys / Cold War Cultures*. This small, solo space was followed by a large room of paintings focusing on East German workers created from the 1950s through the 1980s. These included Volker Stelzmann's famous *Junger Schweißer* (Young Welder, 1971) [Fig. 12] and the cartoon-like, lesser-known *Die Aura der Schmelzer* (The Aura of the Smelters, 1988) by Eberhard Heiland.

Fig. 13 – Hartwig Ebersbach, Widmung an Chile, 1974. Oil on hard fiber, 12 panels: 6 panels 200 x 60 cm, 6 panels 120 x 60 cm. Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, Aachen. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

Whereas the exhibition's first floor offered a roughly chronological overview of art during the first two decades of the Cold War era, most of the works on the second floor dated from the Honecker period and were organized thematically. As on the first floor, these rooms offered a combination of well-known works and new discoveries, especially from the alternative scene. The Leipzig School was shown in a room titled, "The Apotheosis of Horror." It included work by Heisig, Mattheuer, Sitte, and Tübke, as well as by younger artists, including Hartwig Ebersbach and Hubertus Giebe. Many of these paintings focused on the Nazi past or the imperialist present. Ebersbach's polyptych, *Widmung an Chile* (Dedicated to Chile, 1974) [Fig. 13], for example, was a response to the 1973 putsch in Chile in which Augusto Pinochet, with CIA backing, violently overthrew the democratically elected communist leader Salvador Allende and installed a military dictatorship that tortured tens of thousands of people, several thousand of whom were "disappeared."

Another room, titled "Melancholy Antiquity," focused on the use of mythology in East German art. It included works by Heisig, Mattheuer, and Metzkes, among others. Mythology was a major theme in the 1970s and 1980s, enabling artists to comment on current events through allegorical figures such as Sisyphus, Penthesilea, and especially Icarus, who appeared in more than sixty works in these years (Arlt 116). In Hans-Hendrick Grimmling's diptych, *Ikarus zu Hause* (Icarus at Home, 1978) [Fig. 14], Icarus appears as a bird-like figure bound to a chair in the left-hand panel, whereas in the right-hand panel he is gone: only the upturned chair and bird mask remain, presumably having been swatted down by the hand of the giant face that hovers outside the window. It is a work that perhaps reflects the artist's frustration at trying to make a name for himself as a young artist at the time.

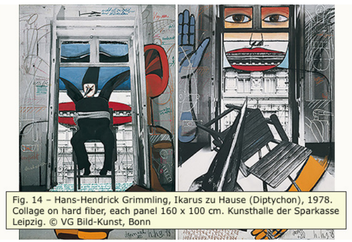

Fig. 14 – Hans-Hendrick Grimmling, Ikarus zu Hause (Diptychon), 1978. Collage on hard fiber, each panel 160 x 100 cm. Kunsthalle der Sparkasse Leipzig. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

A third room was devoted to women artists. Titled, "Old Adam, New Eve," it contained work by a number of important painters, including Angela Hampel, Nuria Quevedo, and Doris Ziegler. Many of the paintings, such as Ziegler's *Ich bin Du* (I am You, 1988) [Fig. 15] and Hampel's *Angela und Angelus I-IV* (1986), were self-portraits. This exhibition marks the first time that so many important female painters were included in a major exhibition of East German art after unification. The room also included alternative artists such as Annemirl Bauer and Gabriele Stötzer, artists whose work was hardly recognized during the Cold War period.

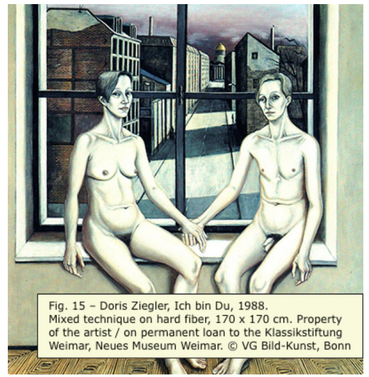

Fig. 15 – Doris Ziegler, Ich bin Du, 1988. Mixed technique on hard fiber, 170 x 170 cm. Property of the artist / on permanent loan to the Klassikstiftung Weimar, Neues Museum Weimar. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

A fourth room, "Outbreak and Disintegration: the 1980s" [Fig. 16], focused on large-scale works of painting and installation created in the final decade of the Cold War, including large, expressionist paintings by Wolfram Adalbert Scheffler [Fig. 16, left] and Cornelia Schleime [Fig. 16, middle].[22] As in the room "Old Adam, New Eve," some of these artists had been exhibited in major exhibitions in East Germany, while others had had a much smaller audience. The exhibition did not distinguish between those artists who were well known and those who were not.

Abschied von Ikarus successfully expanded the view of East German art to include artwork from both the canon and the alternative scene, two art worlds hitherto generally treated separately in exhibitions.[23] Indeed, the inclusion of Socialist Realist, modernist, and alternative art together in one space was the exhibition's real achievement, offering a never-before-seen breadth of art created in East Germany. *Abschied von Ikarus* therefore contained great potential for offering insight into the complexity of artistic production in East Germany. In many ways the first floor fulfilled this promise in its chronological presentation of Soviet-inspired Socialist Realist works next to the Bauhaus-inspired art at the Weimar Academy and the modernist art and artists—some well-known in official circles, some not—around the Galerie Henning in Halle. These rooms added important new dimensions to the narrative around East German art, especially in the 1950s. The second floor, however, did not; organized thematically, it offered little guidance for how to understand the works in relation to the larger context in which they were created. Instead, the thematic groupings organized the material through a Western—often negative—

lens that ultimately distorted the material and impeded understanding. The rooms "Melancholy Antiquity" and "Outbreak and Disintegration: The 1980s," for example, imposed a negative framework on the works shown as evidenced by the terms melancholy and disintegration.[24] "The Apotheosis of Horror," on the other hand, framed the works as a spectacle of violence rather than a critique of the Nazi past or imperialist present, as intended by the artists. As such, the title of the room deflected attention away from the idea held by many East German artists—as well as politicans—of "art as a weapon" in the fight against war and fascism.[25]

Fig. 16 – "Outbreak and Disintegration," room in Abschied von Ikarus, 2013

The exhibition—and especially the catalogue—privileged a Western perspective in a number of other ways as well, most notably in its underrepresentation of women artists. Although *Abschied von Ikarus* included more women painters from the 1970s and 1980s than many of its predecessor exhibitions in the West, the percentage of women was nonetheless far lower in comparison to the realities of the East German art world. Of ninety-six artists in the exhibition, only nine were women, a ratio of less than one in ten, which erroneously suggests that art is primarily a masculine endeavor. This small proportion stands in sharp contrast to the actual East German art world where, as of the 1980s, women comprised more than 33 percent of the artists in the national Union of Visual Artists and more than 20 percent of artists included in the national art exhibitions in Dresden (Zentrum 12; Müller, Appendix 1).[26] Indeed, women had been above 15 percent of the artists included in that exhibition since the 1950s (Eisman, "Economic" 177). *Abschied von Ikarus*'s low percentage reflected Western expectations for women's participation more than Eastern reality. Not only did *Abschied von Ikarus* include far fewer women, their art, with only a few exceptions, was confined to just one room—and not one of the larger ones—which effectively ghettoized them within the exhibition. While grouping women together is common in the West, it was virtually unheard of in the East. The suggestion was thus that women's participation in the East German art world was as low as it was—and continues to be—in the West.[27]

Another way the exhibition distorted East German art was through an overemphasis on the alternative scene. This appears noticeably in the designation of most of the corner rooms to alternative art and artists, including the Bauhaus in Weimar, Hermann Glöckner, Carlfriedrich Claus, Lutz Dammbeck, and Klaus Hähner-Springmühl.[28] No official artist received similar treatment. The exhibition thus obscured the difference between well-known works and those that had a limited audience within the GDR. Indeed, it often inverted the two. The result was an exhibition that showed that a lot of art had been created in East Germany and in a wide variety of styles and media, but offered little indication as to which works were important and to whom, be it the official art scene, artistic subgroups, or the curators who had put the exhibition together.[29]

Another significant distortion was the negative tone of the exhibition, which appeared most prominently in its presentist insistence on the GDR's failure and, with it, the loss of the utopia East Germany had promised, rather than scholarly engagement with the art and art system in which it was created. The exhibition's tendentious nature is evident from its title, "Farewell to Icarus," which refers to a mythological figure who came to symbolize the ideals of the GDR in many artists' work in the 1970s and 1980s; Icarus also symbolized the artists themselves and the struggles they faced in trying to realize these ideals. To say farewell to Icarus is thus to say goodbye not just to the GDR, but also to its art and artists as well as its hope for a better future. The emphasis on East Germany's failure also appeared in the first room of the exhibition, which contained a wall text and two paintings, Bernhard Kretzschmar's *Blick auf Eisenhüttenstadt* (1955) [Fig. 17] and Wolfgang Mattheuer's *Freundlicher Besuch im Braunkohlenrevier* (Friendly Visit to the Lignite Region, 1974) [Fig. 18]. Kretzschmar's early painting captures a high point in East German construction: the completion of an entire city built from scratch, the smoke in the background a sign of productivity rather than pollution. Mattheuer's painting from nearly twenty years later, in comparison, depicts a landscape of dirt with a power plant in the distance ringed in clouds or smog. The suggestion is that the ideals of the earlier work have resulted in the seemingly destroyed landscape of the latter one. Similarly, both images show figures in the foreground. Yet whereas in Kretzschmar's paintings, the many tiny people are enjoying a beautiful day—there is a dog on a leash, a couple having a picnic, and many bikes—the latter shows a figure, perhaps heading off to work, while others, their heads concealed in boxes with smiling faces painted on the sides, head the other way. The juxtaposition of these two paintings thus not only suggests that the early hopes and dreams have resulted in environmental degradation but also the need for people in the GDR to mask their true thoughts and feelings. In other words, it suggests that the GDR was doomed to fail, and it is this idea of failure, coming as it does in the very first room, that sets the stage for the rest of the exhibition despite the fact that the artists themselves were unaware of this outcome and were not engaging with it in their work. To emphasize East Germany's failure thus not only misrepresents the artworks shown, it also subtly undermines their importance since it frames the works as the artistic creations of a failed state. Like the title of the exhibition, this emphasis on failure suggests that these works belong to the "dustbin of history," a common refrain in what historian Sandrine Kott and others have identified as a totalitarian approach to East German studies, an approach that was prevalent in Germany in the 1990s but has since been widely criticized (Cohen; Kott).[30]

Fig. 17 – Bernhard Kretzschmar, Blick auf Eisenhüttenstadt, 1955. Oil on canvas, 105 x 160 cm. Museum Junge Kunst Frankfurt (Oder). © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

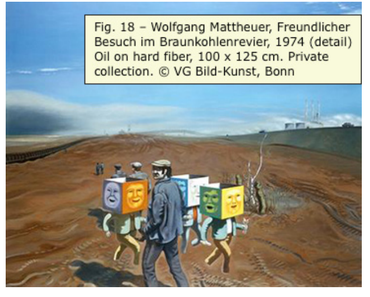

Fig. 18 – Wolfgang Mattheuer, Freundlicher Besuch im Braunkohlenrevier, 1974 (detail) Oil on hard fiber, 100 x 125 cm. Private collection. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

The negative tone of the exhibition is most explicit, however, in the exhibition's catalogue. A quick glance at the articles' titles reveals words and phrases such as impossibility, fatigue, coercion, melancholy, a Pyrrhus victory, dictated standards, ugly, apotheosis of terror, apocalypse and redemption, demise and horror, resistant painting, and escape (Rehberg, et al. 4-5). East Germany is presented as a place whose reality was "infiltrated" by melancholy, which was perhaps a "premonition of the failure of the 'great Project'" (61). Elsewhere it is compared to George Orwell's dystopian novel, *1984* (51). Even when authors acknowledge that some people chose to live in the GDR, the examples suggest it was a bad choice: the journalist Rudolf Herrnstadt—who moved to the East and made his career in the SED but was later forced to resign and was essentially banned to a small town after a clash with Ulbricht—is compared to Helmut Kindler, a journalist who moved to the West and became one of West Germany's most successful publishers (51-52).

The negative tone also appears in the catalogue's emphasis on repression, which is particularly evident in how it portrays Hermann Glöckner, a Dresden artist who is best known today for his many Constructivist paintings and sculptures. The catalogue states that Glöckner first "broke through the cultural political ice" of the art world in 1984 at the age of 95 (160). In this year, he completed a major sculpture in Dresden and received the GDR's national Art Prize. According to the catalog, this marked the end of a "period of […] official ignorance and humiliating limits" on the artist (160). Not only is the language loaded, but the information is false. Glöckner exhibited work in East and West Germany throughout the 1950s, created numerous works of architectural art through the end of the 1960s, and had his breakthrough in 1969 when he was given a major solo exhibition at the Kupferstichkabinet in Dresden that included more than 150 works. Thereafter, he regularly exhibited work in local and national exhibitions in Dresden and was the focus of numerous articles, several catalogues, and a book. Indeed, the major sculpture mentioned in the catalogue was a multi-year commission given to him in the mid-1970s that cost upwards of 45,000 Marks to create and install (BfaK-D). Yet the *Abschied von Ikarus* exhibition and catalogue maintained the fiction that Glöckner was a repressed artist who received recognition in the GDR only a few years before his death. While Glöckner did not share the level of fame of the Leipzig School of artists, he was a well-known and well-respected artist in East Germany throughout the Honecker era.[31] To suggest otherwise is to rewrite East German art along Western expectations of repression. Such rewriting not only distorts the realities of the East German art world, but also deprives artists of their agency and artworks of their meaning. The emphasis throughout the catalogue is thus more on judging East Germany than on understanding the art and the artistic context in which it was created. As historian Andrew Port has noted about some German scholarship on the GDR more generally, the catalogue is an example of "history as comfort food for those most interested in moralistic posturing" (Port 14). Rather than ask questions that further our understanding of East Germany, the catalogue falls back on banalities: the GDR as a repressive, totalitarian state, as a footnote of history.

When examined within the larger context of East German art's reception in the West, *Abschied von Ikarus* exemplifies the second of what I have identified as four main approaches to East German art. The first, often found in English-language scholarship but also in the *Bilderstreit* of the long 1990s, is the idea that there was no art in East Germany or, at least, no art of value to the West, be it aesthetically (e.g. kitsch, *Auftragskunst*) or because of the artists' political beliefs (*Staatskünstler*). The second approach acknowledges that art was created in East Germany, but limits these works to so-called dissident or alternative artists or to those who were oppressed by the system. This can be seen in the *Abschied von Ikarus* exhibition in its overemphasis on the alternative scene, which was highlighted in the corner rooms, and in its rewriting of artists such as Hermann Glöckner. The third approach, which I have not engaged with in this article, acknowledges that even the so-called *Staatskünstler* created art but attempts to separate these artists from the East German state, most often by overemphasizing problems they may have had and ignoring or downplaying any positive connections. This approach can be seen, for example, in the 2005 exhibition, *Bernhard Heisig: Wut der Bilder* (see Eisman, "Denying Difference"). The fourth level is the one I am advocating for here: an engagement with East German art on its own terms. This approach sets aside moral judgments in an attempt to understand the art created—and the artists who created it—in relationship to the East German context in which it was produced. I am arguing, in essence, that art history follow the lead of East German studies more generally and move away from a totalitarian model of engagement in favor of a more nuanced approach (Kott; Port).

Abschied von Ikarus was the last major retrospective exhibition of East German art to take place in Germany. Its size and claim to be the final word in the *Bilderstreit* will presumably make it the last for many years to come.[32] Problematic as it was, it marks the current state of East German art's reception in Germany today and shows how the *Bilderstreit* is over not because it has been successfully resolved but rather because time has made East German art less of a threat to the now not-so-newly unified nation. Even an exhibition in a major art museum is not going to lead to a rewriting of the postwar German canon more than twenty years after unification. Similarly, the negative aspects of the exhibition were more subtle than in the 1990s and, more importantly, were most evident in the catalogue, a massive tome that overwhelms with its size and thus ensures that few of the exhibition visitors will do more than flip through it. As for East German scholars who might voice criticisms, they have largely disappeared in the new millennium, be it from exhaustion, resignation, or death.[33]

Conclusion

For art historians, East Germany offers an unparalleled opportunity to study the impact of politics on art. Until 1945, what would become East Germany and West Germany was the same country with the same (art) history. How art developed thereafter is directly related to the super power in charge and, more specifically, the capitalist or communist ideology applied. Having developed largely outside of a market system, East Germany offers art historians an "alternative modernism," one in which artists did not need to reject the threat of commodity culture as so many artists in the West did. Indeed, a rejection of the commodification of art is partly what spurred the development of conceptual and performance art in the West. As such, East Germany offers an alternative perspective from which to view the development of Western art. In fact, East German art reveals the neoliberal underpinnings of postwar Western art with the latter's emphasis on the individual, the postmodern play of the signifier, and diversity at the cost of challenging inequality (Michaels). One might even argue that East German art's focus on the people and on challenging inequality is an old-school correlative to the activist Social Practice artists who have emerged in recent years—artists whose desire for social engagement has been theorized most famously by the French curator and art critic Nicolas Borriaud in his 1998 book, *Relational Aesthetics*.

A nuanced view of East German art can also offer new insights for German Studies scholars. First, art was an important part of East German culture. Like writers, visual artists were expected to play a major role in helping to form the new socialist identity. Initially this meant creating heroic images of workers and communist leaders as alternative role models to help educate the German people after twelve years of Nazi propaganda. Later it meant creating complex works that engaged the audience in discussions with artists and each other about a variety of issues. Like literature, art became an alternative public sphere (Bathrick). As part of the intellectual elite who helped to create the very fabric of the society in which they lived, artists shared many of the same social responsibilities as writers and filmmakers, both of whom are better known in Anglophone scholarship. East German art is thus not only important in its own right but also in terms of comparisons with these other fields. Like literature, art offered opportunities for discussion through its subject matter, but unlike writers, artists needed some level of official recognition for their work to be seen. Large paintings could not be surreptitiously shared or smuggled across the border (Pachnicke and Merkert 7-8). But like writers, artists could work alone and create whatever they wanted, something those in the film industry could not do owing to the greater number of people involved and the larger monetary investment. In addition to differentiating the conditions of creativity among the cultural elites, it would also be valuable to compare the freezes and thaws in cultural policy: did they happen at the same time and to the same extent across the various fields? Anecdotal evidence suggests not. So what can this tell us?

A study of the visual arts is also important because of the crossover that existed between fields. Visual artists were deeply engaged with the literature of their country, and texts by authors from Brecht to Christa Wolf were frequently referred to if not illustrated outright in their work. Indeed, the Leipzig Academy was known for its literary approach to painting, an approach encouraged by the city's many publishers and book fairs, and many of the artists who studied or taught there also created literary prints throughout their careers. Artists and writers also knew each other and some were friends. Christa Wolf's circle, for example, included both Nuria Quevedo and Angela Hampel, both of whom created numerous works inspired by her novels. Indeed, there is a tremendous amount to be learned about the literature of East Germany as seen through the eyes of East German artists, and presumably that influence moved in both directions. Moreover, artists and writers also some-

times worked together on projects. In 1975, for example, the Mitteldeutscher Verlag in Halle published a nearly 300-page oversize book titled *Chile: Gesang und Bericht* (Chile: Song and Report). It was created through a joint effort of writers and artists—including Volker Braun and Anna Seghers as well as Heisig, Sitte, and Tübke—in response to the 1973 putsch in Chile. There was also crossover between the visual arts and film. The filmmaker Jürgen Böttcher, for example, worked early on as a painter in Dresden under the name Strawalde. There were also many artists who engaged with the Super-8 film medium in the 1980s. To what extent were these latter artists informed by or perhaps even informing DEFA filmmakers?

Such comparisons across media cannot take place in a context in which East German art is presumed to be little more than political propaganda or kitsch. Yet this is the view that continues to dominate Anglophone scholarship, one that was evident in the Los Angeles County Museum's 2009 exhibition, *Art of Two Germanys / Cold War Cultures*, the first—and to date only—major American exhibition of postwar German art to include East German works.[34] Rather than show the diversity of what existed, however, the exhibition continued Cold War stereotypes: East German art was Soviet-inspired Socialist Realism, modern artists were repressed, and the only good art was that created by so-called dissidents or expats. The Leipzig School—indeed, the great variety of artistic styles evident throughout East Germany after the 1950s—was almost entirely absent from the exhibition, as was any discussion of the *Bilderstreit* (Eisman, "Review" 628-30). Significantly, one of the curators was from western Germany, which perhaps explains why this exhibition so closely reflected the western rewriting of East German art that was attempted in Germany in the 1990s. Whereas Germany contained sixteen million people who knew better, some of whom spoke out, the United States did not. Significantly, the LACMA exhibition then traveled to two locations in Germany as *Kunst und Kalter Krieg* (Art and Cold War), where it was praised as an American view on the topic of postwar German art (Poschardt).

Since 1990, East German art has been rewritten to fulfill Western expectations. This rewriting not only negatively affects our understanding of East Germany, but it also deprives us of a perspective from which to better understand the world in which we live today and the choices made in the West after 1945—whether about art, women's rights, or democracy more generally. Understanding East Germany on its own terms offers an unparalleled opportunity to understand how politics affects art—by comparing it to West Germany—and a valuable resource from which to search for alternatives to the neoliberal present in which we find ourselves as well as a cautionary tale for how a good idea can fail. East Germany's value in this regard has only increased in recent years as an entire generation of adults—all born after the end of the Cold War—shows that it is no longer willing to accept the decades-long taboo against socialism nor the claim that neoliberal capitalism is our only option.

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Image Notes

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Fig. 1 – Otto Nagel, Junger Maurer von der Stalinalle, 1953. Oil on canvas, 116 x 79.5 cm. Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin.

Fig. 2 – Willi Sitte, *Raub der Sabinerinnen*, 1953. Oil on hard fiber, 126.5 x 165 cm. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Nationalgalerie.

Fig. 3 – Steffen Fischer and Angela Hampel, *Offene Zweierbeziehung*, 1989. Mixed media. Property of the artists.

Fig. 4 – Heinrich Witz, *Der neue Anfang*, 1959. Oil, 95 x 120 cm. Kunstsammlung der Wismut GmbH Chemnitz.

Fig. 5 – Bernhard Heisig, *Zirkel junge Naturforscher*, 1952. Oil on Canvas. 120 x 190 cm. Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig.

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Fig. 7 – Hans Grundig, *Opfer des Faschismus*, 1946. Oil on hard fiber, 110 x 200 cm. Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig.

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Fig. 11 – Wall of Socialist Realism in *Abschied von Ikarus*.

Fig. 12 – Volker Stelzmann, *Junger Schweißer*, 1971. Mixed media on hard fiber, 121 x 76 cm. Kunsthalle Rostock.

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Fig. 14 – Hans-Hendrick Grimmling, *Ikarus zu Hause (Diptychon)*, 1978. Collage on hard fiber, each panel 160 x 100 cm. Kunsthalle der Sparkasse Leipzig.

Fig. 15 – Doris Ziegler, *Ich bin Du*, 1988. Mixed technique on hard fiber, 170 x 170 cm. Property of the artist / on permanent loan to the Klassikstiftung Weimar, Neues Museum Weimar.

Fig. 16 (cover image) – "Outbreak and Disintegration," room in *Abschied von Ikarus*.

Fig. 17 – Bernhard Kretzschmar, *Blick auf Eisenhüttenstadt*, 1955. Oil on canvas, 105 x 160 cm. Museum Junge Kunst Frankfurt (Oder).

Fig. 18 – Wolfgang Mattheuer, *Freundlicher Besuch im Braunkohlenrevier*, 1974. Oil on hard fiber, 100 x 125 cm. Private collection.

Endnotes

1 This article started as a conference paper about the *Bilderstreit* at a German Studies Association panel in 2005; it was expanded for a conference at Northwestern University in 2009 and again for a conference at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2016. I would like to thank Grant Arndt, Katrin Bahr, Stephen Brockmann, Michael Dreyer, Candice Hamelin, Paula Hanssen, Seth Howes, June Hwang, Franziska Lys, Gisela Schirmer, Marc Silberman, and two anonymous readers for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this manuscript.

2 For a recent example of this in literature, see Brockmann.

3 Recent examples include Rubin; Creech; and Jampol.

4 Although the New Leipzig School has connections to East Germany, most notably through Neo Rauch, it is a post-unification phenomenon. In Germany, the connections between the New Leipzig School and the "old" Leipzig School are well known; in England and the United States, where there is little knowledge of the "old" Leipzig School or modern art in East Germany more generally, the New Leipzig School is often presented in triumphalist terms that assumes these artists had little contact with modern art before 1989/90. For more on this, see Eisman, "Painting."

5 One of the difficulties in recognizing the absence of painting from current scholarship is the tendency to use "art" as a general term for the arts. A recent example is Jampol's tome, *Beyond the Wall, Art and Artifacts from the GDR*. Although a welcome addition to East German studies, it focuses on design and everyday life in the GDR. Of its 900 pages only 13 focus on art, and all of them focus on so-called dissident artists ("Dissident Art" 244-45). Moreover, none of the works shown are paintings, which was East Germany's most important visual arts medium. Although the book is limited to the Wende Museum collection, one has to wonder why "art" was included in the title. Even Kelly and Wlodarski's edited volume, *Art Outside the Lines: New Perspectives on GDR Art Culture*, which contains the largest number of texts on art to date in an English-language book, dedicates more than half of its chapters to film, literature, and especially music.

6 For a recent discussion of some of the problems with scholarship on East Germany, see Port. There are many examples of good scholarship on East German art in German, most frequently as monographs. See Damus; Goeschen; Lang, *Maleri und Grafik*; and Schirmer, *DDR und documenta*. Unfortunately, these works are often less known by non-specialists and those working outside of Germany than texts written for major exhibition catalogues. By their very nature, major exhibition catalogues on this topic are problematic: they are often written by non-specialists under time constraints and the exhibitions themselves, which require significant external funding, generally do not assume a critical stance toward western assumptions. On the political limitations of contemporary art exhibitions, see Stallabrass; on Western assumptions toward East Germany, see Parkes; and Ahbe.

7 For a case study of German scholarship before and after unification, see Eisman, "Denying Difference." The reasons for art's elision in comparison to other media are multiple. For one, the visual arts were a weapon in Cold War politics. Abstraction, particularly Abstract Expressionism, were exported as evidence of the United States' new cultural power and as a visual correlative to democratic freedom. See Barnhisel; Hermand; Guilbaut; and Saunders. Another reason that the visual arts, particularly painting, has been overlooked in the West is the difficulty in seeing originals. Whereas literature, music, and film can cross borders relatively easily, paintings cannot. Even today, the expense of shipping and insurance prevents any but the largest of institutions in the U.S. from mounting an exhibition of East German art. A third factor in why art has been overlooked in comparison to literature, film, and material culture is institutional. In the 1970s and 1980s, German departments in the United States focused on literature. Bertolt Brecht and his legacy in East Germany was an important area of study; another, inspired by the increasing importance of feminism in academia, was of East German authors such as Christa Wolf (see Silberman). Serious studies of East German film, in comparison, first emerged in the 1990s, encouraged by Barton Byg, who founded the DEFA Film Library in Amherst, Massachusetts. This institution has been instrumental in making these films available to English-speaking audiences through subtitles and in bringing scholars together in summer workshops and regular panels at the annual conferences of the German Studies Association. Similarly, the recent interest in East German material culture has been encouraged by Justinian Jampol's Wende Museum, founded near Los Angeles, California, in 2002.

8 Some of these artists were engaging with Picasso's work well before the cultural relaxation of the mid-1950s, which then enabled them to do so openly. Sitte's experiments with Picasso's style, for example, can be seen already in work from 1950 (see Schirmer, *Willi Sitte*).

9 Freezes and thaws in the visual arts were often related to political events. The formalism debates (1948-51) marked a freeze in the face of increasing Cold War tensions. The workers' uprising in 1953, in comparison, resulted in a thaw as East German authorities attempted to gain support from artist intellectuals. The building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 similarly resulted in a thaw after the freeze that followed the Hungarian uprising in 1956. When Erich Honecker came to power in 1971, a lasting thaw set in for those artists who were committed to socialism and worked in a traditional medium like painting. For overviews of East German art history, see Damus; Lang, *Malerei und Grafik*.

10 Individual artists had had exhibitions in West Germany before 1977, but *documenta 6* marked the emergence of "East German Art" as its own category.

11 Major West German exhibitions of East German art include *Zeitvergleich: Malerei und Grafik aus der DDR* (Hamburg 1982); *Durchblick*, Ludwig-Institut für Kunst der DDR (Oberhausen 1984); *DDR heute, Malerei / Graphik / Plastik* (Worpswede 1984); and *Menschenbilder, Kunst aus der DDR* (Bonn 1986).

12 For more information about these clashes, see Eisman, "In the Crucible."

13 Hartwig Ebersbach, *Letter to the Press* (11 February 1998). "es geht gar nicht um eine inhaltliche Auseinandersetzung mit Werk und Leben, sondern es werde lediglich ein Klischee bedient: Heisig, das ist der DDR."

14 Similar accusations arose in the literary controversy around Christa Wolf. It should be noted, however, that not everyone who remained in East Germany believed in the system or was trying to change it.

15 Many of these artists and cultural figures were born in the late 1940s and early 1950s and thus belong to what Mary Fulbrook calls the First FDJ Generation. This generation played a disproportionate role in bringing about the end of the GDR, but they were also the greatest losers after unification: too young to retire, they often faced unemployment and other hardships such as the loss of affordable childcare. The "State Artists," in comparison, were able to retire and faced fewer challenges (Fulbrook 213-14).

16 Dammbeck's tendentious movie, *Dürers Erbe*, castigates Leipzig School artists such as Heisig, Tübke, and Mattheuer for their connection to the East German government, but his story ends around 1961, i.e., before these artists developed the modern styles for which they are known and before their confrontations with the government began.

17 Discussion between Hans Hendrick-Grimmling and the author, 2005.

18 Recent examples of texts engaging with these artists' West German past include Lang, "Expressionism"; Nugent.

19 Discussion between Roland März and the author, summer 2003. The western works were not limited to West Germany.

20 The fourteen districts were Cottbus, Dresden, Erfurt, Frankfurt (Oder), Gera, Halle, Karl Marx Stadt, Leipzig, Magdeburg, Neubrandenburg, Potsdam, Rostock, Schwerin, and Suhl. (East) Berlin later became a fifteenth district.

21 This motivation became clear to me after several discussions with Roland März and others in 2003, when I worked as a volunteer (*Praktikantin*) on the *Kunst in der DDR* exhibition held that year at the Neue Nationalgalerie.

22 The second floor had a total of ten rooms. In addition to the four already mentioned were: Technocratic Utopia, Everyday Struggles ("Mühen der Ebene"), Children of the Night, and three corner rooms that each focused on an individual artist (Carlfriedrich Claus, Lutz Dammbeck, and Klaus Hähner-Springmühl).

23 For an example of a major exhibition on the alternative scene, see Kaiser and Petzold.

24 This negative framing can also be seen in the title of another room, "Everyday Struggles" ("Mühen der Ebene"), which focused on images of work and everyday life. The title refers to a 1949 poem by Bertolt Brecht, "Wahrnehmung" (Observation), that speaks of the "everyday struggles" of the postwar period after the "mountainous struggles" ("Mühen der Gebirge") against the Third Reich. In the context of the poem, everyday struggles are preferable; for those unfamiliar with the poem, however, the title suggests a negative interpretation of the everyday. Moreover, one has to wonder why the curators did not use "Mountainous Struggles" as a title instead of "Apotheosis of Horror" for the neighboring room.

25 In East Germany, works such as those shown in the "Apotheosis of Horror" room were often shown with titles such as "Art as a Weapon" (1960), "Art in the Fight against Fascism (1975), "The Horrors of War" (1983), "Artists against Fascism and War" (1985), or "Antifascist Art in the GDR" (1988).

26 According to the Zentrum für Kulturforschung in Bonn, women were approximately 36 percent of the VBK membership in 1989/90 (12). According to Müller, women were 28 percent of the VBK membership in 1983 (Appendix 1, Table 4).

27 See East London Fawcett's (ELF) Art Audit, 2012-13 and Brainstormers, Accessed 6 September 2016.

28 Although one might be tempted to read the corner rooms as a reference to the margins of official East German art history, in the exhibition space, these rooms functioned to highlight the artists chosen.

29 This blurring of boundaries can be seen in the 2016 exhibition, *Gegenstimmen: Kunst in der DDR, 1976-1989*, at the Martin Gropius Bau in Berlin, which included artwork shown at the prestigious "Art Exhibitions of the GDR" next to work by artists who had received little or no recognition in the GDR; it did not distinguish between them. Indeed, the curator suggested at a symposium in September 2016 that all the artists included were part of a largely overlooked alternative scene that needed its due.

30 This idea of the "dustbin of art history" fits with a larger discussion within East German studies about whether the GDR was a mere "footnote of world history," as Stefan Heym stated after the fall of the Berlin Wall (Port).

31 For the 100th anniversary of Glöckner's birth in January 1989, two years after he died, there were two exhibitions in his honour: *Hermann Glöckner zum 100. Geburtstag* in Dresden and Halle and *Homage à Hermann Glöckner* at the Galerie am Sachsenplatz in Leipzig. The latter included work by more than 70 East German artists.

32 There have been many more exhibitions of East German art than those discussed in this paper, which focuses only on major retrospective exhibitions with a resonance that extends beyond Germany. Many of the most illuminating exhibitions on East German art, in comparison, take place in smaller settings or less prominent locations and therefore do not reach an international audience. The Museum Junge Kunst in Frankfurt/Oder and the Kunst Museum Dieselkraftwerk in Cottbus (both located in eastern Germany) both regularly organize meaningful exhibitions on East German art. It will be interesting to see what, if any, impact the Museum Barberini in Potsdam—which opened in January 2017 with works from Hasso Plattner's collection—will have on scholarship about East German art. It organized a symposium in April 2017 in preparation for an exhibition on East German art scheduled to open in Fall 2017, *Hinter der Maske: Künstler in der DDR*. Significantly, the museum is the result of a private initiative, a western German businessman not unlike Peter Ludwig, whose own important collection of East German art is now on long-term loan at the Museum of Art in Leipzig.

33 A quick look at the authors included in an extensive book about the *Bilderstreit* published in Germany in 2013 is revealing in terms of who writes about East German art today. Of the sixteen authors who contributed texts to the volume edited by Karl-Siegbert Rehberg and Paul Kaiser, only five were from East Germany, and two of these were just teenagers when the Wall fell. The majority of the texts—eleven of sixteen—were written by people who lived in the West (all but one from West Germany), the youngest of whom was approximately 34 when the Wall fell. This is a striking imbalance that favors a western perspective. It should also be pointed out that of the sixteen authors, only four are women.

34 There have been a handful of exhibitions in the United States such as *Twelve Artists of the GDR* at the Busch Reisinger Museum in 1989 and *New Territory, Art from East Germany* at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in 1990. Although important, these exhibitions were small and directed at a specialist audience. Moreover, framed solely in terms of East German art, they did not directly challenge the dominant narrative of postwar German art as a solely West German production.

THE "GENTLE LIE": WOMEN AND THE GDR MEDICAL SYSTEM IN FILM AND LITERATURE

SONJA E. KLOCKE

Abstract | *Within the context of medical-historical research, this article compares the depiction of female patients in GDR and post-GDR fictional texts: Lothar Warneke's Die Beunruhigung (1982), Christa Wolf's Nachdenken über Christa T. (1968) and Leibhaftig (2002), and Kathrin Schmidt's Du stirbst nicht (2009). This approach highlights the idiosyncrasies of GDR medicine, which demanded patients' collaboration in therapeutic measures and hid from them the truth about their conditions. This custom, known as the "gentle lie," as well as other top-down practices echo the state's patriarchal attitude towards its citizens, particularly women, evidencing that the GDR claim of gender equality was not practiced in key areas of women's lives. Furthermore, there is evidence that hierarchical structures denying patients' agency persist today in eastern Germany.*

Résumé | *Dans une perspective médico-historique, cet article compare la description de patientes dans des récits de fiction de la RDA et de l'ex-RDA: L'Inquiétude (Die Beunruhigung) de Lothar Warneke (1982), Christa T. (Nachdenken über Christa T.) (1968) et Le Corps même (Leibhaftig) de Christa Wolf (2002) ainsi que Tu ne vas pas mourir (Du stirbst nicht) de Kathrin Schmidt (2009). Cette approche met en lumière les idiosyncrasies de la médecine de la RDA, laquelle demandait la collaboration des patients dans les mesures thérapeutiques tout en leur cachant la vérité sur leur condition. Cette pratique—connue sous le nom de « doux mensonge »—ainsi que d'autres pratiques imposées d'en haut reflètent l'attitude patriarcale de l'État envers ses citoyens, et tout particulièrement envers les femmes, preuve que la revendication—faite par la RDA—de l'égalité des sexes n'était pas mise en œuvre dans des secteurs clés de la vie des femmes. En outre, tout porte à croire que les structures hiérarchiques privant les patients d'initiative continuent de se perpétuer aujourd'hui dans l'Est de l'Allemagne.*

Lothar Warneke's 1982 film *Die Beunruhigung* (*Apprehension*, 1982), a low-budget, black-and-white *Alltagsfilm* (everyday film) that features documentary elements, was among the most popular DEFA films of the 1980s.[1] At the GDR's second national festival for feature films in Karl-Marx-Stadt in 1982, it received several prizes, including the so-called *Großen Steiger*, the audience prize for the most effective movie screened within the prior two years.[2] As Andrea Rinke highlights in "From Models to Misfits, "the question of how individuals cope with illness, pain, depression, and death was at the forefront of Warneke's controversial film" (195). Surprisingly, though, scholarship largely focuses on how the protagonist, Inge Herold (played by Christine Schorn) takes charge of her life and seeks a fulfilling love relationship when she finds herself in a time of crisis. These discussions treat the diagnosis of breast cancer as no more than a plot trigger for Inge's actions. This approach may be attributable to Erika Richter, the artistic advisor for *Die Beunruhigung*, who spotlighted this aspect in her afterword to Helga Schubert's 1982 script. Richter's declaration that the main idea of the film was, "illness interrupts normal everyday life and forces individuals to take stock" seems to have been highly influential (88).

Contrary to these approaches, this article proposes a reading that investigates more closely the portrayal of the GDR medical system in *Die Beunruhigung*. It places this interpretation in the context of medical-historical research on GDR healthcare practices and examines how this distinctive medical system—characterized by a lack of patient autonomy reflecting the GDR's essentially authoritarian and patriarchal structure—affects Inge Herold's ability to deal with her illness. By considering additional examples of medical treatment in GDR and post-GDR fiction by Christa Wolf and Kathrin Schmidt—fictional texts deliberately chosen to demonstrate that the concern for medical ethics has played a significant role in various historical circumstances and political systems—this approach achieves two goals: firstly, it highlights the idiosyncrasies of the GDR healthcare system, ranging from the effects of a specific doctor-patient relationship based on a legal system influenced by Marxist-Leninist thought to the success of the GDR's effective cancer screening programs; and secondly, it demonstrates the extent to which practices specific to the GDR medical system are portrayed as lingering in post-GDR literature, a portrayal that is, in fact, authenticated by medical-historical research.[3] The chosen texts all feature suffering female protagonists whose illnesses indicate their reluctance to be integrated into the prevailing symbolic order of a patriarchal society—GDR or, in the case of Kathrin Schmidt's *Du stirbst nicht* (*You Are Not Going to Die*, 2009), post-GDR society. The interest in medical ethics and patient autonomy suggests that the texts' frame of reference extends beyond the historical parameters of GDR society and seeks to situate the ethical dilemma they explore within a more general analysis of patriarchy and female subjectivity. Yet the fact that all these texts place their protagonists in GDR or post-GDR, i.e., contemporary East German society encourages us to consider the specifics of GDR-style, top-down practices of medical care that, as Schmidt suggests, have not yet been overcome in Eastern Germany and seem to affect women in particular. However, before delving into a more detailed analysis of the fictional texts, we should reflect on their potential to provide us with historical insight. Here, film and literature can hint at everyday life experiences in the GDR, specifically its medical system, which seems to have considered patients in general and women in particular incapable of handling unpleasant truths about their health.

Fiction as a Source of Historical Knowledge

Simone Barck's claim that GDR fiction is a more illuminating source of knowledge about GDR society than scholarly publications by historians also applies to the medical realm and medical historiography (315). Indeed, in the GDR discussions surrounding contentious topics—such as questions regarding ethics in the medical field—tended to take place in small circles, not in public forums supported by the media. In "Ethische Fragen" ("Ethical Questions"), physician Susanne Hahn stresses that, since the GDR mass media predominantly broadcast experts' decisions, more fine-grained information and critical debates about illness and patients in medical institutions became available to the general public through literature and film (77). Furthermore, in *Rifts in Time and in the Self*, Cheryl Dueck writes, "in a society in which potent political and social messages were transmitted by fiction, the fates of characters in novels can be read as a thermometer of societal health" (112). *Die Beunruhigung* exemplifies these aspects as both scriptwriter Helga Schubert—a professional psychologist as well as a writer—and director Lothar Warneke stressed the significance of their film and the main character's story for catalyzing an intensive dialogue with the audience. As Erika Richter testifies:

> *A large portion of the audience eagerly takes up this offer to communicate, as the first experiences demonstrate. The film loosens tongues. The audience talks about dealing with illness as well as the willingness to communicate and the lack of communication; about the relationship between generations as well as the manifold problems that come with emancipation. (100-1)*

Richter points to the film's influence on several levels: sparking communication and generating specific discourses, for instance, about illness or generations. According to Rosemary Stott, Warneke, like most DEFA filmmakers, "felt a strong affinity with their audience and a responsibility towards them. Because of the lack of a democratic press, the arts could serve the function of raising contemporary issues related to everyday life which were taboo in the print media" (35-36). *Die Beunruhigung* thus offers an example for the many fictional texts that triggered critical thought among GDR citizens and that present a remarkable archive of information about daily life and issues.[4]

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Literature and film depicting illness and the healthcare system reveal cultural and ideological discourses in medical institutions as well as social norms—including, but by no means limited to, the signifiers for pathology, since GDR citizens clearly understood the medical system as a part of society that echoed both the problems and the standards governing the GDR. Accordingly, Thomas Ahbe, Michael Hofmann, and Volker Stiehler's *Redefreiheit*, a volume that contains transcripts of all public debates that took place in Leipzig in the fall of 1989, also includes a chapter dealing with glitches in the healthcare system. Here, the link between difficulties in the medical system and larger societal setbacks is articulated in the statements contributed by Dieter Lohmann, Medical Director of the city hospital in Leipzig, and Rudolf Weiner, Medical Director of the district hospital St. Georg, which met with the audience's strong approval. Both Lohmann and Weiner emphasize that the healthcare system must be considered an integral part of society, which means its trials and tribulations echo the grievances of society at large (Lohmann 526, 531).

One of the so-called *Alltagsfilme* committed to "documentary realism," *Die Beunruhigung* illustrates Warneke's ideal of the *dokumentaren Spielfilm* (documentary drama), which he delineated in his eponymous master's thesis in 1964. With reference to Italian Neorealism and specifically to Cesare Zavattini, Warneke articulated the artistic position justifying the need for a GDR-specific realist documentary film. He aimed for the unification of the "traditional possibilities of the feature film to create lively characters with documentation [in order to] facilitate a new, deeply realistic way of reflecting reality artistically. This possibility is available in the documentary configuration of the feature film. We describe this synthesis as the documentary drama" (238-39).[5] While not challenging socialism's master narrative, such documentary drama would strive to find genuine representations of reality in the texture of personal daily experiences (Harhausen 102; Feinstein 199). Yet following the so-called *Kahlschlag-Plenum* (clean-sweep plenary) of 1965—an event of the ruling Socialist Party that was meant to signal an end to any tendencies associated with the West (e.g., Neorealism) and led to the banning of numerous films and books—there was little space for finding "artistic truth" like Warneke imagined it.[6] Hardly surprising, then, that the director only began to explore this credo in his trilogy of the early 1970s—*Dr. med. Sommer II* (*MD Sommer II*, 1970), *Es ist eine alte Geschichte* (*It's an Old Story*, 1972), and *Leben mit Uwe* (*Life with Uwe*, 1973)—and then much more explicitly with *Die Beunruhigung* in 1982.[7]

In *Die Beunruhigung*, more than his other films, Warneke strived to attain "the greatest possible authenticity in presenting the figures and their living space and conditions " (qtd. in Richter 92). He insisted on using black-and-white film stock in support of a greater sense of realism and truthfulness, and on engaging Thomas Plenert, a young cameraman who had never before shot a feature film but was well-versed in filming documentaries (Harhausen 111; Richter 90-98; Dieter Wolf 136-38). Warneke adamantly defended his idea to develop each scene at original locations and in dialogue with all parties involved. The locales included the Berlin Charité hospital, Inge's workplace in the Department of Health and Welfare, and screenwriter Helga Schubert's apartment, which serves as Inge Herold's home in the film. Schubert was willing to accept radical revisions to her script provided Warneke respected the basic spirit of her story. She also supported his desire to work with non-professional actors, particularly for those characters directly linked to the topic of cancer and healthcare. These authentic voices include an elderly lady diagnosed with breast cancer whom Inge meets in the Charité's waiting area; a young woman who tells the protagonist about her breast cancer therapy; and most importantly Dr. Röseler, an actual Charité physician who examines Inge and informs her about the necessary surgery.

Despite Warneke's struggle for maximum authenticity and the well-established fact that in the GDR fiction served the function of discussing taboo issues in lieu of a democratic press, we should not simply take *Die Beunruhigung* as the only evidence for quotidian life as it was experienced in the GDR. Still, this film in particular is well worth examining in the context of research on the state's medical system since it can serve as *one* window onto GDR society and the healthcare provided. It reveals how the medical system—which viewed GDR citizens in general and women in particular as children too frail to handle issues of life and death—affects Inge Herold's ability to deal with her illness and models how she comes to claim agency in her fight against breast cancer.[8]

Fictional Representations of the GDR Medical System

An intelligent and well-educated woman in her late thirties, the psychologist Inge Herold works as a marriage counselor for the Department of Health and Welfare. A single mother, she has a trusting if not always easy relationship with her teenage son Mike, who disapproves of Joachim (played by Wilfried Pucher), the married man with whom Inge is having an affair. When she learns of her potential breast cancer and the need to undergo a biopsy and possibly also breast surgery the next day, she fears the biopsy that may confirm the presence of cancer and possibly include a mastectomy. The following 24 hours under psychological stress prompt her to reflect on her life and to see the decisions she has made in a clearer light: she seeks out her son, who proves to be a source of encouragement, breaks up with Joachim, who turns out to be unsupportive when Inge needs him most, and discovers a new confidant in Dieter Schramm, a high-school friend and single father. Despite the constant apprehension due to her illness, she musters up the energy to start her life anew.

This confident if not entirely euphoric outcome corresponds with Inge's character: like most female protagonists in DEFA's 1970s and 1980s *Alltagsfilme*, she is a strong woman who asserts her independence as an individual against social norms and does not compromise her ideal of a reciprocated romantic relationship.[9] Her resistance to societal standards surfaces particularly vis-à-vis Katharina (played by Walfriede Schmitt), a former classmate and judge who leads a model socialist life as a married woman with two children, an apartment, a car, and an active social and political life. Faced with both Katharina as well as Inge's disapproving mother (played by Traute Sense), Inge insists that she is happily divorced and actively seeks a new partner when Joachim proves inadequate.

Given her strength in these situations as well as her confidence when she deals with co-workers and clients in the Department of Health and Welfare, it is all the more remarkable that the patient Inge Herold does not stand up to the medical institution. In one of the film's most significant scenes, the Charité physician Dr. Röseler informs Inge about the potentially malignant lump they found in her breast.

In the afterword to the script, Erika Richter draws attention to the remarkable authenticity of this dialogue: the physician "performs" a role that conforms to his routine business, including his attempt to calm down Inge, while the actress "to a certain extent fielded real cues from her partner, cues that a professional actor could hardly have provided, and she responded with great aplomb to these cues, with no trace of staginess" (Richter 96). In other words, Inge performs the reaction to be expected from a patient in the Berlin Charité in 1982: she does not question Dr. Röseler's proposed therapy, which commences with an operation the next day.

As a participant in the healthcare system, Inge is fundamentally aware of her position in the therapeutic process as determined by the framework of GDR law, which denied patients the sovereignty to refuse treatment plans proposed by doctors. The GDR-specific doctor-patient relationship, in which there was no legal contract between a patient and a doctor, meant that the responsibility for a prescribed therapy rested exclusively with the physician. Susanne Hahn draws attention to the fundamental difference between the East German medical-care relationship, the so-called *Betreuungsverhältnis,* and legal practice in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG): "While in the FRG a medical intervention has been considered an infliction of bodily harm in criminal law, which can only be suspended by means of a patient's consent, a medical intervention deemed necessary and carried out according to standard practice was, as a matter of principle, considered therapy in the GDR" (75).[10] Accordingly, within the socialist doctor-patient relationship, the physician was not required to justify a proposed treatment or to tell the patient about the true outcome of an examination. Ulrich Lohmann points out that if doctors considered a patient unable to come to an "appropriate decision," they could even "decide on medical measures against the patient's will" (222). At the same time, patients were legally obligated to cooperate and actively support the therapy administered due to the so-called *Mitwirkungspflicht*. As Ulrike Seifert explains, this obligation was supplemented by mandatory disclosure of any aspect of the concerned person's life that might impinge on the therapy, the so-called *Offenbarungs- und Informationspflicht*, and the legal compulsion to endure any medical measures and any doctor's directions, named *Duldungs- und Befolgungspflicht* (271-74).

In this respect, the proximity of Warneke's 1982 film to Christa Wolf's novels *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (*The Quest for Christa T.*, 1968) and *Leibhaftig* (*In the Flesh*, 2002) is noteworthy, particularly since these three fictional texts were conceived at quite different points in history and portray GDR hospitals in different decades. While *Nachdenken über Christa T.* focuses primarily on the 1950s and early 1960s, *Die Beunruhigung* portrays the situation in the early 1980s and *Leibhaftig*—looking back from the early-21st century—in the late 1980s. In other words, *Nachdenken über Christa T.* was written before the new framework agreement for hospitals, the so-called *Rahmen-Krankenhausordnung* (RKO) of 1979, went into effect, while the other two texts portray the situation after this document was published. The RKO granted patients the individual right to diagnostic and therapeutic elucidation. Referencing the new law, Lohmann argues that patients now were entitled to be informed about their state of health, the motivation and aim of intended medical measures, and the necessity and potential consequences of medical interventions and medication. Yet GDR lawyers quickly pointed out that, based on the standing GDR-specific doctor-patient relationship, physicians alone retained the power to decide on the content and extent of information about the patient's state of health and the manner in which it was to be passed on.[11] In other words, lawmakers were obviously aware of the intricacies implied in the legal implications of the doctor-patient relationship, yet the lack of patient autonomy was never effectively diminished during the 40 years of GDR medicine. Accordingly, Christa T. and the nameless protagonist admitted to a hospital in the late 1980s portrayed in *Leibhaftig* are, like Inge in *Die Beunruhigung*, subjected to care in a clinic and obligated to adjust to the rules of an institution that offers no alternatives to the prescribed treatment. All three texts criticize the power relations in discourses surrounding legal and medical institutions. In particular, Wolf's patient in the 2002 novel is acutely aware of the mechanisms that exact her obedience (37-38). When the head physician thanks her for her excellent cooperation, she even feels obliged to reassure the professor of his accomplishments (117, 156). Corresponding to GDR law, *Leibhaftig* portrays a protagonist required not only to endure but also to participate in the physicians' prescribed therapy, even though she experiences it as violent injury and for the longest time does not seem to believe in its success. In the latter respect, she differs significantly from both Christa T. and Inge, who clearly believe in the progress of socialist medicine.[12]

Nachdenken über Christa T. informs us that the protagonist knows "that before long people won't still be dying of this disease."[13] Thus, she foreshadows an end of all suffering for coming generations. While *Die Beunruhigung* is less certain in predicting Inge's chances to survive cancer, it starts and ends on a decidedly positive note. On the day of one of her subsequent semiannual cancer check-ups, we initially see her in bed with Dieter and shortly afterwards stepping in the shower. In this scene, for which Helga Schubert's script advises that Inge treats her body naturally and without self-pity, she reveals to the viewers that she only has one breast (12). The scenario then jumps back three years to show Inge with Joachim and with both breasts. The audience is therefore aware that cancer plays a key role in this film, but since the protagonist is rather optimistic—she stresses at the end that she has survived the first three years after the surgery and that future cancer check-ups will be scheduled annually—the film offers rather good prospects for Inge to be cured.[14]

In fact, the characters' belief in the progress of socialist medicine is supported by medical-historical research that shows the extent to which GDR medicine had improved since the 1950s. From 1978 to 1982, the year *Die Beunruhigung* was released, the centralized and free healthcare system became more successful in combating cancer than most Western European countries, including the FRG, as a variety of international studies cited by Günter Baust (117) and Stephan Tanneberger (52-53) disclose. At least to some extent, this achievement needs to be considered one of the positive effects of the GDR's *Betreuungsverhältnis* and the patient's *Mitwirkungspflicht*. Citizens—physicians and patients alike—were expected to commit to the advancement of socialism. Therefore, it was incumbent upon patients to cooperate in any measure that would advance not only their individual health but also the health of the community. In fact, the two were—in analogy to personal and societal interests—considered one entity, as Seifert (353) and Günther ("Arztrecht" 89) highlight. Accordingly, patients had to participate in any measure supporting community health, such as vaccination campaigns and preventative medical screenings. The centralized approach proved very effective and most successful in healthcare technology assessment and in combating cancer. The GDR established a World Health Organization-certified Comprehensive Cancer Center, which positioned the socialist state as an international leader in cancer prevention, but which was, as Tanneberger laments, dismantled in the unification process (52-55).

On the downside, these measures did, of course, imply state control, which extended to fields tangentially related to the medical sphere. Since the protection of individuals' health was an effort of society at large, power exercised in healthcare was tightly linked with the judicial system and social welfare, and often also included the support received from a working person's employment collective (Lohmann 223; Seifert 61-62, 64, 305; Günther "Arztrecht" 90). As GDR lawyer Karl-Heinz Christoph explained in 1980: "Fundamentally, the healthcare facilities fulfill their mission within the framework of a specific legal relationship with the citizens for whom they care. A decisive feature of the healthcare facilities consists in the fact that they not only fulfill their mission towards the citizen, but also perform measures of medical and social care on the citizen" (42-43). Christoph highlights the patient's enforced passivity in GDR law and in medical practice: something is done on and to a citizen's body that is to be understood as both medical and social remedy. Since doctors were sworn to take responsibility professionally, politically, and as members of socialist society, patients were required to accept their physicians' proposed treatments as the best option for their individual health and, more importantly, for the health of the socialist community. Even the physician's formal obligation to inform patients about the proposed therapy (*Aufklärungspflicht*) and to seek consent could be bypassed without legal consequences for the doctor (Berndt and Hüller 45; Seifert 162; Günther, "Patientenschutz" 167). A patient's failure to cooperate could, by the 1970s, have serious legal consequences, e.g., concerning labour law and rights to social security, and cause a patient's doctor to initiate educational reform measures (Seifert 301). Patients' bodies become subject to the state and its legal and medical system in the doctors' decisions about the citizens' bodies, even if the patient experiences the execution of a therapy as violent. Given the legal situation, citizens' bodies became subject to one body politic, not only metaphorically speaking. Yet while protecting one's health ceased to be a private matter, and notions of individual choice and doctor-patient confidentiality were considered secondary to the health of the entire population, the individual benefitted from the overall success of preventive care—an aspect underlined by Dr. Röseler in *Die Beunruhigung* when he tells Inge that they are determined to catch any malignancies as early as possible.

One character briefly portrayed in *Die Beunruhigung* who does not benefit from cancer prevention but rather from socialist medicine is the young woman Inge meets immediately after she received her interim diagnosis and learns of her imminent surgery. Bärbel Loeper, around five years younger than Inge and one of the non-professional actors, tells her own story: she is a cancer patient performing the role of a cancer patient. Bärbel is devoted to telling Inge her story meant as encouragement. Even though she only received radiation therapy because her case was too advanced for surgery and she was in danger of losing her then-unborn child, Bärbel did not despair. As the apparently happy eight-year-old daughter is then shown picking up her mother from the hospital, the film accentuates the confidence that socialist medicine will succeed in combating cancer. As if Christa T.'s 1960s claim that soon nobody would die of cancer any longer has come true, Bärbel assures cancer patients in the 1980s that they too can be optimistic. Inge Herold, however, rejects that kind of optimism and turns away—a significant point to which I will return.

The Significance of Generation

In this context it is crucial to note that Bärbel Loeper, Christine Schorn, the character she plays (Inge Herold), as well as her antagonist (Katharina), scriptwriter Helga Schubert, and director Lothar Warneke all belong to the same generation, namely the first postwar and post-Hitler Youth generation. In "Vom Szenarium zum Film," Erika Richter points to this aspect several times:

> *From the interaction among the actors ensues a plausible image of this generation that never had to say 'Heil Hitler!' in school […], that could freely decide in favor of capitalism or socialism. Maybe they are influenced more by the societal developments of our country than they themselves influenced these developments. Helga Schubert does not show outstanding protagonists of the*

> *societal developments. But it is evident that in places where things are actually done, […] the representatives of this generation work independently. (94)*

In contrast to Christa T.'s cohort—that of Christa Wolf herself and other so-called 1929ers who experienced National Socialism and World War II as children and adolescents[15]—this first postwar generation was raised free of direct fascist contamination. Unquestionably respecting those who had risked their lives in the fight against fascism—which naturally included those who represented the GDR at its very top—they grew up with high expectations for a socialist future and sided with socialism. In the film, the difference between socialism and capitalism boils down to the question of happiness: when Inge meets her former high-school friend Brigitte (played by Cox Habbema), who now lives in West Berlin, the major discrepancy between the two women emerges in their expectations for the future. Caught in the capitalist rat race, Brigitte cannot enjoy material comforts such as her new BMW. While she seems to look forward to her vacation in France, she dismisses any chance for happiness and family life and is fixated on her well-paying job. Inge, on the other hand, focuses on her desire for independence *and* a fulfilling relationship. For this first GDR generation, the freedom to travel that Brigitte enjoys cannot make up for the benefits of socialism, such as secure jobs that come without merciless competition.[16] Like the other representatives of her cohort in *Die Beunruhigung*, Inge is no socialist heroine, but one of the "pretty average representatives of this generation," as Richter puts it, who benefitted from the educational reforms that allowed for access to higher education for those groups who had previously been excluded (94). These people were, as Dorothee Wierling explains, "encouraged […] to identify with the state and think of themselves as a biographical project, as part of building a utopian future combining technological with social progress" (209). Their mission was, as Wierling continues, "a specific 'mission to happiness'" (209, which brings us back to Bärbel Loeper, the cancer patient set on giving Inge confidence in her healing prospects.

More than a nice and caring human being, Bärbel Loeper surfaces as a model socialist of the postwar generation. As Udo Grashoff reminds us, the main characteristics that distinguish the socialist personality are optimism, health, and the "capability to consciously effect the environment and to alter both this environment and oneself according to one's own ideas and goals (84).[17] Bärbel makes up for perfect health by fighting cancer, adopting a positive attitude towards life, attempting to modify her environment according to her socialist goals––and doing her best to influence Inge to do the same. Medical institutions were assigned a prominent role in in educating patients to embody the ideal of the positive socialist citizen who ensures productivity and vitality for the triumph of socialism. Hence, patients such as Bärbel and Inge have to believe in regaining their health. To achieve this goal, Bärbel even supports Dr. Röseler in his role of Inge's educator—a role that exceeds the realm of the physician and explicitly includes ideological education (Seifert 38-40, 355). Based on the belief that at least some patients developed organic illness from ideological instability, GDR medical specialists and policy demanded that terminally ill patients, in particular, should be treated within an ideological and ethical framework based on Marxist-Leninist philosophy and the ideology of working-class progress (Kirchgäßner 25; Löther 14). The underlying idea that a sick, malfunctioning body indicates ideological unreliability also surfaces in Helga Schubert's film script when Inge, reflecting on the three years since her surgery, mulls over the physicians' motivation for the repeated check-ups and concludes: "And it somehow also makes you feel safe that they do it so thoroughly. But deep inside you think: so they suppose that somewhere in your body, something grows perfidiously, or it could grow. That they do not trust your body anymore" (84). When Inge contemplates the medical personnel's attitude towards her diseased body, she reveals that her illness is associated with perfidious results in a body which—like an unreliable comrade—cannot be trusted any longer. Conversely, that her body no longer displays cancerous traces indicates the successful treatment—both on the level of the body and ideology. To achieve this goal, the legal system emphasized physicians' obligations to elevate patients' hope and optimism by convincing them that their treatment was working, even in cases of terminal illness (Seifert 168). Since the "socialist personality" believes in progress and is supposedly strong and generally optimistic, the very existence of incurable diseases was denied, even in scholarly publications. Patients could potentially be described as "currently not curable" ("zur Zeit nicht heilbar") or "on the basis of current knowledge incurable" ("auf der Grundlage der derzeit erreichten Erkenntnisse unheilbar"), but the notion that—also in the long run—any disease could be incurable was not to be voiced (Bettin and Gadebusch Bondio 10-11).[18]

The Gentle Lie

This approach to medicine explains both Bärbel's desire to cheer up Inge and Inge's wish to be left alone, as expressed in her body language when she gives Bärbel the cold shoulder. As a participant in the medical system, Inge is aware of these policies. She knows that doctors and nurses are likely to lie to both women regarding their state of health and is clearly opposed to such practices. In the GDR, medical personnel were not obliged to disclose the truth about the condition of ailing patients, and it was common practice to discuss the status of the disease only with close family members and not with the patient. Particularly in cases of adverse prognosis, representatives of the medical and the legal systems embraced the prevailing practice of concealing the hopeless situation and the prospect of death. Until the very end of the GDR, physicians possessed the legal right—and were in most cases encouraged—not to disclose the truth about negative prognoses. Instead, they were to employ what was officially termed the *schonende Lüge* (gentle lie): using appropriate wording and an incomplete description to deliberately keep patients in the dark in cases of unfavorable prognosis (Seifert 173-78).[19]

In *Die Beunruhigung*, the audience becomes privy to a discussion about this practice before Inge leaves her workplace for the Charité, hoping to learn about her own state of health. On her way out, she encounters one of her colleagues who refuses to inform his patient about the diagnosis of cancer. Pressured by Inge, he explains that he does not want to be held responsible for the patient losing hope and choosing to commit suicide. Inge, however, insists on an in-depth discussion at a later point, even though she must have been aware that the law was on her colleague's side and favored unknowing, passive patients who were to be treated under the assumption that individual desires could be reconciled with the interests of society (Seifert 351-52).

While in the scene Inge questions the practice of the gentle lie in her role as psychologist, she also later raises the issue in her role as patient. After she waited for her partner Joachim during the long, lonely night preceding her surgery, she informs him when he finally arrives in the early morning hours: "In an hour, I must go to hospital, and then you must take me because they said they would tell the person who takes me the truth. Yes, that person they will tell the truth. And only that person they will tell the truth. And they will tell that person the truth, and I do not know the truth."[20]

This crucial film scene showcases patients' helplessness vis-à-vis the practice of the gentle lie. We have reason to believe that Helga Schubert incorporated her own experiences as a seriously ill patient here (Richter 88), akin to writer Maxie Wander, who relates her experiences of doctors lying to her about breast cancer in the Charité and in the famous Berlin-Buch clinic in the 1970s of doctors. In her posthumously published volume of diary entries and letters, *Leben wär' eine prima Alternative* (*Life Would Be a Great Alternative*, 1979), she shares how she accidently found out about her condition when friends and family had known about it for several months already (25, 29-30, 60, 271). In a letter to Christa Wolf from January 1969 published in *Sei gegrüßt und lebe* (*Be Greeted and Live*), Brigitte Reimann similarly reveals her stupefaction upon learning that a famous Charité physician had lied to her about her illness. Looking back at that moment, Reimann exposes the lie as "worse than the truth, the entire affair, the clinic, surgery and so on" (Reimann and Wolf 48). She clearly articulates that this practice of withholding knowledge about one's well-being did not, as Ulrich Lohmann points out similarly, serve to add to the patient's "feeling of security" and "dignity"—two goals the so-called *Rahmen-Krankenhausordnung* (RKO) of 1979 had intended to achieve (221). As Reimann's letters reveal, the continued lies by medical personnel as well as friends and family caused increasing anxiety over the course of the next years during which the writer suffered terribly. By May 1970, the high radiation levels she received made her suspect that once again the physicians were not telling her the truth and that "really, she has cancer or a similar horridness" (Reimann and Wolf 121). In fact, the doctors' tall tales continued. In December of the same year, Reimann accidentally overheard them discussing her case and thus learned that her cancer had spread to her dorsal vertebra. Her husband had known about this terrible development since March but

had remained silent (Reimann and Wolf 184-85). In fact, Christa Wolf's diary entries from 1971 disclose that her knowledge about her friend's illness exceeded that of the patient because at least one of the attending physicians revealed the actual diagnosis and prognosis to Wolf—but not to the sick Brigitte Reimann.[21]

The gentle lie occupied Christa Wolf all her life, and she repeatedly brought up the issue in her oeuvre. Starting with Christa T., who overhears the doctors discussing her illness and subsequently insists on knowing the truth—"Is it that, doctor? Tell me the truth, I want to know the truth" (Wolf, *Nachdenken* 174)—she portrays characters who suffer from being left in the dark about their state of health. Thus, she explicitly raised a crucial issue and contributed to societal discussions already in the late 1960s. Not until the mid 1970s did some lawyers, theologians, and philosophers who were opposed to the practice of the gentle lie come forward with their views. In 1974, Professor Berndt on the other hand voiced his concern that patients' growing level of knowledge could lead to a situation in the future in which a doctor might be compelled to tell patients the whole truth (4). Yet for years to come, patients were declared incompetent when it came to managing the health of their own bodies, and the prevailing opinion in the medical and the legal realm supported the practice, as medical ethics specialist Müller's insistence on the gentle lie demonstrates: "even if patients repeatedly […] ask and want to hear the whole truth, even if it should mean death, they really do not want to know it and hope for an optimistic and comforting answer from their physician" (100).[22] What emerges here is the firm belief not only in socialist optimism but also in treating patients like children because they are deemed incapable of dealing with the realities of life and death.

In Wolf's 2002 retrospective novel *Leibhaftig*, she portrays the gentle lie as an ongoing practice of turning patients into passive objects incapable of influencing their own therapy in the GDR of the late 1980s. The novel stages the physicians' norm of discussing a patient's life-threatening condition exclusively with her relatives. Initially, the patient is hardly surprised to learn that her husband speaks furtively with the doctors (16). When she discovers later that he knew about her imminent operation before she was herself informed—because he had discussed her therapy with the surgeon—she is alerted to the seriousness of her illness (50). The patient, aware of the conversations but not of their content, accepts the daily clandestine meetings her spouse has with the chief surgeon (77, 103, 119). Even when she has recovered at the end of the novel, the protagonist suspects continued private conferences based on the evidence that her husband happened to encounter the physician in the corridor (184).

Leibhaftig therefore reveals that the strategy meant to support healing by not alarming patients actually increased anxieties and contributed to doctor-patient relationships lacking trust and denying patients' agency. Similarly, *Stadt der Engel oder The Overcoat of Dr. Freud* (*City of Angels, Or The Overcoat of Dr. Freud*) conveys how the protagonist's friend Emma was forced to trick a nurse into revealing her diagnosis of thyroid cancer so that she could arrange for her death as she saw fit (244). Absent the legal right to information about her body and her health, Emma's only recourse was to outsmart the medical staff. In the entry for 1988 in the autobiographical *Ein Tag im Jahr* (*One Day a Year*, 2003), Wolf revealed that the gentle lie preoccupied her after her hospitalization in 1988. Here, she recounts that she heard a radio report in which a doctor insisted that one must not lie to cancer patients (424). Wolf's fictional portrayals of and reflections about the gentle lie and its effects on patients confirm those scholars and contemporary witnesses who assert that the gentle lie was practiced in the GDR until its healthcare system was dissolved. Similarly, a symposium on the topic of "Information—Truth—Security" that brought together professionals involved in medical ethics in the GDR in December 1988 indicates that in the very last years of the socialist state there was finally public discussion about the gentle lie, while also confirming it as common practice.[23]

The gentle lie exemplifies a guardian state that wants to protect its allegedly incompetent patients from unwelcome news. While similar practices might have existed in the FRG as well, patient docility and the gentle lie were neither legally defined nor prescribed by the state apparatus there. On the contrary: since legal practice in the FRG has always demanded a patient's written consent for any medical intervention, they could hardly be left in the dark about their state of health. While the gentle lie and the demand for patient cooperation—as enshrined in the *Duldungs- und Befolgungspflicht*, the *Mitwirkungspflicht*, and the *Offenbarungs- und Informationspflicht*—are indeed characteristic of the GDR medical and legal systems, this does not imply that these practices vanished with the GDR. Indeed, Kathrin Schmidt's *Du stirbst nicht* highlights the post-unification continuity of procedures that limit a patient's agency and compares ways of exercising power before and after 1990. The patient at the center of the novel, Helene Wesendahl—another psychologist trained in the GDR, just like the author Schmidt, the script writer Helga Schubert, and the character Inge Herold in *Die Beunruhigung*—experiences the power structures and routines of two clinics and a rehab center as she recovers from a burst aneurysm. When she declines psychotherapy in the hospital and rejects contraindicated epilepsy medication, she is subjected to the full force of the medical staff. Three doctors and two nurses assemble to inform her, "she was not allowed to do that. […] She had to. Back down. They bore the responsibility. Not Helene. *What, I bear no responsibility?*"[24] Denying her the right to take responsibility for her own body, the members of the medical profession team up against the patient and claim authority over her disease—behavior that appears bizarre, given the legal situation in united Germany. Instead of seeking a solution in dialogue, they expect the patient to "back down," which clearly means that she is supposed to disregard her own interests in favor of those expressed by the medical professionals.

These doctors and nurses appear stuck in an attitude towards the patient that is reminiscent of GDR law, in which both patients' ill bodies and their behavior were to be treated, individuals were supposed to be persuaded to "back down" for the greater good, and passive patients had to accept the proposed therapy. In other words, certain aspects of GDR medicine seem to live on; Hartmut Bettin and Mariacarla Gadebusch Bondio explain:

> *We can assume extensive continuities with regards to staff. […] That means that many who work and research in […] medical institutions were born, socialized, and in many cases received their academic education in the GDR. As students of medicine, physicians, […] and nurses they worked in GDR medical institutions, gained experiences there, and were shaped in certain ways. (7)*

Medical-historical research maintains that due to obvious continuities among medical staff, behavior and ethical attitudes that were specific to the GDR and socialist medicine persist. In other words, while the political state ceased to exist, its citizens inevitably perpetuate its practices and norms. *Du stirbst nicht* addresses this topic repeatedly by referencing the GDR's *Duldungs- und Befolgungspflicht*—an "obligation" the medical personnel in Schmidt's novel expect to be fulfilled by Helene and against which the patient rebels.

Lingering GDR practices also surface in the patient's alleged obligation to cooperate with therapy. In the novel, this extends to the reports the hospital sends to the rehab center. They are not limited to information pertaining to the patient's medical situation, but also assess her personality and willingness to accept the therapy whose successful outcome is contingent upon her cooperation and for which she is held liable. The speech therapist, for example, claims that the patient "proved to be a *non-cooperative patient* […] The physiotherapist's report, however, says *very cooperative*" (Schmidt 136-37; italics in original). Employing language that is characteristic of the GDR medical system, both reports explicitly evaluate the patient's inclination to cooperate. By italicizing the relevant words in the text, *Du stirbst nicht* draws attention to what Christa Wolf similarly conveyed about her stay in the GDR hospital in *Leibhaftig* and to what we witness in *Die Beunruhigung*: the requirement to participate in therapeutic measures, even if the patient experiences them as brutal, contraindicated, or futile.[25] While *Du stirbst nicht* does not portray instances of the gentle lie, the medical personnel unmistakably remind the woman of her so-called *Mitwirkungs-*, *Duldungs-* and *Befolgungspflicht*—obligations to cooperate and endure that were part of GDR law but not contemporary FRG law. The female protagonist can only escape such demands to collaborate in painful and even contraindicated and potentially deadly therapeutic measures with the support of her husband. In fact, she even depends on his rejection of the idea to submit his wife to a guardianship procedure, an idea brought forward by the medical staff to threaten the patient (313-14). This incident presents yet another situation in which the healthcare professionals depicted in Schmidt's novel engage in a practice—in Ulrich Lohmann's terms, the "unexplained, informal incapacitation devoid of a lawyer by the collective of physicians" (222)—that was commonly accepted in GDR hospitals.

Conclusion

Published 20 years after the fall of the Wall, Schmidt's *Du stirbst nicht* points to ongoing practices in Eastern German hospitals that clearly have their roots in the GDR medical system. The medical personnel's repeated refusal to grant the protagonist sovereignty over her own body and mind evokes institutional and everyday practices of patriarchy in GDR hospitals such as the ones we witnessed in the examples of GDR fictional texts discussed in this article. In the socialist state, these culminated in the practice of the gentle lie, which aimed to protect patients in general and women

in particular from harsh truths about their health. Whether such tendencies will survive in the next generation, one trained entirely in post-unification Germany, and emerge in fictional texts in the future remains to be seen.

While it is true that medical systems tend to be hierarchically structured in most societies, not least because expertise rests with the physicians, this is a phenomenon that will probably proliferate with increasing specialization of medical experts in the years to come. Nonetheless, it seems rather surprising that in a socialist state—one that declared itself to be a classless society and officially guaranteed gender equality—these apparently inherent dimensions of the healing profession were never seriously questioned. Further research that investigates whether similar practices were common in other Eastern European countries under Soviet rule would be enlightening. In the GDR, several reforms that aimed to flattened hierarchies in hospitals, including by reducing the salary differentials between doctors and nurses, were indeed successful. The hierarchical relationship between healthcare professionals and their patients, however, was never questioned.[26] In fact, the successes in the GDR's progressive preventive care programs depended on hierarchical structures that enforced the belief that one's health could not be considered a private matter. Because notions of individual choice and doctor-patient confidentiality were considered secondary to the health of the entire population, everyone had to participate in measures supporting community health, such as vaccination campaigns and medical screenings, and individuals benefitted from the overall success of preventive care. Effectively, the state's attitude towards its citizens—deemed children unqualified to make decisions regarding serious issues such as life and death—often did protect patients. However, the mindset revealed in practices such as the gentle lie and other customs denying patients' agency, in general and for women in particular, offers yet more evidence that East German socialists' claim of gender equality was not achieved in key areas of women's lives.

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Clip Notes

* All Clips will be added by September 2017.

Clip 1: Charité physician Dr. Röseler examines Inge before the surgery.

Clip 2: Cancer patient Bärbel Loeper tells Inge her own story: Bärbel is a cancer patient performing the role of a cancer patient.

Clip 3: Inge reveals her helplessness vis-à-vis the practice of the gentle lie in a conversation with her partner Joachim.

Endnotes

1 DEFA or Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft was the state-owned film company established by the Soviet Military Authority in 1946. Unless I indicate I am quoting from an extant translation, all translations into English are my own.

2 At the GDR's second national festival for feature films in Karl-Marx-Stadt in 1982, *Die Beunruhigung* received the following prizes: Helga Schubert for scenario, Lothar Warneke for direction, Christine Schorn for lead actress, Walfriede Schmitt for best supporting actress, Thomas Plenert for camera, and Erika Lehmphul for editing. The audience jury declared *Die Beunruhigung* to be the most effective movie screened within the last two years, and the film—a rare instance for the GDR—was invited to the Venice Film Festival. See Haas and Wolf, *Sozialistische Filmkunst* 241; Dieter Wolf, "Die Beunruhigung" 138-40.

3 See Bettin and Gadebusch Bondio, 7.

4 On this aspect of GDR film and the impact of such "audience forums," which were habitually held in cinemas, see Gisela Bahr, "Film and Consciousness: The Depiction of Women in East German Movies (*Till Death do You Part*, *Solo Sunny*, *The Disturbance*, *Pauline's Second Life*)," in *Gender and German Cinema: Feminist Interventions*. Vol. 1: Gender and Representation in New German Cinema, edited by Sandra Frieden et al., Berg, 1993, p. 131.

5 Warneke's "Der dokumentare Spielfilm" is also partially reprinted in Warneke, *Film ist eine Art zu Leben*.

6 The infamous 1965 Eleventh Plenum of the SED Central Committee became known as the *Kahlschlag-Plenum* after Erich Honecker, who later became the General Secretary of the SED Central Committee (1971–1989), justified the banning of numerous films and books by declaring that skepticism and the development of socialism were mutually incompatible. Honecker insisted on the artists' commitment to a partisan approach to political and aesthetic evaluations of GDR reality, an approach that supported SED politics at all times. The events are documented in detail in Agde, *Kahlschlag*. Soldovieri's article "Censorship and the Law" highlights the most notable event of the plenum, the banning of *Das Kaninchen bin ich* (*The Rabbit is me*), a film by Kurt Maetzig based on a novel by Manfred Bieler only published after the fall of the Wall.

7 Stott emphasizes that the "documentary realist style, which became predominant in the 1970s and 1980s was far less costly [than genre films]. Warneke's *Die Beunruhigung*, for instance, […] was made with a budget of some 800,000 marks" (28-29). Stott further emphasizes Erika Richter's role as dramaturg for "Warneke's remarkable run of creative successes in the 1980s" (25).

8 Since November 1989, the image of the GDR as an authoritarian, paternalistic state that kept its population in a prolonged state of childhood has dominated political and cultural discourses on the GDR. For early examples, see, for example, Henrich, *Der vormundschaftliche Staat*; and Maaz, *Der Gefühlsstau*. Debbie Pinfold has demonstrated that this image needs to be complemented by official representations of the GDR as a child who tries to negotiate its identity vis-à-vis its Soviet parental figures. See Pinfold, "'Das Mündel will Vormund sein.'"

9 Harhausen 101; Rinke 183, 189; Feinstein 210. In "Waren Ostfrauen wirklich anders?," Gräf emphasizes that starting in the 1960s, DEFA films screen women who prefer to be divorced than unhappily married (110).

10 Günther in "Arztrecht" considers this specific doctor-patient relationship unique in history (87). See Günther, "Patientenschutz" 161; Seifert 168, 304; Wagner 234. The *Bundesgerichtshof* (Federal Court of Justice) in the FRG considers a medical intervention, including a successful intervention carried out according to standard practice, as fulfilling the legal criteria for assault and battery according to §223 *Strafgesetzbuch* (StGB, Criminal Code). A patient's consent to treatment is therefore indispensable, with the exception of an emergency operation performed when the patient is unconscious and therefore unable to provide consent. See BGH judgment BGHSt 11.

11 See Lohmann 221; Juristisch-medizinischer Arbeitskreis der Vereinigung der Juristen der DDR 139-40.

12 For detailed analyses of the significance of illness and patients in the GDR medical system in Christa Wolf's novels *Nachdenken über Christa T.* and *Leibhaftig* see Klocke 34-113.

13 *The Quest for Christa T.*, 182. The German original reads: "Ich bin zu früh geboren. Denn sie weiß: Nicht mehr lange wird an dieser Krankheit gestorben werden" (179).

14 For a similar assessment of the ending, see Pinkert, 127.

15 Throughout *Dissonant Lives*, Fulbrook employs the term "1929ers" in her analysis of this generation's significance for the early years of the GDR. She explains that her research on the 1929ers was initially provoked by a joke she heard repeatedly, "to the effect that 'Christa Wolf was born in 1929, like everyone else in the GDR'" (252). Fulbrook considers Wolf "the 'classic 1929er'" (293). See Wierling, 205-08; Ahbe and Gries, "Gesellschaftsgeschichte als Generationengeschichte" 481.

16 For a similar reading, see Gersch 186-87.

17 Grashoff emphasizes the "Fähigkeit, bewusst auf die Umwelt einzuwirken und diese sowie sich selbst nach eigenen Vorstellungen und Zielen zu verändern" (282).

18 Reding insists on defining "unheilbar" (incurable) in relation to ideology (90). Also see Jahr.

19 Even though "schonend" has a more literal translation of "protective" or "protecting," I chose to translate "schonende Lüge" as "gentle lie" to better evoke what the practice entails: protecting patients from a reality that the medical profession in the GDR obviously considered as too harsh for patients to face. Bettin and Gadebusch Bondio similarly report that, at least in 1976, the gentle lie was still recommended practice (10-11). Hahn claims that it was gradually abandoned during the 1970s (78), but Günther in "Arztrecht" insists that it persisted until the end of the GDR, particularly in cases of incurable cancer (89).

20 "In einer Stunde muss ich ins Krankenhaus, und dann musst du mich hinbringen, weil sie gesagt haben, dem, der mich bringt, sagen sie die Wahrheit. Ja, dem sagen sie die Wahrheit. Und dem sagen sie die Wahrheit. Und dem sagen sie die Wahrheit und ich weiß die Wahrheit nicht."

21 Christa Wolf's diaries of February 16, 1971, February 22, 1971, and March 3, 1971 quoted in Reimann and Wolf 153-55.

22 Mandel and Lange similarly insist that even when patients ask specific questions, the content and form of the physicians' answers depend on what the doctors, not the patient, consider beneficial for the patient and the therapeutic goals. Also see Lohmann 221.

23 Ernst Günther and Ernst Luther, "Was schafft Geborgenheit? Zu einigen Resultaten des Ethik-Symposiums zum Thema Information – Wahrheit – Geborgenheit." *Humanitas*, vol. 29, no. 4, 1989, 9, quoted in Lohmann 221.

24 "Sie dürfe das nicht. […] Sie müsse. Zurückstecken. Die Verantwortung trügen sie. Nicht Helene. *Was, ich trage keine Verantwortung?*" (Schmidt 308; italics in original.)

25 For detailed analysis of Kathrin Schmidt's novel *Du stirbst nicht* and the significance of the GDR medical system in post-unification Germany, see Klocke 165-78.

26 See Hahn 80-82, 84, 74; Festge 97; Schleiermacher and Schagen 230; Seifert 60-61.

IT TASTES LIKE THE EAST …
THE PROBLEM OF TASTE IN THE GDR

ALICE WEINREB

Cover Image (Figure 1): Gaby from the Eastern Zone (17) in Paradise (the FRG): My First Banana. From: Titanic 11 (November 1989). Image courtesy of Titanic Redaktion, Frankfurt, Germany.

Abstract *| This essay uses the topic of taste, specifically taste for food, as a way of unpacking the history of the GDR and East-West relations during the late Cold War. It explores the question of East German tastes from two angles: West German fantasies about the inadequacies of the GDR's food system, and East German nutritionists' unsuccessful struggles to regulate popular tastes. In particular, it focuses on the moment when popular taste was seen as a serious problem by the GDR state—during the rise of the obesity epidemic in the 1970s and 1980s.*

Résumé *| Cet essai utilise le thème du goût, spécifiquement le goût pour la nourriture, comme un moyen de dévoiler l'histoire de la RDA et les relations Est-Ouest pendant la fin de la guerre froide. Il examine la question des goûts de l'Allemagne de l'Est sous deux angles: Les fantaisies des ouest-allemands sur les insuffisances du système alimentaire de la RDA, et les luttes infructueuses des spécialistes de la nutrition est-allemands pour réglementer les goûts populaires. L'essai se concentre en particulière sur le moment où le goût populaire a été considéré comme un problème grave par l'état de la RDA—pendant l'augmentation de l'épidémie d'obésité dans les années 1970 et 1980.*

In the autumn of 1999, just a few months after I had moved to Berlin for a post-college fellowship, I attended a party hosted by a good friend. Like most of my friends at that time, she was East German, a fact of which I was barely aware. This particular party proved unexpectedly memorable, however, as it was the stage for my first experience of the infamous *Mauer im Kopf*, the "Wall in the head" that was still a subject of much debate a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The hostess had provided abundant snacks for our enjoyment, including, to my delight, one of my favorite sweets: *Knusperflocken*, small candies made of crunchy grains and milk chocolate. I was enthusiastically reaching for a handful when a guest warned me away: "I can't believe it—don't eat those," he said. "Those are so *Ossi* [East German]." "What do you mean," I asked innocently, "I think they're delicious." "No, they are not," he insisted, "they only have two ingredients!" This both simple and nonsensical answer revealed that this *Wessi* defined East German food by what he perceived as inadequacy and lack—not poor flavor per se, but the abstract problem of having "only" two ingredients (chocolate and grain). His explanation bemused me; it only made sense when I began to understand it as part of a larger discourse that existed within recently reunified Germany. It also was my first exposure to the pervasiveness of food-based fantasies on the part of both East and West Germans with regard to one another in the wake of reunification.

Perhaps the most famous example of this sort of West German fantasy of East German "bad taste" is the infamous satirical magazine *Titanic*'s cover image from November 1989: the smiling "Zonen-Gabi," or "Gabi from the [Eastern] zone," holds an enormous peeled cucumber under the headline, "My first banana" (See Cover Image/ Fig. 1). The *Titanic* picture was only the most famous in a veritable flood of cartoons and images memorializing the fall of the Wall—an overwhelming number of which focused on bananas (Seeßlen). These jokes almost always described a profound East German desire for bananas, one that was so strong it bordered on the pathological. For example, East Germans were depicted as monkeys or as ravenous hordes consuming overnight the entire supply of bananas in the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany or West Germany). These jokes often revolved around the idea that East Germans' tastes were so underdeveloped that they could not actually identify a banana when they ate it—or did not eat it, as the case may be. Most frequent was the premise of the *Titanic* image: an East German ate a pickle, cucumber, sausage, or other deeply familiar food, but in their ignorance they "tasted" a banana. In other words, post-reunification discourse on the GDR normalized assumptions not only about how much East Germans ate (a lot) and what they ate (drab, non-delicious foods), but also about their inability to identify specific flavors. Most of these jokes could be summed up with the premise that the GDR was a land inhabited by people who were universally afflicted with "bad taste."

Theories of taste have been a crucial part of discussions of class, difference, and identity at least since Pierre Bourdieu's influential work *Distinction*, in which the sociologist noted that "tastes in food also depend on the idea each class has of the body and of the effects of food on the body, that is, on its strength, health and beauty" (190). However, taste is not simply a component of the expression of individual and collective identity. People's tastes in food have long been a central concern of modern states. Economists and nutritionists have struggled to determine, explain, and modify individual tastes in food since the emergence of the industrial economy; the rise of industrialization meant that economic health depended upon eating habits. Labour productivity was seen as directly related to popular diets, and food production and consumption became increasingly important components of the national economy. This recognition of the economic and social significance of individual dietary preferences has inspired countless projects to improve how and what populations eat. However, nutritionists' consistent failures to modify what they consider unhealthy popular eating habits has only confirmed anthropologist Jack Goody's observation that foodways often seem to be "the most conservative aspects of culture" (150). Indeed, since the emergence of the modern nutritional sciences, nutritionists have consistently complained about the near-impossibility of changing popular tastes ("Psychologische Grundlagen des Ernährungsverhaltens"). As a West German nutritionist explained grimly in 1967, "it is the task of nutritionists to work against false

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dietary habits, and this obligation makes nutritionists unpopular. Nowhere is the human spirit less reasonable and more stubborn than when it is defending traditional and false eating habits" (Holtmeier 312). Thus taste remains individual and almost impossible for external forces to regulate at the same time that peoples' tastes in food matter profoundly to modern states because they determine what and how much individuals eat.

Scholarship on the GDR has only recently begun to address issues of food production and consumption as key components of everyday life (Ciesla and Poutrus). This literature has carefully documented East Germans' struggles to purchase foodstuffs given the vagaries of a socialist economy. Poor quality products, irregular and inadequate supplies, and inequitable and unpredictable distribution shaped consumer culture generally, but also of course determined how and what people ate. Historians have been less aware, however, of the ways in which the GDR's distinctive food culture incorporated citizens', especially East German women's, struggles to purchase foodstuffs. Moreover, they have ignored the existence of an elaborate network of collective-eating establishments in workplace canteens and school cafeterias, as well as a variety of individual strategies for food acquisition, including a reliance on private gardens and barter and trade as methods of compensating for inadequate state-provided supplies. More generally, the expanding literature on consumption practices in the GDR has rarely explored the issue of taste. While scholars such as Paul Betts, Judd Stitziel, and Eli Rubin have addressed the relationship between taste and East German identity vis-à-vis, respectively, furniture, fashion, and plastics, food has been marginal to these discussions. Nonetheless expressions of taste as a strategy of social ordering and hierarchy are inseparable from food itself. While we usually assume that good taste (or flavor) determines the foods that we eat, we simultaneously believe that other people's "wrong" food choices are made because of their underdeveloped or inadequate tastes. In short, the relationship between the actual flavor of specific foods and their symbolic association with "good taste" or "bad taste" is fluid, often contradictory, and heavily influenced by larger external political and social categories.

This essay thinks about the category of taste as a way of exploring both the history and the legacy of the GDR by focusing upon two distinct discourses that constructed East German popular food tastes as flawed or bad. During the 1970s, the East German medical establishment came to the consensus that its population was too fat because of its inappropriate appetites for both too much food and the wrong sort of food. Actually the 1970s and 1980s witnessed the emergence of a so-called obesity epidemic in both East and West Germany, as well as across much of the industrialized world. Obesity posed a particular problem to the socialist state because its very existence suggested that popular taste was flawed, and that the sorts of "ordinary" foodways generally conceptualized as central to the state's identity caused serious health problems. This disturbing idea that East German citizens did not, in fact, like the "correct" foods suggested that some core values of socialism needed to be redefined. The obesity epidemic thus became a source of tension between nutritionists, who believed that excessive levels of fatness revealed poor eating habits, and a larger political, economic, and cultural discourse that associated socialism with cheap, abundant, and tasty foods. This essay compares this tension surrounding East German obesity with West German descriptions of East Germans as both impoverished and overweight, a population imagined as relying upon poor-tasting and undesirable foodstuffs. Here, East Germans' poor taste was imagined as being the direct and inevitable result of the economic system; West Germans imagined the East German population as icons of "bad taste" because they were forced to live within the inadequate consumer landscape of state socialism. Although these discourses served different purposes and emerged out of different contexts, they shared a common perception of the flawed nature of East German bodies and appetites.

Western Fantasies of Eastern Food

The conceptualization of East Germans as possessing singularly unsophisticated palates and an inferior gustatory culture had a long tradition in the FRG. During the decades of Cold War division, mainstream West German discourse invoked two distinct and seemingly opposed images of the East German body: the starving victim of communism and the overweight and unsophisticated socialist citizen. Neither of these clichés was specific to the FRG. At least since the Russian Revolution, Western anti-communists associated communism with food shortages and even famine (Veit). During the Cold War, the emergence of private consumption as a primary sphere of global competition generally associated the Eastern Bloc with an underdeveloped, inadequate, and unattractive consumer market. In the case of divided Germany, however, these general patterns proved ubiquitous and long-lasting. Here popular discourse invoked these pathologized bodies to represent a distorted consumer culture and the profound inadequacies of the GDR's political and economic system more generally. [1] In addition, these stereotypes of East German bodies assumed that what and how East Germans ate was uniquely central to their overall lived experiences.

In the newly developing rhetoric of the Cold War, the sameness and anti-individualism that was thought to be a hallmark of communism became associated with poor quality and inadequate supply. Convinced, in the words of the postwar West German agricultural expert Frieda Wunderlich, that the goal of the Soviets had always been "above all the ruin of East German agriculture," anti-communists believed that a socialist government inevitably resulted in malnourishment and hunger (50). The weekly news magazine *Der Spiegel* regularly reported throughout the 1950s and 1960s that "hunger, the vulture that circles over the socialist reconstruction, is hovering over the German Soviet Zone" ("Schweinemord"), as the German Democratic Republic was often termed in Western media. Until the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the *Grüne Woche* (Green Week), the major West German agricultural convention held annually in West Berlin, offered free food samples to East German visitors who were assumed to suffer from severe hunger. Indeed, beginning in the late 1950s, the West Berlin government began stockpiling vast amounts of groceries in city storehouses, as advisors predicted a food crisis as a result of an anticipated unification. Decades before Gabi was depicted devouring her "banana," West German economists imagined hordes of half-starved East Germans gobbling up their supplies of sugar, butter, and meat (Betr: Arbeitsgruppe "Lebensmittelindustrie"). Throughout the years of division and regardless of the actual nutritional status of the population, West German depictions of life in the GDR relied upon tropes of hunger and deprivation that had been established during earlier wartime and immediate postwar experiences of poverty and shortages: poorly stocked stores and empty shelves, meager obligatory canteen meals, and never-satisfied cravings. For the FRG, the GDR became a key symbol of and shorthand for German hunger.

This vision of the GDR as a place of hunger and underdevelopment was encouraged by the steady shipments of West Packages (*Westpakete*) sent eastward across the border. They contained everything from bonbons to soaps, exotic fruits to stockings, noodles to imported chocolates. As a 1954 ad in the popular West German magazine *Prima* explained to its readers:

> *[F]ood packages seem to be a permanent aspect of our age. Before the currency reform, many lives depended on them. That's how it was with us. Then came the great [currency] reform, and suddenly we were no longer dependent on the food packages.* ***We*** *were not. But on the other side of the oft-cited curtain not much has changed, and so we now send packages across it. What you and I fill the packages and gift baskets with is not insignificant. It must be luxurious food products, butter and cheese, fish conserves, a sausage, fruit juices, a bottle of wine, valuable things for which our brothers and sisters will thank us. ("Prima Abschrift")*

These packages of chocolates, coffee, and cigarettes continued to be sent long after the GDR had transformed itself into a prosperous, industrialized, and—from a purely caloric perspective—quite well-fed socialist country. [2] By relegating the GDR to a state of permanent want, these shipments compounded the internalized model of inequality that was central to West German identity. Even at the peak of the GDR's obesity epidemic in the 1970s and 1980s, these packages continued to be shipped across the border, feeding East German fantasies of Western abundance rather than intending to address real food shortages. Tellingly, throughout division and on into reunification, West Germans tended to depict East Germans as both chubby and badly dressed, exploiting a heavily class-based iconography that linked socialist bodies with the uneducated and unsophisticated proletariat. [3] These poor-yet-overfed bodies represented a particular kind of "Cold War hunger" which allowed East Germans to be constructed as simultaneously hungry (needing food aid) and fat (lacking sophistication and knowledge about how to eat well).

The real food situation in the GDR was certainly different from that of the FRG, although as much in terms of the ways in which people acquired their food as the actual foods consumed. Rather than relying on well-stocked and reliable supermarkets, a hallmark of the West German economy, East Germans acquired their foods through a wide array of means. In addition to standard grocery shopping, food was acquired through an informal economy that included systems of barter and trade, the black market, favours, bribery, or personal connections—so-called "Vitamin B," with B standing for *Beziehungen* or "relationships" (Schneider 250).

Though the most severe supply problems had been resolved by the early 1960s, inadequate and monotonous food supplies continued to be a major political problem throughout the duration of the GDR. A 1968 report from the Leipzig Institute for Market Research found that "the lack of continuity in product supply is most noticeable in the structural differences between supply and demand," noting that sheer quantity of goods was adequate for the population as a whole but distributed sporadically "in terms of time and territory" (Institut für Markforschung). A shop's selection of goods was generally determined by geographic location; large cities, tourist destinations, or industrial regions were better supplied than smaller towns or areas with low population density. Nutritionists complained that inequitable and unreliable distribution policies not only insured constant dissatisfaction but did not serve the interests of public health (Vorschlag Nr 5). Unpredictability and recurrent shortages produced scarcity and consumer unhappiness that coexisted with low basic food prices, high caloric intake, and well-developed collective feeding programs for working adults and school children.

The extended life of rationing in the GDR meant that private food consumption did not increase as dramatically or as early as it did in the West. However, despite frequent shortages of individual foods, and countering West German assumptions of starvation and food deprivation, caloric intake remained quite high. [4] Without a doubt shortages in staple products—especially butter and meat—often signaled excessive consumption rather than inadequate supply. As the populace had rising incomes and inadequate consumer goods to purchase, they frequently turned to foodstuffs, which were available abundantly if not always in the best quality or greatest variety. As a result, food quickly became one of the population's most important outlets for spending (Steiner 186). In a development celebrated by East German politicians, if not the country's nutritionists, the GDR's per capita butter consumption had already outpaced that of the FRG by 1960 (Steiner 109).

In 1965, *Der Spiegel* bitingly noted that "the GDR—as always ten years behind progress—has finally reached the stage of the eating wave. Walter Ulbricht's cherished dream of reaching global superiority has finally been realized—at least on the scale" ("Süß und fett"). Indeed, the FRG had already begun reporting dangerous levels of obesity amongst segments of its population within two years of the country's 1949 founding (Bansi). A decade after the *Spiegel* article, in 1976, at the same time that the West German medical establishment was confirming obesity as the country's most pressing medical threat, *Die Zeit* reported in open disgust that "obesity has gradually acquired an epidemic character" in the GDR, as "84,000 tons of excess fat are wobbling around" ("Gegen die Fettsucht"). The article, typical of West German discourse on East German obesity, diagnosed this excessive weight as being existentially different from the West's own struggles with overweight citizens. West Germans were generally assumed to be too fat because of their booming economy's excessive consumer choice. West German citizens, especially women, were thought to lack the willpower to resist the seductive call of abundant high-quality delicacies (Neuloh and Teuteberg). In dramatic contrast, socialist obesity was interpreted as a cipher of unfulfilled and displaced desires. In the East, food "makes up for difficulties, stresses, and disappointments. It is often a substitute for pleasures that one can no longer enjoy ("Gegen die Fettsucht"). This pathologized fatness—representing poverty and unhappiness rather than prosperity and pleasure—was a physical expression of the country's flawed economy.

The association of the GDR with a distinctive sort of overweight was both true and untrue. While East German bodyweight steadily climbed over the postwar decades, and nutritionists agreed that the population's diet was far too fatty and sweet, including too much meat and too little produce, this was not an East German but rather a German-German trend. Comparisons of the two countries' diets were far more striking for their similarities than for their differences. East Germans ate more butter, flour, and potatoes than West Germans, roughly the same amount of sugar, meat, and milk, and, surprisingly, more vegetables—though primarily preserved and pickled—and much less tropical and citrus fruit. In short, since the early 1960s, the two German states had consistently reported analogous levels of overweight. While both states began reporting rising levels of overweight by the mid-to-late 1950s, it was the 1970s that ushered in talk of an epidemic. At this point, both FRG and GDR studies consistently found that about one in three German adults was overweight ("Übergewicht als Risikofaktor;" Müller).

The Dilemma of Dieting in Socialism

While basic dietary intake as well as general rates of obesity resembled those of the FRG, the GDR's struggle with overweight was really quite different from that of West Germany, discursively as well as in terms of policy. What were the specific contours of the East German struggle to control and reduce the country's relatively high levels of overweight citizens? In the FRG, overweight went from being celebrated as an icon of economic success (see Economic Minister Ludwig Erhard, whose own bulk represented the abundance that marked the end of austerity and poverty) to being demonized as a working-class problem caused by a combination of laziness and ignorance. In the GDR, by contrast, a specific level of plumpness represented a proletarian sort of prosperity and social equality, while hunger signaled moral and economic failure. Much as they might have bemoaned excessive caloric consumption, socialist commentators never forgot, as chef Kurt Drummer pointed out in a bestselling cookbook promoting healthy, lower-fat recipes, that "after all we have not been living in this excess for so long. Less than two centuries ago cakes and tarts were still a luxury of which the poorer segments of the population generally could only dream" (Drummer and Muskewitz 172). East German "real-existing socialism" consistently rejected the West's purportedly "self-absorbed" obsession with slimness, condemning the health harms of weight-loss pills and quack diets as well as the rise of eating disorders among western youth as indicative of capitalism's moral and societal flaws. By contrast, East Germany promoted an idealized worker's body that was supposed to be attainable to all, neither thin nor fat, consuming neither too much nor too little, and focused on productivity rather than external appearance.

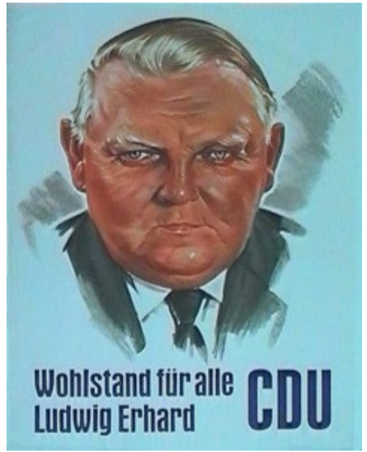

Figure 2: "Prosperity for All: Ludwig Erhard, CDU." Electoral poster from 1957. Image courtesy of the Lebendiges Museum Online. Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung; KAS/ACDP 10-001:650 CC-BY-SA 3.0 DE.

One of the earliest national studies of the spread of obesity in the East, published in 1970, estimated that one-third of the adult population was seriously overweight, while assuring its readers that it was "the high standard of living in the GDR" that was responsible for the "incredible spread of obesity" (Müller 1008). The study claimed that East Germans were overweight because "food is available everywhere—when among friends, it is practically forced upon you," rather than, as in the West, being consumed inappropriately due to loneliness, familial degeneration, or isolation (Krebs 481). The head of the GDR Institute for Health Education explained that "our current health problems are the problems of a rich society, from the first we should see this, and for all complaints about the widespread overweight and the growing abuse of natural stimulants, we should not forget that, after all, we wanted this high quality of life and fought hard for it" (Voß 64). The fact that the GDR had the highest per capita rate of butter consumption in the world was a source of pride for government officials, although anathema to nutritionists. This contradiction resulted in awkward constructions, as in the pamphlet "Your Diet, Your Health," which claimed that "we are proud that in our state workers eat butter. But one must say to them that the exclusive consumption of butter can lead to health problems" ("Deine Ernährung, deine Gesundheit"). As a result, the GDR was much less consistent than the FRG in its official rejection of fatness, which remained medically pathologized at the same time that it was considered aesthetically acceptable, a sign of prosperity and pleasure. While women's magazines in the West were dominated by countless pages of dieting advice, East German women's magazines made a point of encouraging readers to reject both fatness and thinness, instead modeling a moderate range of body shapes that included the acceptable category of *vollschlank* (usually translated as "stout," the word literally means "full-slim" or "big-slim.") Public figures referenced abundant appetites and celebrat-

ed their paunches in a way unimaginable in the West. Even in the midst of the country's obesity epidemic, conventional dieting continued to have negative associations, while abundant and carefree eating remained both norm and ideal. [5] Although health professionals agreed that growing rates of overweight were a serious problem and health risk for the population, East German politicians and many ordinary citizens continued to see excess body weight as a cipher for abundant and tasty food, and thus proof of the country's economic and social success.

In the GDR, a modern food economy was conceptualized as one of abundance, egalitarianism, collective wellbeing, and pleasure. East German health and nutrition experts repeatedly emphasized the close relationship between food and pleasure—something that is especially striking given the relative absence of this theme in equivalent West German sources. The German Hygiene Museum in Dresden, reflecting on how to get its citizens to eat both less and differently, reminded educators that "eating is a pleasurable experience, it belongs to the important pleasures of human life. One cannot underestimate the value of this pleasure. Speaking prohibitions with a raised finger prevents the necessary open-mindedness and willingness to change one's own eating habits" (Brinkmann 65). Experts asserted that healthful eating and moderate dietary restraint did not mean "a society of thin ascetics with burning gazes who want everyone to live from a diet of black bread, yogurt, and radishes" (Haenel, "Fettsucht muss nicht sein"), and nutritionists were constantly reminding chefs and cookbook authors not to sacrifice flavor for health, something they believed was a sure recipe for failure. Indeed, this celebration of the pleasure of eating, and especially the joys of "good taste," reflected a political ideology that officially venerated the "ordinary" citizen and "normal" tastes. Thus, Honecker himself described his dietary lifestyle as a sort of model for socialist eating, combining an ascetic denial of exotic foodstuffs with an enthusiastic consumption of the simple yet distinctly unhealthy foods (meat, fat, starches), which nutritionists blamed for the country's weight problems:

> *[E]very morning I ate one or two rolls with only butter and honey; for lunchtime I was in the Central Committee [canteen]; there I had either sausage with mashed potatoes, macaroni with bacon or goulash, and in the evenings I ate a little something at home, watched some TV, and went to sleep […]. Thus I never lost my connection to the Volk.* (qtd. in Merkel, *Wunderwirtschaft* 314)

Such a celebration of domestic, low-cost, and high-calorie canteen meals was entirely absent from West Germany's far more stringent language of crisis and self-control.

For nutritionists, this discourse posed a serious problem as they struggled to reconcile the country's economic and social realities with their own recommendations for weight-loss. They complained that waging a serious fight against obesity would require a reversal of the country's basic economic priorities, which generally equated high levels of popular consumption with economic as well as political success. While in the West diet products and reduced-calorie foodstuffs represented the potential for massive profit, in the GDR this was not the case. Diet foods, which generally required higher levels of industrial processing as well as the addition of artificial sweeteners and other relatively expensive and often imported chemicals, were a hard sell to socialist economists. In the early 1970s, when a Dresden cake factory developed a reduced-fat cream torte with 6,000 calories (reduced from the 9,000 in the original recipe), the additional labour costs were so substantial that the company's production numbers dropped dramatically (Bericht über den Stand der Qualität). The company requested a reduction in their assigned quota because their yearly productivity ratings were suffering; the threat of reduced profits won them permission to reduce their production of the dietetic desserts and to return to the full-fat version.

By the 1970s, rising rates of obesity had inspired medical experts to exert unprecedented pressure on the food industry to expand its dietetic offerings. At this point, East German factories were producing only 74 diabetic and "special diet" foods, 23 reduced-calorie items, and 35 healthy children's food products (Ibid.). Ten years later, the number of such products had nearly doubled (Entwicklungskonzeptionen). In order to regulate this expanding market, the Trademark Association for Dietetic Products received increased funding for its ON stamp (*optimierte Nahrung* or "optimized food"), which was awarded to products that met a high standard of quality and healthfulness: it could signal reduced calorie, high fiber, low fat, reduced sugar, or diabetic-safe. A guide to dietetic food products shows the variants of ON labels being produced in the late 1970s. By the mid-1980s, 140 products were receiving the stamp, and this number continued to grow until 1990 (Ibid.). However, impressive as these official numbers were, the products actually available varied

Figure 3: "Food Products for Healthy Nutrition." A guide to new East German products that support healthy diets, particularly focusing on low-calorie and low-cholesterol foodstuffs. Lebensmittel für die gesunde Ernährung (Fachbuchverlag, 1978). Author's private collection.

in quality and were always in inadequate quantities to meet popular demand.

East Germany's difficulty with marketing weight-loss was both conceptual and economic. Especially problematic was the basic premise of encouraging people to simply eat less food. After all, the GDR's much-vaunted subsidized food prices were explicitly designed to encourage high levels of (specific kinds of) food consumption, a goal inspired by the poverty and hunger of the interwar and postwar years. The rise in obesity, however, added fuel to older economic criticisms of the counterproductive consequences of artificially low food prices. Frozen prices on core goods led to subsidized commodities being seen as cheap rather than valuable and, as a result, they were consumed in excess and wasted profligately. [6] Nonetheless, economists worried that any decline in food spending would leave citizens with no outlet for their excess cash. In the West, decreased food spending could be countered with increased spending on auxiliary dieting products, ranging from gym memberships to weight-loss pills to diet sodas. Such products were nearly nonexistent in the GDR. In short, food seemed to be the only thing that one could always buy, to the frustration of many East German dieters. In 1975, professional chef Claus Kulka wrote a letter blaming the country's supply issues for his unsuccessful struggle to lose weight. After seeing a short TV clip composed by the German Hygiene Museum in Dresden on "healthy nutrition," he had been inspired to change his eating habits. The program had recommended a calorie chart to regulate individual diet more precisely. However, such a chart proved impossible to find at a store or through mail-order, causing Kulka to ask angrily: "what use is it to us when healthy lifestyles are advocated by our media, but the simple and even cheap-to-produce products that are required cannot be found anywhere (Letter)?"

Nutritional chemists proudly claimed that "we are already capable of simulating meat so effectively that it cannot be distinguished from the natural product" (Haenel, An Frau Ilse Schäfer), asserting that such "simulated foods" would become especially popular among the overweight population by providing "much needed low-calorie alternatives" (Haenel, "Entwicklungen"). In reality, even simple reduced-fat sausages—which had been produced before the Second World War—were often difficult to come by. Despite official production quotas for over two dozen varieties of health-conscious sausages, a diabetic man complained in 1975 that it was:

> *incomprehensible why fine baked goods are made so excessively rich with sugar and fat, [and] the same is true for sausage. In general there is only one single variety of low-fat sausage [in stock]. Who can eat this year after year? In special shops one can generally receive two to three sorts in exchange for standing in line for twenty minutes. All of them however are distinguished by a particular flavorlessness because they are all diet-sausage.* (Betr: Diabetiker)

Even when the food industry did manage to develop and produce foodstuffs with reduced levels of fat and sugar, this meant, counterproductively, that the East German market was flooded with these "unhealthy" waste products. A new variety of reduced-fat condensed milk with only four-per-

cent fat promised, ironically, to also result in the production of "forty-seven tons of butter with seventy-four percent fat for [every] one thousand tons of condensed milk" —an equation of questionable health benefit (Beschluss); standard East German butter at the time had a fat-level of 70 percent. As much as nutritionists tried to guide and regulate food consumption, economic goals rather than nutritional ideals determined the foodstuffs that were produced.

Particularly galling was the fact that the East German media consistently affirmed the widespread belief that prosperity was "connected to a high consumption of meat, butter, sweets made from refined flour, etc." (Ein heisses Eisen). Magazines, newspapers, and other popular media explicitly rejected official nutritional recommendations to eat both less and differently, making it difficult to market alternative or healthier foods as "good." As nutritionists complained:

> *[O]ccasionally we find support in the press, but often things there are made especially difficult for us. There were great difficulties with getting an article about whole grain noodles published in the newspaper. It was said, "with whole grain noodles we are taking a step backwards," or "this means that lean years are coming our way." At this point a colleague spontaneously took a pot of whole grain noodles to the press and thus convinced the editorial board. (Gemeinschaftsküche 29)*

In 1976, the popular magazine *Guter Rat* (*Good Advice*) casually defended its frequent inclusion of high-calorie recipes despite the growing levels of obesity by asserting that "for years our readers have enjoyed the little special occasion at which they occasionally present their guests with something special on the table. From this perspective we see absolutely no contradiction in the fact that we here exceed the caloric limits, and on the other hand speak of a healthy diet" (Editorial). Such popular venues defended high-calorie and purportedly unhealthy food choices as both normal and appropriate, suggesting that official nutritional recommendations were inadequate, unappealing, or just plain wrong.

A 1987 report on the psychology of dietary behavior blamed the food industry for the country's negligible declines in obesity rates. The problem, the report found, was in the poor flavors of the country's dietetic foodstuffs. By trying to market these products to overweight citizens, the industry was ignoring the primal fact that "in dietary behavior the taste of foods and dishes and the affiliated satisfaction of the pleasure drive plays an essential role. This fact should be the basis for all decisions of those responsible for the food industry and food preparation to prepare tasty foods in the interest of a healthy diet" ("Psychologische Grundlagen"). On the other hand, nutritionists acknowledged that the better food tasted, the more people ate, working against weigh loss goals. Even as they labored to improve the quality and taste of the country's food supply, nutritionists worried about numerous studies of consumer behavior that had found that improving grocery selection "stimulates private food production" and discouraged the use of canteens, which in turn meant that carefully calibrated reduced-calorie canteen meals would have far less impact than anticipated (Entwicklung des Bedarfs).

Figure 4: "Overweight. Excessive Eating leads to Overweight." Image courtesy of Deutsches Hygiene-Museum, Dresden, Germany.

The country's high levels of fatness and obesity-related illnesses suggested that the widespread availability of cheap and popular high-fat and high-sugar products was counterproductive. Anti-obesity campaigners attempted to sever the association of socialism with a "comfortable," even potentially attractive, sort of fatness. The East German Central Institute for Nutrition (Zentralinstitut für Ernährung) initiated a public debate asking "whether obesity is a private issue." The answer was a resounding no, since "the consequences of obesity are so serious and impactful that one is dealing with a social, health, humanitarian, and economic problem of the first degree […] and beyond that the fat person certainly does not match our beauty ideal and seems unaesthetic, which one—including the fat person him or herself—is regrettably well aware of" ("Ist Fettleibigkeit Privatsache"). Dr. Helmut Haenel, the leading public figure in the country's anti-obesity campaign, openly expressed his desire to make slim bodies the societal norm of the GDR. An egalitarian socialist society, according to Haenel, "cannot afford to maintain up to a third of its citizens, even up to a half, with heavy bodies, gasping for breath and unwilling to be active, susceptible to disease, less resistant to disease, early invalids, and dying early. A model society must also have the model of a healthy productive individual, that is, of a slim person" (Haenel, "Fettsucht muss nicht sein"). Such messages, however, did not have the desired impact. Although by the 1980s, surveys revealed that for the first time a majority of the population was trying to lose weight, these high rates of dieting correlated with higher rather than lower levels of obesity. By the time the Berlin Wall fell, the East German medical establishment, much like its capitalist counterpart, had come to see the population's recalcitrant tastes as its biggest obstacle to popular health.

Conclusion

By the 1970s East and West German nutritionists agreed that obesity was their respective nation's most pressing health threat. As a result, both socialist and capitalist experts believed that the goal of modern nutritional education was to tackle diet-related health problems through retraining popular tastes. Through a combination of propagandistic scare tactics and increased interventions in childhood and workplace diets, both states struggled throughout the 1970s and 1980s to change German tastes, and both admitted a discouraging lack of success (Weinreb, *Modern Hungers*). Thus, despite Western assertions of profound differences in tastes on either side of the Iron Curtain, East and West German food habits were more similar than different, both in terms of their resistance to change and their specific desires. The fall of the Wall changed the contours of these German-German struggles to regulate bodies and control popular taste. The disappearance of the GDR meant for West Germans the disappearance of an "other" Germany that embodied the "wrong" sort of food consumption and production. Yet food has remained a pivotal symbol. The importance of food in the complex memory work that has surrounded German reunification since 1990 reflects the ways in which both East and West Germans have been struggling to come to terms with their divided past and shared present (Gries).

The importance of food for remembering the past and imagining the future at least partially explains why it is that foods and drinks are some of the only East German products still being produced in reunified Germany (Sutton); most other consumer products are no longer available (Merkel, "From Stigma to Cult" 264). This continued interest in East German foods appears to many Westerners counterintuitive, if not absurd. For many West Germans, the GDR's food culture seemed to be the aspect of everyday life that most graphically represented the horrors and failures of the former nation. Instead, the East German food landscape has become the focal point of distinctly positive memories and acts of recreation; it is a crucial, though underexplored, component of the phenomenon of the rise in nostalgia for the GDR—a sort of magical memory of the past that has even grown to include West Germans who in turn fetishize products of the imagined former East (Jarausch 336). Indeed, the continued prominence of foodstuffs in post-reunification constructions of the GDR—ranging from the Spreewald pickles of the blockbuster film *Good Bye Lenin!* to the revival of newly exotic "cult" classics such as the East German *Rotkäppchen* brand of sparkling wine or even the aforementioned *Knusperflocken*—remind us that food-based fantasies of the self and the other have proved longer lasting than the political divisions of the Cold War itself. More generally, this brief discussion of both internal and external debates over popular tastes in the socialist GDR suggests the importance of taste for the working of state power. Modern states, regardless of their economic system, strive to optimize their populations' diets, and nutritionists and economists fail to reconcile the frustrating reality of individual tastes with such larger biopolitical projects.

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Image Notes

Cover Image (Figure 1): Gaby from the Eastern Zone (17) in Paradise (the FRG): My First Banana. From: *Titanic* 11 (November 1989). Image courtesy of Titanic Redaktion, Frankfurt, Germany.

Figure 2: "Prosperity for All: Ludwig Erhard, CDU." Electoral poster from 1957. Image courtesy of the Lebendiges Museum Online. Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung; KAS/ACDP 10-001:650 CC-BY-SA 3.0 DE.

Figure 3: "Food Products for Healthy Nutrition." A guide to new East German products that support healthy diets, particularly focusing on low-calorie and low-cholesterol foodstuffs. *Lebensmittel für die gesunde Ernährung* (Fachbuchverlag, 1978). Author's private collection.

Figure 4: "Overweight. Excessive Eating leads to Overweight." Image courtesy of Deutsches Hygiene-Museum, Dresden, Germany.

Notes

1 I have previously argued that the West German interest in the material reality of East German bodies was a direct legacy of Germans' personal and collective experiences during the Third Reich and the postwar Occupation (see Weinreb, "Embodying German Suffering").

2 By the late 1950s, per-head caloric intake in the GDR had reached prewar levels and rose steadily over the subsequent decades. By the 1960s, the country had largely overcome its severe housing shortage and was boasting impressive rates of economic growth. By the early 1970s, the GDR had established itself as the "shop window" of the Eastern Bloc and was generally considered the most prosperous communist country (Steiner 84). Of course, these developments paled in comparison to the Federal Republic, whose postwar Economic Miracle made the country the world's fastest growing economy within just a few years of its defeat and collapse in 1945.

3 East German anthropologist Katrin Rohnstock notes the ubiquity of beer bellies in descriptions of East German men, arguing that the swollen stomach is a sort of "socialist phenotype" in both German states (Rohnstock, "Der Bierbauch.")

4 While the GDR did not cancel its rationing program until 1958, by this point caloric intake had already exceeded medical recommendations. Indeed, this extended rationing is linked more to excessive food consumption than to significant shortages (Steiner 109).

5 This is not to say that individual East Germans, and especially women and girls, did not feel pressure to lose weight or suffer from eating disorders, only that mainstream discourse did not openly encourage extreme thinness (see Kerr-Boyle).

6 The official end of rationing in 1958 accompanied the establishment of prices for core commodities that remained constant for the duration of the state's existence (e.g., bread rolls were 5 pfennig, half a pound of butter was 2.50 marks, a sausage was 80 pfennig) (see Kaminsky 49).

TROUBLED FACES: THE MELANCHOLY PASSION OF ANNA SEGHERS'S *DIE ENTSCHEIDUNG*

BENJAMIN ROBINSON

Abstract | *Among the plotlines in Anna Seghers' 1959 novel of socialist construction, Die Entscheidung, the love story remains the most realistic allegory for understanding passionate motivations for socialism. This reading reveals how Seghers has moved the locus of insight from characters in her early novels who gain ideological consciousness in mortal struggle against repression to characters who discover ideological limits in the face of creaturely involvements. The sacrifice of the Catholic wife of a communist engineer points to the persistence of the body, labour, and birth, with their concomitant emotions of compassion and romance. By directing attention away from doctrinaire elements, my reading explores how the particulars of care encounter the generalities of collectivism.*

Résumé | *Dans le roman d'Anna Seghers de 1959, Die Entscheidung, roman de construction socialiste, l'histoire d'amour reste l'allégorie la plus réaliste pour comprendre certaines motivations passionnées pour le socialisme. Cette intervention montre comment Seghers a déplacé le lieu de connaissance de la lutte forcenée contre la répression (dans ses premiers romans) aux personnages qui se heurtent aux limites idéologiques devant leurs engagements corporels. Le sacrifice de la femme catholique d'un ingénieur communiste pointe vers la persistance du corps, du travail et de l'accouchement, avec leurs sentiments de compassion et de rêve. En écartant l'attention des éléments doctrinaires, cette intervention interroge les façons dont les particularités des soins rencontrent les généralités du collectivisme.*

> *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.*
> —*Romans 8: 18-21*

Introduction—Love as Socialist Allegory

Anna Seghers's 1959 novel, *Die Entscheidung* (*The Decision*) is an epic chronicle of the reconstruction of heavy industry on socialist terms in the rubble of the Soviet Occupation Zone of Germany. In one of the most memorable plotlines, the engineer Ernst Riedl finds himself separated from his beloved wife, Katharina, by geography and conviction. Riedl received his engineering training before the war and had his first position in a giant Bentheim Steel Works plant in the Elbe River town of Kossin, and then returns after the war to Kossin, now in the Soviet Occupation Zone. He is attracted by the workers struggling on their own to get the plant back into operation, deciding for reasons not altogether clear to himself to throw in his lot with them and settle in Kossin. His wife meanwhile is surviving the postwar wreckage in the village of Kronbach near Riedl's hometown in the American Occupation Zone on the river Main. He first met her on a trip home during a university holiday before the war and has been mostly away from her since then at work or at war. She is a truehearted Rhineland Catholic, "the sweetest thing he knew" (*Entscheidung* 156), young, innocent and committed to the remnants of the peasant community in the villages along the Main.[1] She faces the postwar devastation around her without discontent or pity. Neither a social climber nor an activist, she is reconciled to her place in the world and above all eager to be helpful to those in need. Katharina, we immediately perceive, is a good woman—but since she is not committed to changing the world, we know just as immediately that the plot will demand she undergo some transformation or come to some decision, as the title promises. We get to know her husband Riedl as a dedicated, rather awkward person, likewise neither a striver nor quite a malcontent, but a melancholic, unwilling to let people into his confidence. [2] His sense that he belongs on the Elbe in the East is as vague and as deep-seated as Katharina's that she belongs on the Main in the West. Both are motivated by faith and both committed to the underdog. Yet Riedl's newfound solidarity with the East separates him from his wife and birthplace; that is, his decision would seem to demand some sort of articulate, enlightened account from him—one that he, like many laconic Seghers heroes from Andreas Bruyn to Benito Guerrero, proves unable to formulate. The direct communication that might save their relationship instead becomes a freighted allegory of socialism and redemption.

Before Seghers returned from Mexican exile to the Soviet Occupation Zone in 1947, her writing—although set in realistic sites of political resistance and exile—adopted the elevated diction and iconography of religious tradition to reveal a humane passion for socialism. In contrast to the insights of doctrine, revelation here is a specifically aesthetic sort of knowledge. She uses allegorical means to bridge the gap between descriptive and affective registers, where the intensity of the feeling of insight stands in little proportion to the modesty of what is described. Seghers achieved her effects of knowledge especially through a narrative structure that juxtaposed routine and danger, monotony and exaltation. Indeed, in Seghers's work the genre "socialist realism" can be understood as just the allegorical attribution of socialist significance to major and minor plot events.[3] "Allegory," wrote Walter Benjamin in the *Origins of German Tragic Drama*, "established itself most permanently where transitoriness and eternity confronted each other most closely" (224, qtd. in Santner, 21).

After 1947, the socialist state, once the exalted goal of so much charismatic sacrifice in Seghers's earlier writing, became the mundane setting of her historical chronicles of socialist construction. Committed to the literary affirmation of a state that, when it appeared on the back of the occupying Soviet army rather than with the hoped-for workers' uprising, did so in the severe form of a bureaucratic party apparatus, Seghers faced a new aesthetic challenge. Socialism had to be depicted as the inherent tendency of the age, not as a deferred future expressed negatively as opposition to a damaged present. Her heroes had to rise to the occasion of single-party rule and collective labour discipline, not resistance and strikes. In such wearying and often parochial circumstances, the opportunity to risk one's life was not so readily available for eliciting revelation. While the passion for socialism remains central to her two postwar novels of contemporary history, its depiction becomes more indirect and the parties to the struggle have less chance to disclose their deeper motives—often not transparent even to themselves. In *Die Entscheidung*, Seghers's allegorical structure of meaning-making is as pervasive as ever, but shifts its manifest setting into more mundane life situations. Ironically, her allegorical intensification of meaning becomes more inescapable as the situations in which it is expressed become more commonplace. In Riedl and Katharina's story, the mysteries of socialist desire (the physical as well as political dimensions of *choosing* socialism) are conveyed allegorically through their trials of unfulfilled romantic passion and displaced faith. The almost absurdly deferred reconciliation of the star-crossed lovers is charged with lifting the narrative load that Seghers's plots of political martyrdom once would have carried.

What reads as most realistic in Seghers's novel after the 1989 collapse of real socialism in the Eastern Bloc is not the genre-typical grit of craggy workers testing their open-hearth furnace or vigilantly matching wits with supervisors, but rather the way Riedl and Katharina conceal from themselves the objects of their attachment and loss (the unplumbed space between authentic faith and self-deception). Their struggle to find the truth of their characters expressed in an emblematic social choice proves self-deceptive in a way that does not expose some novelistic bad faith, but instead captures the very beat of faith and irony and resistance and conformity that emerges in the interference pattern of engaged realism set against the disillusioned history of our present today. The lovers' tragedy anticipates how socialist realism relates to the sad fate of real socialism in the hands of postwar history. It casts into relief not just the different time-spans of individual and collective desire, but also the

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different temporalities a person inhabits when she is loving or exhausted, ambitious or troubled. Most important perhaps, the pair's tragedy shows how difficult it is to coordinate passionate faith with practical judgment. "As a rule," Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt observe in their *History and Obstinacy*, "strong motives (for example, 'I feel responsible for the future and the development of my children,' 'my faith is inalienable') are less likely to ally themselves with the motives of other humans than are weak motives," such as the pragmatic calculations of daily life (402).

Lovers, Tormentors, and Bodies at Risk

Given the harsh situation of destroyed, occupied, and morally fraught postwar Germany, two lovers finding themselves drawn apart by circumstances is not an especially surprising plot construction; one could read it as demonstrating how the greedy, recidivist interests of the West run roughshod over humble lives. Yet Seghers makes it clear that Katharina and Riedl remain not only genuinely in love, but also practically capable of reconciling their future plans. They are thwarted by something deeper than the various Cold War machinations and ideological misprisions that constitute the narrative stumbling blocks in the novel's more tendentious episodes. With its utopian theme of absolute love coming together in a community of caring, this plot thread might also be read as a foil for the more overtly topical threads, implicitly underscoring the unsuitability of any option available in Cold War Germany for delicate souls in hardscrabble times.[4] The Soviet Zone and early GDR, Seghers shows us, are no place for gentle people. Even if the late 1940s are no longer Bertolt Brecht's "dark times" of fascism—the period of Seghers's most celebrated novels, *The Seventh Cross* (1942) and *Transit* (1944)—they surely remain a time for sober self-discipline. Though characters are not called upon to make mortal sacrifices, they must still forfeit the radiant life of achieved community.

Yet Riedl is not an otherworldly romantic. He is not organized in the Communist party, but nevertheless hews imperturbably to the party line, less hesitant than even his party-member acquaintances. His inner doubts pertain to his person, not to the Soviet course. His commitment to making machines work, to the manageable goals of uncomplicated workers, illustrates the sort of steadfast attitude for which shifting party lines and power struggles are turbulences to which his deeper faith in good work pay little heed. He is, in other words, less a stranger to the practical world of postwar reconstruction than he is guided by a non-intellectual intuition of a bigger picture, rooted in things other than the daily struggle in which hardened workers and party agitators are absorbed. He is, arguably, the book's prime example of someone who has chosen his choice, motivated as he is by an existential decision for the better Germany. However, in a crucial twist, the intuitions guiding him belong to the effervescent Katharina rather than to the melancholic Riedl. Riedl grasps neither his own optimistic commitment nor his stubborn melancholy. His character weakness, his lack of self-confidence, derives, at least in comparison to the activists around him, from his missing the stark authority of death in his biography. The strong-willed cadre supervising the Kossin mill or prowling the Occupation Zone to recruit a new political infrastructure share a background of mortal sacrifice in clandestine party work during fascism or in the Spanish Civil War. To use Sigmund Freud's famous distinction between mourning and melancholia, the activists frankly mourn the comrades they have lost, and turn loss into a determined affirmation of the future. Riedl, as a melancholic, does not even recognize what it is that he has lost, and is thus incapable of avowing it—the authority of his character, such as it is, depends on an intuition, both idealized and enigmatic, rather than his having known death and surmounted it in action.

What Riedl does have, and the other serious people at the plant do not, is Katharina. Katharina embodies, in the gracious form of the human figure, Riedl's intuition of repaired humanity.[5] Her own generous faith, however, will not let itself be organized into the particular ideological present, as Riedl attempts to do with his faith in order to wrest it from its melancholy indefiniteness. He insists on the pathos of the present in a way that Katharina cannot. To put it in terms of genre conventions: while Katharina's timeless faith will not let itself be written according to the partisan conventions of official socialist realism, Seghers cannot do without expressing it—it is still the literary model of what faith must be. This tension between the organized particular (the historically sectarian) and the untrammeled universal—refracted through registers of social and existential worlds, manifest and latent experiences, political and natural history, theoretical and revealed truth—gives force to the tragic impulse that Seghers weaves into the novel's sweeping chronicle as a whole. Yet as it turns out, this thread, instead of tying together the shattered historical world in which it unfolds, is like Hansel and Gretel's bread crumbs: it draws us deep into the real socialist woods, but leaves us lost as to what would be established for us there—if not an untrammeled world, then the ideological coherence *Die Entscheidung* aims to secure. It would therefore be wrong to read the tragic love story as a foil for the political strands and their doctrinal moral coordinates. On the contrary, Riedl and Katharina's love points to a persistent characteristic of Seghers' politics of the aesthetic, which a disappointed Marcel Reich-Ranicki claimed the novel had forfeited, namely her focus on "simple people" who can barely express their "strong feelings and few thoughts" (Reich-Ranicki). Since her 1926 story, "Grubetsch," Seghers's plots invariably harbour a moment of revelation that hints at a passionate alternative to the monotony of the life to which her simple protagonists are condemned. Literature in her aesthetics is a way to envision an ecstatic community against a horizon of historical mortification.

In the conflict-laden years of the Weimar Republic, Seghers' humble characters were workers, housewives, and drifters. Many of her key scenes juxtaposed experiences of bodily exhaustion with those of the body extending itself into the world and bending toward the bodies of its fatigued fellows. The exhaustion of a labourer's body obliterates all experience besides physical pain—there is nothing left to say, the moral self no longer appears in words or deeds, and the character withdraws into the silent vanishing point of his or her creaturely nature.[6] The body extending outward, by contrast, opens itself to risk, palpates the presence of others in wary anticipation of a touch—a communion (when the body meets a lover or comrade) or a blow (when it meets a cop or informer). Through its extension, the beset human figure exposes its embodied moral qualities to the judgment of fellow human beings, risking the possibility of companionship or affliction. In her 1928 story *Aufstand der Fischer von St. Barbara* (*Revolt of the Fishermen of Santa Barbara*) we learn in the first sentences what will happen to the agitator, Hull, and the striker, Andreas. Their authority in the unfolding story derives from our anticipating Andreas' death on the cliffs when fleeing the police, and Hull exposing himself to a physical jeopardy he needn't assume. Indeed, Hull's body-at-risk is what draws Andreas from the enclosed drudgery of his poverty into a world that opens onto love and death. In stark relief against their physical duress, both characters assume a mythical gravitas that Seghers writing laconically conveys. In her subsequent work under the new circumstances of fascist victory and her exile from Germany, the historical scale of the violence she depicts expands, yet her exhausted charismatics—such as Georg Heisler, the escaped concentration camp prisoner from *The Seventh Cross*—continue to give focus to Seghers's incomparable balancing act: on the one hand, the horrible moral burden her heroes bear for drawing ordinary people into often fatal danger; and on the other, the uplift they provide us by giving history's otherwise private and complicit bystanders the opportunity to disclose their righteousness.

Although fascism drives her to France and Mexico, danger is not an exotic milieu for Seghers but rather the negation that lies latent in all routine, whether that of daily labor or the discipline of living on the lam, underground, or in exile. In a damaged world, danger arises from keeping faith with oneself despite the compromise and corruption all around. Danger culminates in an ecstasy, often only perceived through the fragmented senses of a tortured body, pointing beyond the routines of work and obedience. The death that ensures the consistency of a protagonist's faith also ensures its relevance, indeed, its perennial youth—as the title of Seghers's first postwar novel, the 1949 epic *Die Toten bleiben jung* (*The Dead Stay Young*), programmatically announces. What changes in her work, from the Weimar Republic, exile from fascism in Germany, and finally to the Soviet occupation and the construction of the GDR, is an increasing tendency to frame these moments of ecstasy—often immersed in primordial settings and concentrated by the limits of the struggling body—in larger and more historically explicit chronological spans with scarcely veiled theses about the proper course of events. At the same time, the natural body at the cusp of death remains the key source of narrative force. The relevant body at the center of the voluminous *Die Entscheidung*, where a variation on Seghers' characteristic drama of catalyst and bystander plays out, is, surprisingly, Katharina's.

Landscapes with Ruins and Faces, Sullen and Radiant

We first meet Riedl through the party's eyes, when his opacity rather than his promise stands out. Robert Lohse, another one of the novel's protagonists, describes Riedl to his childhood friend and Spanish Civil War comrade, the functionary Richard Hagen: "He was employed here before the war. Then he came back and helped us. I still haven't seen into his heart. […] I can scarcely imagine why such a person would want the plant to belong to us" (77). What is significant for our sense of Riedl's authenticity is that, unlike Lohse, who

has been starved for recognition since childhood, he is not particularly eager for the collective's acknowledgment. Mostly, though, Riedl is an enigma to himself. We repeatedly hear him described as "boring […] gloomy, sullen" (89), "sullen and gray" (286), or "awkward, sluggish" (356), and he only responds morosely to attempts to draw him out, even the attempts of his one-time close friend and engineering school comrade, Rentmair—who will eventually commit suicide due in no small part to the failure of his friend's intimacy and trust. The only insight we get into Riedl's heart comes from his worrying about Katharina. Indeed, he feels needed by the workers, and responds gratefully as we would expect of an engineer, absorbing himself in their technical challenges; yet that is as far as his class solidarity goes—there is no pronounced ideological awakening in Kossin that visibly swells his heart.

His wife writes him about the life she is trying to re-establish for them back in the West, near his hometown in a Main village by the steel works still under Bentheim's ownership; she offers him hope that "the light is always there in all the darkness and confusion" (155). Riedl thinks about the workers he met on the grounds of the expropriated Kossin plant and writes back to his wife with the same phrase, "the light is always there" (155). "But when his wife wrote him back puzzled and sad, he felt that she hadn't understood him" (156). This exchange—ambiguous about what sort of light Riedl has seen and what sort of convictions he communicates to his wife—sets up the conflict between Riedl and Katharina that ends in her death in childbirth while crossing the border into the GDR on foot to meet her husband in Kossin.

In his first visit to Katharina in the novel's narrated time, Riedl travels to Rödersheim on the Main River in the West to negotiate with a supplier. Rödersheim is his hometown, where his mother, sister, and older brother still live. Katharina lives a step further along the Main in the small village of Kronbach, a short train ride to Stargenheim and then a two-hour walk, with a ferry ride across the river at Heidesheim. Riedl witnesses a bustling scene along his walk through Rödersheim. The Bentheim Works stretch along the river between Rödersheim and Hadersfeld. The reconstruction is impressive, not only of the factory, but also of the houses and shops. The visible success spurs Riedl to pose the key question that organizes his conscious perception of the cultural and natural landscape along the Main: "Whatever Riedl saw, he compared with his own experiences; the thought never left him, he turned it over endlessly in his mind: Can Katharina understand what distinguishes life here from life over there?" (311).

His perceptions do him no favors. The prosperity of the West outshines anything in Kossin. In the 1968 sequel to *Die Entscheidung*, the novel *Das Vertrauen* (*Trust*), Riedl will encounter in the West the very worker whose plea for help rebuilding the Kossin plant moved Riedl to stay in the East, setting in motion the sequence of tragic plot events. In the sequel, the uncomplicated but faithless worker explains to Riedl, "here [in the West] we're well off. A blind man sees that. Even better than I imagined (27).[7] Already in the first novel, instead of finding visual confirmation of the rightness of the socialist course, Riedl notices only prosperity in the West. Seeing how "one full shop came after another" (311), he reassures himself with another way of looking at things. While he remains consciously focused on the distinction "here" and "there," at a deeper level he organizes his perceptions according to a different distinction, namely, that between inside and outside. Anticipating his imminent reunion with Katharina, he imagines a conversation that shifts attention to the second axis: "It seems so meager on our side. Here, one wants whatever makes people greedy and wild to earn more. Back home people are transforming themselves. That happens on the inside. It isn't displayed in shop windows" (311). However, because this internal change is not visible, Riedl immediately concedes to himself the uncertainty of his knowledge, interrupting his imagined dialogue: "He balked. Is it true? Are there really many who've changed?" (311). Although he introduces the internal-external distinction to shore up his faith, the new distinction only compounds his uncertainty, adding another, intensive dimension. If the first uncertainty appears in the novel's landscapes, the second appears in the novel's faces. The tension between two dimensions, intensive and extensive, is especially apparent in Riedl and Katharina's story, where the faces and landscapes alternate with each other in a rhythm of tension and release. As his reunion with Katharina approaches and his doubt becomes ever more intolerable, the overwhelming beauty and familiarity of his native landscape reasserts itself (which is also Seghers's native landscape). No longer primarily an industrial and commercial landscape, which would invariably cast the economically inferior East into the melancholy obscurity of its rainy grays, the West German landscape that opens up before Riedl's senses has been drawn back into nature. The natural landscape, narrated with a rich sensual vocabulary as a retardation of action, is transformed into a scene that transcends the variable, excitable temporality of economic and political life.

In her 2001 study, *Anna Seghers: The Mythic Dimension*, Helen Fehervary argues that Seghers, rather than being primarily a psychological or lyrical writer, was "the quintessential pictorial writer. Everything she wrote revolves around pictures and derives its significance from them" (13). Fehervary emphasizes how Seghers' deep familiarity with the tradition of the Dutch masters allowed her to describe settings saturated with the iconography of northern European painting, a mythic doubling of the story locale that lends her prose an atmosphere of messianic weight. This rich topographic descriptiveness, with its implicit temporal depth, emerges as Riedl walks along the Main from the station at Stargenheim to the ferry at Heidesheim. Abandoning his imagined dialogue with Katharina, with its fruitless dialectic of doubt, Riedl gives himself over to his senses, which promise him a deeper truth than his own hesitant and uncertain voice:

> *Riedl was tired and relaxed […]. The tension, the anxiety around seeing Katharina again, was gone […]. The thicket smelled of blossoms. And something dwelled in this scent, these hills, this warm wind that he'd long done without. Something at once wild and gentle, an intimation of the south, an abiding faith in the beauty of the world. (314)*

I want to linger over this image, since so much of what structures the novel, is put into play here: the problems of conversion and recognition, of correlating inside/outside with here/there, and inner states with their reflection in landscapes. Two plots are superimposed, one involving political consciousness, the other romantic intuition. In one plot, Riedl's bodily exhaustion draws him in from the West's extroverted economic landscape, which wearies him just because he perceives how it undercuts his decision for the people's property of the East. Like Riedl's own sullen and unrevealing face, the eastern landscape seems opaque by contrast to the exuberant commercial activity of the West. His exhaustion, rather than absorbing him as pain would into the solipsism of physical embodiment, releases him from the tension of his interminable inner dialogues. His sensual awareness attunes itself to the scents, breezes, and hills to which his body reaches out. The attunement restores his faith in an undivided world expressed through its transcendent beauty. The other plot entails how romantic love, confronted with the lovers' silence and misunderstanding, reassures itself with reference to the landscape that constitutes the common world in which they relate to each other. The subjective landscape that emerges through exhaustion is not a modernist collage of fragmented perceptions but rather the shared setting in which the lovers step back from their ceaseless changeability and observe each other observing, aware of each other from a reflexive, at times almost elegiac, distance, as the unity of an experiencing subject.

There is another aspect of the image worth lingering over. As the story progresses, Riedl's tense body gradually attunes itself to a peaceful landscape, relaxing from the rigors of distinguishing and deciding. In terms of literary genre, we see a protagonist being relieved of the strenuous demands of socialist realism, which insist that characters align with a positive or negative tendency in the novel's urgent social world. The scenic asserts priority over the dialogic or didactic. In the attunement of beholder and beheld, interior and exterior align with each other. The scene is cast in the mild light of forgiveness rather than praise or blame. Lulled by the sight of the ferry gliding across the river, Riedl has relinquished the tension of judgment with a rhetorical question his body has already answered, "to what end […] this tormenting decision?" (315).

When Katharina quietly catches up with Riedl at the boat, she does not surprise him or disturb the balance: "He turned his head, he wasn't taken aback, not even surprised" (315). Like the landscape, her appearance has taken on a nearly unchanging demeanor: "She even wore the same dress that she wore at their last parting. It was only a bit faded, bluish instead of blue" (315)—only enough change to let in a breath of the melancholy that mortal life recognizes in the face of the transcendent. Riedl's moodiness when he is separated from Katharina dissipates as he sees himself reflected as a whole in her steady gaze: "She looked directly at him without smiling, only her gold brown eyes. It was like old times" (315). While the context of East and West is changeable, here he sees her seeing the same loving subject, the same unity of past, present, and the anticipation of the future. The lovers, the mild evening, the scent of grasses and flowers, even the ruins of wartime are reconciled in the landscape: "The boat, the clouds and the hills, the riverbank with the bombed out city hung in the pink air" (316).

The ruined city in the landscape is, to borrow Walter Benjamin's famous image for the storyteller's placid art, as natural and inevitable as the "reaper […] in the processions around

the cathedral clock at noon" (95). Not the lovers' biographies with their tormented record of decisions counts in the riverbank's pink air, but rather their organic bodies and animal sensitivity. Personal history turns into natural history, with its creatureliness and its intimacy with death and the passage of time. As Eric Santner writes in *On Creaturely Life*, "the ambiguity at the heart" of this vision of natural history is that "the extreme response of our bodies to an absence of balance in nature presupposes a nature already thrown off its tracks […] by human history" (99). In her characteristic visual idiom, Seghers asserts the style of the farmer's almanac tale—the chronicle form Benjamin took as the model of the storyteller's art—against the busy and sometimes bullying style of engaged political literature. As Benjamin elaborates, the chronicle differs from historiographic writing precisely in refusing to *explain* the concatenation of events. Rather than explanation, the chronicler offers interpretation, "which is not concerned with an accurate concatenation of definite events, but with the way these are embedded in the great inscrutable course of the world" (Benjamin 96).

The intuition of the *longue durée* remains, however, of only short duration. Riedl cannot maintain the scene's sublimity. The trace of socialist realism, in the emphatic sense of a more or less intact socialist value system, lies too heavily over his character for him to break out of the Cold War's subjectification. The pink air is too perfect, the characters bathed by its light too imperfect. Riedl falls back into the banality of political dialogue, commenting on the stray bomb that destroyed the buildings, explaining that hollow cylinders such as smokestacks and church spires do not explode in the air pressure. Katharina recognizes the breach of style: "Katharina said quickly, in the way one speaks to a child […]'do you think so? I don't understand a thing about it'" (316). With a romantic gesture, tossing her bouquet of wildflowers into the current, she tries to steer the novel away from socialist realism and Riedl's attention back to the unfinished tasks of love. However, the scenic spell of the unifying landscape has been broken, and unlike the smokestacks and spires, Riedl gives way to the pressure of having to analyze the scene, drawing the story back into the changeable temporality of definite events.

Having disrupted the idyll, Riedl goes on to confuse ideological and romantic idioms in analyzing the quality of Katharina's love: "He thought: in a moment we'll be on the spot that is holding her. Then I'll know why she doesn't want to come to me" (316). The increasingly few readers versed in the conventions of socialist realism immediately understand the need to break the romantic spell, but those expecting (perhaps only with self-conscious estrangement from the genre) that love will conquer all may be disturbed by Riedl's stubborn clumsiness. The shifts speak to an intransigence of the Cold War's socialist realism, which demands that multiple motives be sorted into ideological categories that psychological realism resists.[8] The confusion clears, however, if one refuses to be either a socialist-realist reader or a psychological-realistic reader and understands the conventions of the genres as standing in an allegorical relationship to each other. Just as a love story cannot be reduced to matrimonial closure, the political tale cannot be reduced to the choice to live in the East or West. The romantic issue for the already married Riedl and Katharina is not matrimony, but rather the authenticity of their love. Niklas Luhmann, has argued that love is coded by the distinction between *amour/plaisir* as well as that between passion/reason (85; 95). Likewise, the true socialist is coded by two central distinctions: working to realize oneself through collective property as opposed to working for the pleasure of buying consumer goods; and the revolutionary's sacrificial readiness as opposed to the dogmatist's self-righteousness. Neither set of distinctions can be settled by a declarative sentence. The experience of truth follows a structure of withholding and deferral, punctured by intuitions of a latent presence within. To be sure, love, unlike socialism, is addressed intimately. The bourgeois novel, with its rich techniques for focalizing the narrative on individual characters, evolved in tandem with the conventions of romantic experience. Yet socialism, a reality that appears for the first time in the 20th century, is missing a comparable code for grasping its interiority. Seeking to portray subjectivities with which readers could plausibly identify (as opposed to the unattainable ego-ideal represented by the Spanish Civil War fighters), Seghers positions the individual love story allegorically with reference to the collectively addressed passions of socialism.

In this sense, Riedl's apparent psychological confusion between Katharina's affections and her political convictions cannot be read as a character failing (or the failure to sketch a plausible character). Rather, this dilemma points to the love story as being the realistic vehicle to make the story of socialist passion allegorically accessible to the reader. In his 1933 book, *The Socialist Decision*, the theologian Paul Tillich held: "No one can understand socialism who has not experienced its demand for justice as a demand made on oneself. *Whoever has not struggled with the spirit of socialism can speak about it only from the outside, which is to say, in fact not at all*" (7, emphasis in the original). The characterization is not unlike that of love, whose nature can only be experienced from the inside—a beloved is just another person to someone not in love, and the struggle of lovers to know each other's minds and bodies is otiose to the outsider.

The Creaturely and the Promethean

Unable to adopt the new convictions of her husband, Katharina receives counsel from her priest Father Traub, who helped her survive the postwar crisis. He directs her to the smallholding of the widowed and disfigured peasant Alois Seiler. Here she rebuilds a household destroyed by fascism and war through her care, a power as gentle as it is rare. In a vivid image, when Riedl finally arrives at the spot on which his jealousy has been fixated—Seiler's farmhouse—he discovers not a romantic rival but a scene of traditional domesticity, a warm glow in dark times:

> *The kitchen at first appeared very deep and very dark to Riedl. He gradually figured out that the oven, which was as big as the table, was pushed up against the back wall; he discovered the massive, weakly glimmering copper spoons, attached to a bracket. The crucifix hung alone on the side wall. The dark wooden cross was large, while the crucified one was small, almost delicate, turned from ivory. (317-18)*

The picture is reminiscent of one of Jan Steen's richly toned portraits of a peasant family at mealtime, piously saying grace in the dark recesses of the kitchen, copper tools lambent in the fire of the hearth—except for the one disruptive element that intrudes on Riedl's inventory: "the year 1950 leapt to his eye from the calendar" (318). With this detail in Riedl's eye, Seghers sets up the opposition between the present-day historical temporality and the Catholic temporality of salvation. After their night together, Riedl wakes with the roosters and instructs Katharina to get ready to come with him. She has arranged to take the day off to spend with him, but it quickly becomes apparent that he means she should come with him immediately back to Kossin. She quietly goes down to the kitchen to warm the coffee; the hired hands are still in the field, the room is still: "There was an inkling of home in it. And the four walls and table and oven around her seemed to say: stay. You're man and wife." (319) The domestic image, however, cannot hold; the tear of calendar time already cuts through it. The mythic hearth, the forge of domestic and community consciousness, draws the readers into a world of quiet contemplation, while the calendar spits us out along with the two lovers and their quickly dashed hope for a communion that will last longer than a single night of conjugal bliss.

As Katharina and Riedl retrace their walk back to the ferry, her face is transformed from radiant unity with the landscape into pure division:

> *Katharina sat upright in front of him in the boat. She avoided his gaze, and chatted away with the ferryman. He saw now, though, how pale her mouth was; he saw her desperation, and the purple world was still more beautiful than it was in the evening, even the reflection of the bombed out city in the river was beautiful. (319-20)*

Katharina's face is still beautiful in the morning light, but it has withdrawn its gaze from Riedl's in punishment for his repeated abandonment. Her mouth seeks to make itself unavailable, dispersing itself into idle chatter, out of tune with the landscape. Nonetheless, the despair she seeks to dispel refocuses not on the words but the pallor of her mouth, which leaps out of the purple air to Riedl's eye. The salience of her mouth, however, is different than the salience of the Cold War calendar date. It re-centers the image's beauty despite her evasive blathering with the ferryman. The morning of the destroyed relationship is even more beautiful than the evening of the hopeful relationship. On the first crossing, Riedl evaded amorous communication with his own blather about bombs and air pressure; on this crossing, Katharina's evasion evokes no effort by Riedl to reintegrate the voice and image of Katharina's mouth. He reads her despair aesthetically like he reads the reflection of the destroyed city; neither interpretation involves his subjectivity in action. He returns to his melancholy, unable to act on the inside/outside distinction, displacing his will grimly back into the topography of this side/that side.

Since the train to Rödersheim does not depart for another three hours, Katharina, in a final gesture, pleads with Riedl to visit her priest. As a compact set piece, Riedl's conversation with Father Traub stages the allegorical dynamics of his visits to the West and anticipates the dynamics of Katharina's mirrored crossing over the East-West border at the novel's end. The conversation has two main threads: draw-

ing Riedl out to speak about the socialist difference at the level of appearances, and then challenging him to disclose whether there is a corresponding difference along the axis of (non-appearing) depths—to disclose, that is, his own moral self. Father Traub allays Riedl's distrust with his peaceful visage and searching eyes, courting Riedl's reluctant voice with a simple question about why he enjoys living in the Russian zone. His answer is surprising since it expresses enthusiasm for the labour morale of the East, something that the novel has not described him experiencing. On the contrary, Riedl's interior monologues have only expressed doubt about the morale in the East and whether the workers have really transformed themselves. The irony is that Father Traub's uncomplicated face penetrates Riedl's glum physiognomy only to discover behind it an orthodox narrative of the labour situation. Indeed, the melancholic Riedl is possessed by a loquacious enthusiasm: "Traub's eyes no longer captivated him. He was captivated by what he was relating […]. The more Riedl said, the more occurred to him to say. Much more than ever occurred to him when Katharina was listening" (324-325). Father Traub remains placid but responds to Riedl's enthusiasm skeptically, suggesting that such perennial bursts of human effort are a flight from "two little words: Creatus sum" (325).

While the provenance of the words is not elaborated, given Father Traub's Catholicism, a suggestive reference point is the opening line of St. Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, "Creatus est homo" (man is created). In a 1940 lecture, Carl Jung called the words "a psychological declaration of the first importance" (Jung, online). For Jung, they point to the moment an ego realizes that "I happen to myself." The relevant question of faith posed by the recognition that I am not the cause of myself is whether I am to choose submission to the plan of providence or whether I am left with only the absurd facticity of existence, of being "thrown into the world": transcendence or nothingness? In some sense, the latter option, the anti-religious insight of existentialism pervasive among intellectuals of the era, would be as unsympathetic to Seghers as it would be to Father Traub. To be sure, as Christiane Zehl Romero has pointed out, Seghers's engagements with the existentialism of Kierkegaard and Dostoyevsky shaped her intellectually from an early age (104-5). At the same time, however, existentialism in the 1940s and 50s was a rival to Marxism and sharply rejected by György Lukács and other prominent intellectuals of the Eastern Bloc (Lukács). Existentialism, ostensibly the more pious option, captures a common gesture of Christian and communist. True faith, according to St. Ignatius's Exercise 234, involves a *sacrificium intellectus dei*, a leap by which the faithful exchange their earthly will for the gift of God's grace. While the communist position espouses a secular humanism, in Seghers's chiliastic allegories it also displays an aesthetic rather than discursive faith in a supra-individual providence. This is the faith that Father Traub recognizes in Riedl—and in the orders of the Soviet General heading the Military Administration in Germany—but whose pathos of novelty he finds inauthentic:

> *What do you see so new in all that? […] You know all the attempts that have been made over the last two thousand years to establish the kingdom of God on earth […]. Didn't Calvin already claim that the grace of God revealed itself in success? […] When I listen to what you're saying, and let the orders of the Russian general run thought my head […] I'm struck by something similar. (325)*

For Father Traub the issue comes down to the overreach of Riedl's enthusiasm for human Promethean autonomy—one belied by the bombed cities Riedl gazes upon, whose overgrown ruins, as W. G. Sebald argued in his study, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, have "drop[ped] out of what we have thought for so long to be our autonomous history and back into the history of nature" (66).[9] It is, after all, resplendent nature, not human daring, that has seized Riedl on his visit—a resplendence that points to a cognate sense of *creatus sum* found already in the medieval concept of the Book of Nature: natural creation is an objective revelation as sacred as that of scripture. Against the river landscape of hills, lavender, and bombed-out factories, humans appear frail and finite. With their pale lips and evasive chatter, they are creatures of original sin, incapable of perfection in historical time and saved for divine time only by the hidden grace of providence. Traub is perceptive enough to recognize the doubt behind Riedl's productivist bravado. He alludes to the mass rapes committed by the occupying Red Army, which Riedl, eager to mitigate the brutality of socialist forces, has to recognize as a sign of the Soviets' human frailty. Traub's special reason to fear a Promethean arrogance is that, by casting its subjects as infinite creators, it shows little mercy for the finite creation. Katharina's message to Riedl, to which Traub hopes to make him sensitive, is of her care. Moreover, earlier in the visit when Riedl first learns of Katharina's position on the farm caring for the widowed and disfigured Seiler, he becomes jealous of her distribution of care: "Do you think you're wanted only here?" (317). His melancholic disposition—the pervasive sense of loss whose source he cannot identify—is what draws him to Katharina's ministering gaze.

Traub has found Riedl's sensitive point. The interview ends perfunctorily when Traub asks him to consider whether Katharina could really survive, let alone thrive, in the life he envisions for her in Kossin. Riedl bursts out, "Doesn't a wife belong to her husband?" (325). The priest does not respond ideologically, but instead admonishes him to considerateness. If he does not want simply to order her, but to have her share his faith in the Soviet occupation, then he has to leave the decision to her. Faith is the last dimension of freedom for the creature of the finite world.[10]

Katharina's Final Crossing

In the final segment of the story, Katharina, who has conceived in the train station hotel during one of Riedl's subsequent visits and is now late in her pregnancy, finally decides to cross over to the East on her own and, out of fear of the official border, to do so illegally on foot.[11] Both of Riedl's intervening visits have been cut short by unexpected bad news out of Kossin: the suicide of the couple's friend Rentmair and then the defection of his firm's top leadership (due to Cold War intrigue). The news does not exactly evoke confidence in the bonds of care holding life together in Kossin. However, Katharina's place in the Main river landscape has meanwhile been shaken. Seiler's sister has moved to the farm and the family has taken over running the household. Seiler's disfigured face—whose mixture of ugliness and composure reflected back at Riedl the vanity of his jealousy while laying the basis for Katharina's comforting presence at the hearth—has made way for a new economy of glances around the kitchen table: a faster pace of exchanged looks, thrifty and avaricious, signaling the domestic temporality of the West's economic miracle. Katharina is already preparing her inevitable move to an office job in the city. Her vulnerability could not be more complete. Separated from the caring household she has fostered, loosed from the agrarian Catholic tradition and estranged from her husband, Katharina is deceived by one final hope for reunion in the West. Although she has concealed news of her pregnancy from Riedl, he is informed by Father Traub and hastens across the border to see her. The very evening he arrives below her window at the farmhouse, the newspapers are carrying news of the defection of the Kossin firm's directorate, listing Riedl as one of the defectors. Katharina believes he has come to stay. As soon as she confides her expectations, thereby alerting him to the turmoil back at the factory, his consternation and solicitousness about the pregnancy turn into dismay about the defection—on a moment's notice he drops his visit, pregnancy and all: "Afterwards man and wife said little. Katharina didn't go downstairs with him. Her arms hung so loosely it was as if he had shaken them off" (515). In this confluence of crises, intimate loyalty and ideological avowal appear irreconcilable in the simultaneity of their urgency. The fateful decision in this moment is all Riedl's—or providence's—and it falls on the side of the factory.

Katharina's decision to cross the border illegally at the very end of her pregnancy is psychologically realistic only if we understand it as a gesture of suicide brought to Riedl's doorstep. Yet as Fehervary has emphasized, Seghers's imagination is not drawn to fine-grained psychological portraits. The rage that Katharina in her natural piety would never admit to herself goes likewise unrecognized in the story of her border crossing. The villages at the border of Franconia and Thuringia and the bands of birch and fir forests she traverses become mythical landscapes rather than geopolitical regions; historical and intimate temporalities—so incapable of resolution in biographical time—become metaphysical ones. The topography of her border crossing resembles nothing so much as the explicitly mythological setting of Seghers's 1948 story "Das Argonautenschiff" ("The Ship of the Argonauts"), interpreted by Fehervary as an allegorical treatment of Seghers's own decision to return from exile to the Soviet Zone in Germany (38-41).

Katharina, throwing herself into physical activity to the point of exhaustion, assumes—at the very moment of her greatest social, emotional, and bodily need as wife and expectant mother—the full burden of guilt for Riedl having abandoned her during her pregnancy: "Am I lying here all alone? Is he gone? Gone for good? And she asked herself whether she could really have said: I can't go to you anymore. It's impossible with the child. Who's going to help him there? she thought lying in her bed at night, doesn't he need the two of us more than ever?" (595). Riedl's moral exemption is not just from Katharina's limited subjective point of view; the narration likewise elides any hint of his responsibility, as though his socialist passion has possessed his will so fully that he is as much an object of his beliefs as their subject.[12] Our sympathy with Riedl, such as it is at this point, depends on whether we recognize him, despite the bravado he dissembled for Traub, as a creature of both power strug-

gles and the political passions they have fostered. His salvation as a character in the novel depends on our acceptance of Traub's *creatus sum*.

Yet, if Riedl lies somewhere on the spectrum of creaturely life, Katharina lies at its most extreme position. As much as she seems to approach sanctification through her mortification, she cannot be a sacrificial hero like the dead of the communist resistance or the Spanish Civil War. Rather, because of her very real faith in Catholicism—what a communist would consider a false belief—she becomes the scapegoat for Riedl's guilt and the guilt of all the hesitant and melancholy people living in bad faith in the shadow of the Cold War. We witness her abandoned, if not by God then by a Catholic community that has abandoned piety for venality, as well as by a communism whose bold and timely stories of people's property and the workers' party cannot accommodate her untimely story of abiding faith, hope, and caring love, where, as St. Paul advises us, "the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Katharina's decision to cross over comes to her not through rational deliberation on social systems but rather as a premonition: "In her head the idea came to her—like a response one has been nervously awaiting and when it finally comes doesn't at first understand—, that she soon had to go over to him" (596). The thought arises on its own and comes to her vividly but indistinctly. It appears in the form of an aesthetic intuition that is otherwise hard to achieve in the novel's sober world. Even as Riedl is the manifest object of the pronoun in the phrase, "soon had to go over to him," we recognize in the diction the figure of death (with or without salvation). The only time she finds peace is when she thinks of her decision to cross to the other side, not what she will find there: "Then all the doubt, all the fear of the last years, her difficult loneliness and her brief, no less difficult meetings with her husband, and even the decision which stood before her, seemed only a matter of the path, of crossing the border" (597).

Her journey is marked by the oscillation of her consciousness from her body's pain and exhaustion in labour to the calm observation of the landscape. A market woman whom she befriended during her pregnancy described for her the path over the Thuringian Highlands to the GDR. Initially, the plan Katharina worked out with the market woman was that the woman's cousin would guide her, but Katharina has put off the journey for so long that the cousin is no longer there. When she finally sets out from the country road where the bus has dropped her, her companion is a crone with a black straw hat who had been traveling in the same bus, the spitting image of Alois Seiler's sister. She seeks to ingratiate herself with Katharina by warning her of danger from the police, who will be on heightened lookout for suspicious people due to the World Festival of Youth in East Berlin. Katharina finally shakes off her unwelcome guide with a coin that the old woman snaps from her hand "with fingers like a beak" (600). The crone's presence, reminiscent of the devilish gondolier in Thomas Mann's "Death in Venice," lends a hallucinatory aspect to the journey that is only intensified as she climbs the hills toward the woods. The higher she goes, the more the edge of the forest recedes from her, until at some point it finally stops climbing and welcomes her into its peaceful foliage: "The forest no longer climbed away. It waited peacefully. She shuffled through the leaves. Now the air above her was moist and fresh. There were red and bright yellow patches as though autumn had already snuck up. Katharina would have had nothing against remaining here, if she could, instead of hiking farther and farther" (601). At this point of momentary solace, several children and an older girl appear out of nowhere, babbling about the Festival in East Berlin and the Western police efforts to prevent them from attending. Katharina understands little in the torrent of words and names, recognizing only an uncanny appearance of appetite, youth, and life in her rapidly dimming world: "She understood only the note of insistence, of overcoming boundaries. She would have liked to ask: What's the point of all that? Why? For the sake of what? […] But there was no time for that, she was already alone again.—She listened, astonished by how long the rustling and cracking went on" (602).

In brief moments of lucidity, she perceives the firs rising like Gothic arches, but the sheltering branches open themselves ever more reluctantly to the light of her gaze, whipping back instead across her face, marring its placid beauty and leaving her looking like both the image of Jesus with the crown of thorns and *mater dolorosa*:

> *Her face was soon all scratched up from the branches snapping back. She got some rest on a tree trunk. Between the stiff branches there were still a few clouds and mountain peaks and villages and even a sun, ripe and near enough to pick. However much she [sie] struggled, she [sie] was pressed into the great cold shroud, the brightly patterned world. (603)*

In German, the third person feminine pronoun "sie" identifies Katharina with the entangled sun (also feminine), resisting, but inevitably folded into the winding sheet of the colourful world. A distant sound of chopping draws Katharina out of her enveloping exhaustion to a pair of woodsman, the first of whom responds to her attentively while the other accuses her of being a nuisance to others by climbing through the woods in such a condition. Her strength suffices only for her to utter, "I can't go any further" (603) and passed out. The first woodcutter brings her to his aunt, where she regains consciousness. She does not have the strength to stop crying. The peasant woman tries to reassure her that they can get her to a hospital in time, but Katharina says she is crying because she hoped to make it across the border. The woman reassures her that she has indeed made it—and she spells it out—to the German Democratic Republic. All Katharina can say to the news is "I? Here?" (604) before she closes her eyes. "In the midst of her joy the labor pains began anew. Her thoughts stopped. Astonishment and fear were stronger than anything" (605).

Katharina dies naturalistically, in pain, without any certain revelation, only the ambiguous recognition, "I? Here?" that she has made it to the other side. Her final fear and astonishment defer any answer to the question of her sanctification, recalling for us so many narratives that end with the hero suspended between holy sacrifice and simple death—from Jesus' cry, "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46) to the double judgment pronounced on Margarete in the last scene of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust*, "She's condemned! She's saved!" to the wasting death of Robert Musil's simple Tonka in his eponymous story, taking with her a child that may have been immaculately conceived. Perhaps the most telling parallel, however, is with the death of the young mother, Elisabeth, in Seghers's preceding novel, *The Dead Stay Young* (1947).[13] A Baltic German aristocrat and the wife and cousin of the sadistic SS officer Lieven, Elisabeth is an impossible vehicle for revelation. Nonetheless, her death in the snow with her child bears the novel's most powerful moment of aesthetic intuition. The scene's iconography is quietly evocative of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's winter landscapes and the Russian winters that have repulsed invaders. As Elisabeth wanders the country roads behind her family estate in a snowstorm, trying to escape the partisans retaking Nazi-occupied Lithuania, she gradually loses her orientation in the cold. Seghers slows the narrative tempo to almost a *nunc stans* in which we follow Elisabeth's constricting consciousness as she tends to her beloved boy, who at first walks happily beside her, then warms himself in her arms until she begins to falter and becomes indifferent to the time of day, then to time itself as her memories swirl and depart, and finally her spirit withdraws even from her tightly cradled child.

Given their social positions and non-communist faiths, what aspects of Elisabeth and Katharina as characters brings the texts to the verge of revelation? Two things. First, both characters are witnesses of something our primary characters are unable to behold. Second, they belong to a circle of action that compels them to disclose themselves in proximity to (or embrace of) death. Importantly, the truth of the world that both witness, and the worldly selves that both disclose at death, remain inchoate—they do not coalesce into transcendental significance. Instead, the characters preserve in their faces a disfiguring tension caught between hope and care. Elisabeth, alone among the legion of characters in *The Dead Stay Young*, indirectly witnesses the Holocaust through overhearing the SS officers gathered at her estate laughing at the naked bodies of the Jewish women they see on the transport train. Katharina witnesses nothing so devastating.[14] Like Elisabeth, she is headstrong and practical, both depicted and seeing in concrete sensual terms. Yet where Elisabeth witnesses people reduced to the animal finitude of their bodies, Katharina witnesses people denied the same finitude, her undeterred eye grasping the neglect of the creature that leads to fear, suicide, defection, and bad faith. Of course, what they each behold, genocide and failure of compassion, is not equivalent—yet there is a certain fortuity of character to be found among those at the edge of the manifest social struggle, where the pace is slow enough to grasp biography and the body, history, and nature. From such eccentric proximity, anyone's eyes might open, however briefly, to the light of revelation.

Katharina and Elisabeth approach revelation ever so closely, but if Seghers confirmed their vision by sharing it with her readers, it would surely prove to be kitsch. By dying on the cusp of their central insight, they ultimately withhold it. By contrast, the one unambiguously haloed face of *Die Entscheidung*, that of the beautiful Spanish Civil War nurse, Celia, does reflect back at us the light of truth. In a makeshift field hospital, Celia tends to three wounded partisans, Robert Lohse, Richard Hagen, and Herbert Melzer, who become three positive heroes of the novel. Indeed, Celia's light is the gift that keeps them focused on the ultimate prize. The pure spectrum radiated by her face is the metaphor that secures

the partisan meaning of the novel's explicitly tendentious plots. With the light it gathers, Celia's face reflects back to all who behold it stable, enduring, indeed, transcendent signification:[15]

> *Celia, the nurse, used the narrow light that for a brief time every day lay across the cleft in the rock, on flesh and blood, on bandage strips, on eyes in which the light of the world was gathered. Everyone tried in this moment to sate themselves on the sight of her young and loyal face. It was more beautiful than any they'd ever seen […]. It would never fade from their memory. It could never again disappear in the darkness. (35)*

How one of those surviving partisans, the author Herbert Melzer, depicts Celia in his novel within the novel becomes a turning point of Seghers's novel. Instead of giving due respect to Celia's loyalty to the cause, Melzer conjures a happy marriage for her, a private reconciliation that pleases Melzer's American publisher. Yet in a key moment among stalwart comrades, Melzer realizes he has betrayed his epiphany of Celia: "She never holed herself up in a family. I don't dare destroy her image" (338). Herbert takes up the novel again and in the new draft has Celia die in a ravine on a mission for her party: "Though her limbs are shattered by the fall, she lies in incorruptible youth at the bottom of the crevice" (338).

After a sentence like that, one waits for the body to turn to dust, like that of the youthfully preserved groom in Johann Peter Hebel's "Mines of Falun," Walter Benjamin's example the storyteller's art. The problem with the symbolism of Celia is that, while she escapes the private reconciliation of marriage that had threatened her in Melzer's novel, in Seghers's novel she is all-too-conveniently reconciled with the positive message. As beautiful as the epiphany is that the partisans behold in her eyes, her face has no inchoative aspect, no ambiguity of becoming, just the look of a finished figure of meaning. Celia's beauty is the same sort as that of the peasant girl who, in the last scene of *Die Entscheidung*, brings Riedl his surviving baby, "a beautiful girl […] like an apparition from another world" (605). It is the beauty of explicit signification that needs its proper seal. Accordingly, we read that the girl "later becomes a crane operator" (606), just as a socialist angel must. What keeps Katharina and Elisabeth from debasing their revelations by beholding them all too dogmatically is the ultimately naturalistic finality of their death. Celia's tidy death, in contrast to theirs, has no biographical finality, no individuating effect; instead, her dying only makes her luminous visage brighter, until it is only a blank spot to be filled by another determined young visionary, deferring the concrete death that might disclose a life.

At the end of Riedl and Katharina's story, his pervasive melancholy has left its gloomy trace across the novel, counter to the bright signs of the socialist martyrs and activists. Both traces are etched into the landscapes and faces—the activist's face surveying the landscape as a field of action while the melancholic's wrestles with becoming absorbed into it. The melancholy disposition recognizes the loss of the creaturely in socialism's Promethean gestures but cannot reconcile the loss with the affirmative pathos that his or her faith requires. The dominant pattern of Seghers' writing set in earlier periods of resistance and struggle is the dangerous lying latent just beneath the mundane. Under those circumstances the risk of exposing one's life was offset by the opportunity for its authentic humanity to disclose its orientation toward hope. In the era of real socialism, Seghers retains the pattern of juxtaposed routine and extreme but inverts their polarity. The exceptional situation of the long-awaited event of socialism's arrival has become the order of the day. It admits of no ordinary private satisfaction. Its positive protagonists, like the leading functionary, Martin, whom we first meet as a young man in *The Dead Stay Young*, have relinquished the mundane life of personal interiority for the pure externality of the cause. Distinguished only by a trifecta of righteous attributes—Civil War veteran, concentration camp survivor, and party sage—Martin bears no personal attributes: "Since he didn't have any family of his own anymore […] he apparently possessed no ordinary life of his own, with numerous trivial details, with tiny secrets, tender, sad, frustrating, meaningful only for him, but without trace and consequence for others" (167).

If the order of the day is extraordinary, then it will be illuminated only by the mundane harbored within it. The task of socialism, the plot of Katharina and Riedl implies, is to find in the midst of the extraordinary the courage to bear its dreary routines. As the catalyst for such revelation, Riedl draws Katharina into the space of disclosure by inviting her to submit to socialism's routinized authority, while denying that it is anything but extraordinary. This is to submit to the judgment of the party without admitting that the party is submitting the human creature to demands it would be impossible fully to meet in good faith. Katharina is not called upon to resist unjust power in public, but to submit to presumably just but creaturely indifferent power in private. Riedl needs her to confirm his faith in the socialist cause in the light of her faith in God. He needs the illumination of her light since his own hesitating light does not participate in the irreproachable luster that shines forth from Celia, neither metonymically by virtue of having been with the other heroes in the medic tent in Spain, nor metaphorically by virtue of the narrator condensing the meaning of his light with theirs. Called by Riedl's flight from her ordinary care to finally cross over to his side, Katharina is too much a creature of her time, place, and body to become the mobile metaphor Riedl needs her to be. While she is Riedl's light, embodying his intuition of a repaired world, her light proves to be of an entirely different part of the spectrum than Celia's. Called to the other side, the spectrums do not combine into the pure white light of an untroubled socialist vision but rather into the rainy industrial grays of East German socialism, a palette of a historically specific, fluctuating, and ultimately tragic faith.

The peasant midwife who reluctantly delivered Katharina's baby asks Riedl's driver if he will pay for replacing the blood-soaked mattress. The banal persistence of practical needs recalls Breughel's ploughman indifferently watching Icarus fall to the sea in W. H. Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts":

> *About suffering they were never wrong,*
> *The old Masters: how well they understood*
> *Its human position: how it takes place*
> *While someone else is eating or opening a window or*
> *just walking dully along;*
> *How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting*
> *For the miraculous birth, there always must be*
> *Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating*
> *On a pond at the edge of the wood*

The hard-working people here in the GDR do not care especially about the pure light of Katharina's astonishment, "I? Here?" The brusque pragmatism of replacing a soiled mattress disrupts any ideological composure the novel might have conveyed and that we might have taken as a *decision*. This zero point is one last trauma: Katherina dies a stranger. The mess left behind by her blood indexes a moment altogether foreign to the ideological and erotic longings on which the narrative attention has been focalized. Instead of reconciling the competing desires it has brought into play, the novel, in an unguarded instant, pulls the floor out from under its generic expectations. We cannot save the *creatus sum* we witness here at the intersection of the transcendental and the secular-momentary, wherever else the story might take us. We have encountered something upon whose misrecognition any eventual decision will have to rest.

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Endnotes

1 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

2 I follow Seghers' convention in the novel and refer to Ernst Riedl by his surname and Katharina Riedl by her given name.

3 I refer to socialist realism as a "genre" in the following rather than the alternatives of "style" or "tradition." Usage is not consistent in the secondary literature, but the advantage of using "genre" for my purposes is that it better captures the element of a worldview expressed by socialist realism that is broader than any specific stylistic markers.

4 In *Legal Tender: Love and Legitimacy in the East German Cultural Imagination*, John Urang—though he only briefly deals with the early period of GDR culture, primarily in reference to DEFA films—is mordant about their failure to recognize the "self-determination" of love stories in the socialist realism. He characterizes the general problem of the love story in East Germany "as that of an imposition of the socialist symbolic economy—that is, of socialist ideology's self-understanding and ordering of the world—onto the love story's erotic economy" (31). However, in Seghers' work the problem is different, not so much the imposition of an alien economy as an investigation of the problem of choosing (desiring) socialism through the means of romantic allegory.

5 As Devin Fore argues in *Realism after Modernism: The Rehumanization of Art and Literature*, the human figure returns emphatically after the WWI despite modernism's bold efforts to dehumanize art. Yet the return to the human figure, as Fore demonstrates, "was a deeply conflicted proposal" due to the very lability of the definition of the human (3), especially in connection with the Promethean project of modernist social constructivism.

6 See Hannah Arendt's description in *The Human Condition* of physical pain as an experience that impoverishes a person's condition of being in the world, reducing him or her to nature (50-51).

7 In an undated and unaddressed 1947 letter Seghers comments on the ambiguity of the German labour morale she witnesses when she first returns to destroyed Germany. She encounters a Berlin worker: "he made a virtue of necessity and took up the career of 'commercializing rubble.' That could well show something of 'German labor morale,' this virtue in service of angels and demons" (43).

8 One is reminded here again of John Urang's inquiry into audience pressures on "hyperpoliticized socialist-realist love plots" (19) in the GDR. While Seghers, as an artistically and ideologically ambitious author, hews on the story-level to what Urang calls "the rigorously ideological couplings of 1950s socialist realism," on the discourse-level her text struggles with love motifs as an allegorical double for socialist passion. In the 1968 sequel, *Das Vertrauen*, however, Riedl's memories are narrated without this tension and the prose assumes an almost bizarre (were it not so generic) hierarchization of socialism and eros. Riedl recalls the moment he decides to stay in the Soviet Zone: "Something seized him then as nothing has ever seized him again, not even love to an individual person, not even if that beloved person was Katharina […] The most important thing in his life. But the second most important thing won't on that account become any less" (24-25). The character Ella Busch, singled out in *Die Entscheidung* for both her loyalty to socialism and her beauty and desire for erotic joy (she is repeatedly tagged with the epithet of being proud of her bust) is accordingly sacrificed in *Das Vertrauen*. Trampled by striking works trying to invade the Kossin plant during the June 17, 1953 uprising against the SED, Ella embodies the incompatibility of a certain kind of joy with socialism. On the story-level, we can read that as an orthodox ideological prioritization, but when we consider the pathos of the discourse, we are compelled to read it the other way, as melancholic recognition that the wished-for society indeed has failed to unite ideological demands with authentic erotic motives.

9 Sebald discusses a short story by Alexander Kluge about the WWII air bombing of Kluge's native town, Halberstadt. In a caption underneath a picture of the ruined Halberstadt, Kluge quotes Marx from the *1844 Manuscripts*, "We see how the history of *industry* and the now *objective* existence of industry have become the *open* book of the *human consciousness,* human *psychology* perceived in sensory terms" (qtd. in Sebald 66). Sebald concludes we can no longer believe industry is the open book of human thought and feeling; its ruins instead take their place in nature, whether or not we want to read nature as the open book of God's creation.

10 In *On Creaturely Life*, Santner emphasizes a definition of "creaturely" distinct from the simple common ground shared by humans and animals. It is, rather, the traumatic moment where the ego's sense of autonomous agency is deranged by its relationship to the other, whether that other is animal life, nature, or the neighbor, whose conscious life is never directly accessible to us. The trauma comes not just from loss of conscious control by the ego, but from the positive recognition that the distinction between the self and the creaturely other is insupportable (xvii). Thus, the creaturely points to a distinction between living and dying based on the politicization of the material substrate of life itself: "The essential disruption that renders man 'creaturely' […] names the threshold where life becomes a matter of politics and politics comes to inform the very matter and materiality of life" (13). The politics Santner has in mind in his readings of Rilke, Benjamin, and Sebald is precisely not the politics of sovereign or Promethean self-determination but rather the biopolitics of the other, the outcast, the "undead," "between real and symbolic death" (xx).

11 Of the many discussions of this episode, two have been especially suggestive. Loreto Vilar has argued that Katharina signifies a natural spirit that cannot survive in the technical-industrial context of the GDR (84-86). Simone Bischoff interprets her as both a romantic and Christian symbol (174-75). In both cases, she is seen as an allegorical figure of utopia that goes beyond her relationship to Riedl to express Seghers's own utopian commitments.

12 Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, somewhat overstating the observation, remarks on the hierarchy of moral struggles in partisan leftist narratives of the postwar years, in which interpersonal and especially erotic-romantic ethics plays a markedly subordinate role: "Parties who embraced the ideologies of the Left were freed of all self-reflexive struggle by the moral certainty of a clean conscience" (97-98).

13 Ella Busch from *Die Entscheidung* (Ella Schanz after marrying in *Das Vertrauen*) fits a similar model of the mother who dies. Although Ella is a loyal socialist who dies defending her factory from rampaging strikers on June 17, 1953, she is also a character distinguished by her desire for joy—a desire portrayed as distinct from though not in opposition to her desire for socialism. Her abrupt trampling with her unborn child on June 17 is not narrated with the same focalization as Katharina and Elizabeth's death—in part because she, like the partisan Herbert Melzer who is clubbed by police at a strike in the west, meets her death in a moment when her actions are harmonized with her socialist convictions not with her need for basic sensual joy.

14 In her brief discussion of Elisabeth Lieven in *Post-Fascist Fantasies*, Julia Hell notes the uniqueness of this Holocaust narration in Seghers' oeuvre and how the description of Elisabeth's wandering through the snow "resembles Seghers's own experience in 1941 […] it establishes a parallel between character and author, allowing us to read this variation on Seghers's dominant literary figure as the fantasy of identifying with the bystander" (86-87). Not only does Elisabeth's status as bystander matter, but also the proximity of her death and her son's to those she witnesses—the communion of death setting a final seal of authenticity on a narrative sequence. Understanding the gravity of death as an organizing principle of life is a critical feature of Seghers's strongest characters. The privileged focalization on such characters is as much a cause as it is the narrative effect of identification. In order to convey the mythic insight into the *creatus sum*, Seghers's needs techniques that highlight discourse over plot action, bringing the narrative into close alignment with a consciousness at its most contemplative and, in many ways, most impotent.

15 See the always perceptive commentary of Loreto Vilar on the role Celia (191-92). Friedrich Albrecht argues that the exceptional situations ("Ausnahmezustände") in which Celia is exclusively portrayed lend her the aura of a saint. He contrasts her with the Celia of Seghers's 1977 story "Begegnungen" ("Encounters"), who is portrayed in the routine of everyday life—there she appears more as a nun than a saint (463-64).

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JAKE SMITH

Jake Smith completed his PhD at the University of Chicago in 2017 with a dissertation on urban countercultural movements in Northern and Central Europe entitled "Strangers in a Dead Land: Redemption and Regeneration in the European Counterculture." The doctoral work traces the transformation of countercultural thought and practice in the period following the "German Autumn" of 1977 and argues that urban countercultures in cities such as Berlin, Freiburg, and Zurich played a critical role in the development and propagation of a post-industrial, postmodern aesthetic that has since become ubiquitous in cities throughout Europe.

Jake Smith a reçu son doctorat de l'Université de Chicago an 2017; sa dissertation, intitulée « Strangers in a Dead Land: Redemption and Regeneration in the European Counterculture » porte sur les mouvements contre-culturels urbains en Europe du nord et en Europe centrale. Son projet retrace la transformation de la pensée et de la pratique contre-culturelles qui a suivi « l'Automne allemand » de 1977 et propose que les contre-cultures urbaines dans les villes comme Berlin, Freiburg et Zurich ont joué un rôle critique dans le développement et la diffusion d'une esthétique post-industrielle, « post-moderne » qui s'est par la suite répandue dans les villes d'Europe.

ALICE WEINREB

Alice Weinreb is Assistant Professor of History at Loyola University Chicago. She has published articles on food and hunger in Nazi and postwar Germany in the *Zeitschrift für Körpergeschichte, Central European History,* and *German Studies Review*. Her first book is *Modern Hungers: Food and Power in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Oxford University Press, 2017). She is currently working on a new project on the emergence of a specifically German conception of a clean and healthy environment.

Alice Weinreb est professeure (*Assistant Professor*) d'histoire à Loyola University à Chicago. Elle a publiée des articles sur l'alimentation et la faim en Allemagne pendant le Troisième Reich et l'après-guerre dans *Zeitschrift für Körpergeschichte, Central European History,* et *German Studies Review*. Son premier livre s'intitule *Modern Hungers: Food and Power in Twentieth-Century Germany* Oxford University Press (2017). Elle travaille actuellement sur un nouveau projet consacré à l'émergence d'une conception spécifiquement allemande d'un environnement propre et sain.