

German Monitor 74

Art Outside the Lines

New Perspectives
on GDR Art Culture



Edited by Elaine Kelly and Amy Włodarski

ART OUTSIDE THE LINES

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Illustrations

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Elaine Kelly and Amy Wlodarski

Introduction

In the twenty years since the fall of the Berlin Wall the German Democratic Republic has been cast invariably in the role of other. Rendered a historical entity by its sudden demise and rapid absorption into West Germany in 1990, it was denied the opportunity accorded to states such as Poland and Hungary to forge a post-communist identity on its own terms. Instead it remained frozen in the political landscape of the Cold War. Over the last two decades, perceptions of the GDR have evolved in response to this post-*Wende* positioning; most notably, very negative portrayals of the state as Germany's second dictatorship have been superseded in certain arenas by a wave of so-called *Ostalgie*, which has resulted in warmer depictions, a nostalgic alternative to modern German society. Yet despite such shifts in perception, there has been little change in the underlying principles governing the discourse surrounding the state. Whether positioned as an oppressive regime as in Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's Oscar-winning film *Das Leben der Anderen* (2006) or as a nation of quaint consumer goods, rituals, and old-fashioned community spirit in Wolfgang Becker's more upbeat *Good Bye Lenin!* (2003), the GDR is imagined habitually in terms of otherness, construed as the historical antithesis to the contemporary German, and indeed western self.

This phenomenon possesses particular implications for the GDR's artistic legacy in that art produced in the state has been accepted into mainstream culture reluctantly if at all. This unwillingness to incorporate GDR art works into longer-term narratives of German cultural history forms the focus of this collection. The essays explore the enduring impact of Cold War paradigms on current modes of reception, and problematise accepted accounts of an East-West opposition where art is concerned. In particular, the collection questions the validity of current aesthetic frameworks that preference western aesthetics as a universal norm against which the GDR automatically appears as a deviation. What emerges is a variety of essays – both theoretical and applicative – which offer new directions for the study of GDR artistic culture. The volume examines the

potential of alternative modes of expression and newer, postmodern methodologies to provide substitute models beyond those of dogmatic totalitarianism or *Ostalgie*.

The GDR as Other

German unification has been likened in certain quarters to a process of colonisation.¹ It involved not a merger of two equal states but an accession of East Germany into the larger Federal Republic. As the latter's interior minister, Wolfgang Schäuble, explained:

My dear citizens, what is taking place here is the accession of the GDR to the Federal Republic, and not the other way around. We have a good *Grundgesetz* (basic law), which has proved its worth. We will do everything for you. You are very welcome to join us. We do not wish callously to ignore your wishes and interests. However, we are not seeing here the unification of two equal states. We are not starting again from the beginning, from positions that have equal rights. The *Grundgesetz* exists, and the Federal Republic exists.²

From the perspective of the Federal Republic the collapse of the GDR represented a triumph for the ideals of democracy and capitalism. As a consequence, the welcome extended to GDR citizens was not granted to the state's intellectual culture, which was deemed at best opportunistic and at worst morally bankrupt. In the years immediately following unification, the intelligentsia came under widespread attack: writers were criticised for their compliance with an oppressive regime; professors were removed en masse from university posts, and East German art was removed from galleries.³

Central to this purge was the revival of the black-and-white paradigms of dictatorship that had dominated western perceptions of the GDR at the height of the Cold War. Analyses of the GDR in the 1990s consistently focused on its totalitarian status. The Enquete commission, which was established by the Bundestag as a form of truth and reconciliation commission in 1992, notably concluded that the GDR was a totalitarian dictatorship in which SED power penetrated 'all areas of state and society [...] effecting the complete submission of freedom of opinion and the free exchange of political views.'⁴ The demise of the GDR was presented in this context as a catharsis from not one but two dictatorships; unification symbolised a second German zero hour, the final step in the arduous German process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* or coming to terms with the past.⁵

The totalitarian model mapped directly on to discussions of the GDR's cultural history. The years following unification saw a spate of studies portraying an artistic culture that existed solely within the confines of the state's political structures, a culture which in the absence of these structures was now rendered defunct. Symptomatic is *Politisch fest in unseren Händen*, Lars Klingberg's 1997 account of music societies in the GDR.⁶ Klingberg describes a culture firmly in the grip of the SED in which musicologists and musicians served as an extension of the party and exploited the Germanic cultural heritage for purely political purposes. This reading of the GDR's artistic culture as a microcosm of its monolithic political society underlined the reception in the 1990s of art works created in the GDR, and played a crucial role in their sidelining from contemporary discourse. The assumption that they were intrinsically linked to a corrupt political system precluded them from aesthetic appraisal, and resulted in the dubious tendency to view art created over a forty-year period as a single undifferentiated body. Evaluation was limited to blunt paradigms of dissidence and conformism, political and moral judgments that translated tenuously at best into artistic polarities of modernism and socialist realism.

This mindset was epitomised in the highly controversial 'Aufstieg und Fall der Moderne' exhibition, which took place in Weimar in 1999 and is discussed in Jonathan Osmond's essay in this collection. The exhibition, curated by the West German Achim Preiss, contained three sections. The first, which was housed in the Weimar Schloss, centred on international modernism of the early twentieth century. The second and third sections presented art of the Nazi period and the GDR respectively. Notably these sections were housed together in the decidedly less elegant environs of the post-war Mehrzweckhalle. The juxtaposition of the two periods combined with the apparently indiscriminate approach to the hanging of the East German art works conveyed an explicit message: GDR art, if it was to be remembered at all, should be retained in the collective cultural memory only within narratives of dictatorship.⁷

The acrimony that accompanied the portrayal of GDR art in the Weimar exhibition indicated a shift in attitude toward the state.⁸ In the late 1990s, debates about the limitations of the totalitarian model, most notably its failure to allow for the diverse fabric of GDR society, played out at length among historians. Attempts to define a model of

totalitarianism that accounted for the relative flexibility of the GDR dictatorship resulted in moves to approach the state from a socio-cultural rather than political angle, thus giving agency to ordinary citizens.⁹ This changing orientation was reflected in the growing fascination in mainstream culture with life in the GDR. As unemployment rose and Germans became increasingly disillusioned with the policies of the Federal Republic, East Germany emerged as an icon of a lost past, a focus for a nostalgia shared not just by citizens of the former state but also by their western counterparts.¹⁰ This *Ostalgie* has resulted in a barrage of films and television programmes devoted to life in the GDR, shops selling GDR paraphernalia, and themed museums, bars, and hotels.¹¹

The phenomenon has been criticised in certain quarters as a form of historical revisionism, an attempt to glorify what was for many GDR citizens a repressive regime.¹² Certainly, it involves a more positive portrayal of the GDR than was common in the years immediately following unification. Yet, the focus of *Ostalgie* is extremely narrow; the emphasis is placed squarely on consumer rather than artistic or intellectual culture. As Paul Cooke crucially observes, this results in an attempt to normalize the GDR on what are effectively western terms. Discussing the rise of *Ostalgie* television programs he remarks: 'While these programs ostensibly try to include in the mainstream and thus normalize the experience of living in GDR, it soon becomes apparent that their real focus is to normalize the experience of GDR citizens as *consumers*, and by extension to embed their position within the consumer culture of present-day German society.'¹³ Given the focus on kitsch and difference in such programmes, the GDR emerges once again as other; it is effectively portrayed as a novelty state. In terms of the reception of art, *Ostalgie* is in its own way as limiting as the rhetoric of dictatorship. The emphasis on 'things' and consumable items leads to artworks produced in the GDR being interpreted as commodities rather than aesthetic entities, a circumstance which cements their exclusion from western artistic discourse.

And yet perhaps the greatest obstacle that has faced East German artists in the years since the *Wende* is the fact that cultural life in the GDR *was* inextricably linked with the state. That is not to say that artists served as mere mouthpieces for a tyrannical regime, but to acknowledge the crucial role that the state's infrastructure – its

institutions, economy, and media – played in promoting the arts. The systematic dismantling of this infrastructure in the 1990s had lethal implications for the state's intellectual culture. Deprived of forums in which they could debate, exhibit paintings, and have compositions performed, GDR artists were effectively left without a voice, and their cultural heritage, in the absence of public advocates, was seized by western critics as a canvas onto which the wider tensions of the Cold War and unification could be projected.

Clearly the so-called 'wall in the head' has had a far longer legacy than its concrete counterpart. Twenty years after the collapse of the GDR, however, there are signs that the constructs of self and other that have been so central to German identity are abating. Significant here is a growing awareness that the allegations of western continuity associated with unification were as self-constructed as the nationalist myths created by the GDR in the 1950s. Unification inevitably impacted on the financial and cultural structures of the Federal Republic, and while on paper the FRG remains very much alive, its pre-unification intellectual culture is as much a thing of the past as the GDR's.¹⁴

This realisation is important in that it allows the GDR to emerge from the shadow of otherness in which it has been languishing. Crucially, it also diminishes the benchmark status accorded to western culture in the years following unification, and demands that art from the two Germanys be evaluated on more equal terms, preferably those that transcend the dated frameworks of the Cold War. There have been significant moves in this direction in recent years. The hugely ambitious *Musik in Deutschland 1950-1990* series, for example, offers a history of contemporary German music in 122 compact discs organised, significantly, not according to East-West polarities but by genre.¹⁵ The results are illuminating and do much to undermine the paradigms of dictatorship and conservatism traditionally used in conjunction with GDR art. A similar approach underpinned the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's (LACMA) recent 'Art of Two Germanys/Cold War Cultures' exhibition, which is discussed in Justinian Jampol's essay. As its title suggests, the exhibition, which opened in January 2009, also placed art of the FRG and GDR side by side, attracting considerable attention in the process. Despite the mixed responses by German galleries, it was hailed portentously by

Hanno Rauterberg in a review in *Die Zeit* tellingly titled ‘Nun kann die Mauer fallen.’¹⁶

Such exhibitions are often perceived as threatening, in part because they challenge the definitive status of the western artistic canon, which has excluded and marginalised the East German fine arts. Such prejudicial practices are not unique; indeed, many of the ideas within this volume build upon earlier advances in GDR popular culture and literary studies that were promoted to challenge similar canonical limitations in these fields. Particularly germane for the current volume are contributions to the re-definition and contextualisation of the GDR literary canon, a project that has taken multiple forms since the 1980s.

Repositioning GDR Art

Scepticism about the dominant role of the political in GDR literature preoccupied literary scholars in the waning years of the Cold War. Troubled by the narrow one-dimensional boundaries of the accepted GDR canon, Anneli Hartmann pertinently asked ‘Was heißt heute überhaupt noch “DDR-Literatur”?’¹⁷ After the fall of the Wall, new studies of GDR literature began to construe the canon as a site of history and memory that needed to be re-thought and re-historicised. The volume *Contentious Memories: Looking Back at the GDR* (2000) represents a defining moment within this movement. Therein, Marc Silberman criticised studies that promoted the tired binaries of ‘politics/aesthetics or content/form’ and instead called for greater attention to generational shifts within GDR culture and the situation of the GDR within longer pan-German or even international traditions of literature.¹⁸ Later in the volume, Frank Hörnigk notably remarked: ‘There is no one definitive GDR canon of the 1960 and 1970s!’ – the exclamation point articulating both his excitement and conviction.¹⁹

This collection of essays builds on these literary currents, challenging accepted narratives of GDR culture and exploring alternative methods for interpreting and evaluating fine art produced in the state. Crucially, the essays put art itself to the fore; it is not, as is so often the case, considered simply as a political by-product but as an entity of value in its own right. A particular theme that emerges strongly from the collection is the rarely-acknowledged diversity of artistic life in the state. Moving away from the preconception that artistic directives were delivered from on high, the essays expose the significant level of dialogue that actually occurred between artists and the party.

Contrary to long-held perceptions, artists themselves were actively engaged in determining the direction and definition of socialist realism, and debates surrounding what was deemed acceptable as art in the GDR frequently took place within the public sphere.

A reconsideration of the simplistic opposition between western modernism and socialist realism, with the former representing canonical innovation and the latter out-moded propaganda, is long overdue. Central to a new approach is the realisation that socialist realism and artistic innovation were not mutually exclusive. While the GDR undoubtedly had more than its share of pedantic party hardliners and uninspired artists who were keen to prescribe conservative figurative painting and tonal music in the name of socialist realism, the state also boasted strong pockets of innovation. These pacesetters worked not just in the peripheries of society that form the focus of Sigrid Hofer's account of experimentalist art in Dresden, but also within the mainstream political culture.²⁰ Within musical and literary circles, committed Marxist intellectuals such as Bertolt Brecht, Hanns Eisler, Paul Dessau, and Christa Wolf were all strong advocates of a socialist realist art that challenged rather than anaesthetised its audience.

Also misleading is the assumed connection between avant-garde creations and political dissidence, an argument that equates artistic style with political orientation. As several high-profile scandals in the 1990s demonstrate, such simplistic associations were ineffective tools for determining the political loyalties and persuasions of East German artists. Most notably, the outing of Sascha Anderson, the apparently dissident leader of the Prenzlauer Berg literary community, as a Stasi informer effectively undermined the conclusion that a direct correlation existed between radical art and non-conformist political views. Yet critics in the West have been slow to move beyond the post-war alignment of democracy and the avant-garde.²¹

Without diminishing the significant and serious constraints that totalitarianism placed on artistic expression, intellectual ideation, and personal lives, this volume reassesses the basic assumption of the GDR's uncritical isolationism and reconsiders the state and its legacy in a broader political, sociological, and international context. Our intent is to offer alternative narratives that challenge the narrow characterisation of GDR art as prescribed or repressed and in doing so, to advance a more nuanced and diversified picture of East German creation, criticism, and post-*Wende* legacy. The explorations of cul-

tural life in the GDR offered here reveal a more complex relationship between aesthetics and politics, one in which negotiations between state and artist reveal successful challenges to political dictation through direct engagement, grassroots organisation, and the sheer act of artistic creation.

In an attempt to provide a broader picture of artistic life in the GDR, the essays collectively discuss how aesthetic discourse was influenced by artistic dialogue in myriad contexts, including private, public, and international spheres. The long-held precept that West Germany represented a hot-bed of internationalism while the GDR remained a realm of conservative provincialism does not stand up to scrutiny. New archival evidence suggests instead a creative interchange between artists on either side of the border, a phenomenon that repositis GDR artists in both international and German dialogues about the nature of twentieth-century art. East German composers, for instance, regularly travelled to the Darmstadt summer courses prior to 1961 and even after the erection of the Wall were in regular contact with left-leaning and unashamedly avant-garde composers such as Luigi Nono and Mauricio Kagel.²² As Joy Haslam Calico has noted, collaborative projects between East and West Germany also established the possibility for a ‘third space of artistic collaboration’, in which ideas about the aesthetics of modern art were debated and advanced through the exchanges between composers on both sides of the Wall.²³ Indeed, the archives of the Akademie der Künste, which held branches in both East and West Berlin, hold multiple documents that speak to cross-cultural consciousness of the trends and performances occurring throughout the GDR and the FRG, an awareness confirmed in the diaries of composers such as Paul Dessau and official publications of the Verband Deutscher Komponisten und Musikwissenschaftler (VDK).²⁴

Such realisations have been slow to impact on the wider reception of the GDR’s artistic culture; recent attempts to expose the diversity of the state have fostered intense debates about colonisation and historical revisionism. Notable in this regard was the exhibition ‘Parteidiktatur und Alltag in der DDR’ organised by the Deutsches Historisches Museum in 2007, in which personal objects were displayed alongside items associated with political propaganda in the public spaces of the Zeughaus. *Alltagsgeschichte* has long been a site for academic innovation within the realm of GDR cultural studies, in

part because common cultural materials have traditionally been situated on the margins of academic scholarship. As a result, analyses appear not only liberated from more hegemonic models but also aware of the multiplicity of GDR culture and consumption. While early studies in the 1980s did maintain the rhetoric of ‘othering’, their language was often more sympathetic and accepting than critical, as seen in the introduction to *Alltag im anderen Deutschland* (1985): ‘Wie ist der Alltag im anderen Deutschland? Durchaus nicht phantasielos, durchaus nicht unzufrieden, nicht leidenschaftslos, nicht lieblos.’²⁵ Post-*Wende* studies quickly raised the important question of social pluralism; Stefan Sommer notes that the question of ‘What was every-day life in the GDR?’ needs to be followed by another: ‘Wessen Alltag? [...] Da stehen viele Alltagserfahrungen nebeneinander, die DDR wurde von den verschiedenen Generationen verschieden erlebt.’²⁶ And yet, the exhibition at the Zeughaus elicited ire from both defenders and critics of East German art; the former declared the exhibition to be an attempt of the West to colonise the history of the East, while the latter dismissed the exhibition as too uncritical and generic.²⁷

LACMA’s ‘Art of Two Germanys’ exhibition drew a similarly mixed response. The diversity of East Germany’s fine arts – a more contentious topic than everyday life – struck critics in both the American and German press. Writing for *The New York Times*, Michael Kimmelman observed that far from confirming traditional preconceptions that artists in the GDR adhered to rigid criteria of socialist realism, ‘the show makes clear that the truth was more complicated, as it usually is, East German art having been more varied, not always politically compliant, and closer at times to what was happening in West Germany than the West German art establishment either acknowledged or bothered to notice.’²⁸ And yet, negative reactions in certain corners of the German press prompted art critic Hanno Rauterberg to caution readers that ‘selbst 20 Jahre nach dem Mauerfall ist der Kalte Krieg nicht zu Ende, nicht in den Köpfen vieler Museumsdirektoren.’²⁹

The emphasis on individual experience inherent in these two exhibitions highlights the importance of locating those voices that have been sidelined from historiographies of the arts in Germany. Adding to the challenge is the preferential status accorded to official archives and documents in recent scholarship. The sudden accessibil-

ity of vast realms of government documents in the 1990s provided scholars with an invaluable window on to the political machinations of the state. Yet, this resource has also had its pitfalls; the tendency to assume that SED documents constituted the authentic narrative of life in the GDR resulted in a spate of histories that bore little resemblance to the lived experiences of GDR citizens. Corey Ross, in this context, describes the phenomenon of writing GDR history from the ‘inside outwards’, a process that results in histories that overlook ‘the experiences of contemporaries, and in the process [paint] a picture of the past that the East Germans themselves do not recognise.’³⁰ Crucially, the privileging of government documents denies legitimacy to currents and events that were *not* recorded by the SED.³¹ Absent from these archives are the alternative voices that existed within the GDR, in particular those of women artists, artists working within private spheres, and artists working in alternative mediums and genres.

Consequently, the authors of this volume have expanded the scope of their inquiry beyond that of the traditional archives, utilising both private and state-sponsored art collections, discarded objects, and the resources of oral history. A recurring theme is that of art’s critical role within the GDR dictatorship and its connection to pan-Germanic ideas and legacies. Many of the essays are concerned with new theoretical frameworks that better account for the range of artistic expression that occurred within the borders of the former East German state. Methodologies that encourage consideration of multiple histories and alternative modernities are drawn from current cultural historiography as well as postcolonial studies.³² In short, the volume aims to give a voice to those who have been all too frequently excluded from contemporary consideration. In all cases, the authors’ research has benefited from the post-*Wende* position from which they are writing; by moving away from the binary position of West-other, these studies attempt to debunk the notion that there was a normal path of modernity that was inherently western in composition and nature. As Stuart Taberner and Paul Cooke argue in *German Culture, Politics, and Literature into the Twenty-First Century*, post-GDR criticism has reached a point where its materials defy simple classification into categories of normal and abnormal, a dichotomy too easily grafted onto the cultural geography of the divided German state.³³ It is a tendency that has plagued not only academic studies but also the painful cultural negotiations of unification, including debates over the

preservation and dismantling of East German icons and artistic legacies.

Art outside the Lines: Organisation

This volume aims to interject the fine arts into the broader context of GDR culture and is generally concerned with repositioning art produced in the former East Germany in terms of current trends in GDR studies. Our approach has required a metaphorical ‘knocking down of the wall’ that has separated the various artistic disciplines from one another. We advance an inclusive perspective that situates fine art mediums in dialogue with genres such as film and literature that have benefited from decades of study and reconsideration. The essays build on recent advances in social and cultural history, but they also offer new perspectives that have cross-disciplinary relevance. This cross-disciplinary aspect is significant. The juxtaposition of the various arts provides a broader overview of aesthetical discourse in the GDR, demonstrating the shared concerns and interchange between the various artistic spheres.

The volume follows a trajectory that moves from more thematic considerations of GDR art to subject-specific studies of music and the visual arts. The first group of essays explores the multiple discourses that shaped the production and reception of art in the public sphere of the GDR. Working with the audience-oriented mediums of murals, film, and public monuments, the authors pose challenges to the prevailing political-historical constructs of the time, and reveal the extent to which art facilitated open exchanges about aesthetic policy and preferences, the staging of socialist history, and political power. They examine debates, propaganda, and most importantly the space that existed for counter-narratives and alternative interpretations. Moreover, all three essays address the various and conflicting interpretations of socialist realism that determined artistic production in the state, arguing that the definition was more flexible and inclusive than previously admitted.

April Eisman’s essay focuses on a series of murals created by the artist Bernhard Heisig that sparked controversy in the mid-1960s over what constituted socialist realism. The debate that ensued demonstrates the power of East German artists to contribute openly to aesthetic debates and complicates a simplistic understanding of socialist realism as politically conservative art. Skyler Arndt-Briggs explores

the public memory of 17 June 1953 as encapsulated in DEFA films, contextualising her discussion in terms of the political impact of the uprising on the DEFA studios. She contrasts Kurt Maetzig's officially sanctioned representation of 1953, *Schlösser und Katen* (1957) with other films from the era in which references to the uprising are conspicuously absent, positing the date as a shadow memory that pervaded public consciousness up to and beyond 1989. Finally, Kristine Nielsen turns her attention to public monuments and the means by which their social value was assessed and evaluated by the broader East German public. Her study, which focuses specifically on the Ernst Thälmann monument in Prenzlauer Berg, explores how artistic objects provoked public reactions that were often antithetical to the staged, theatrical dedication ceremonies that accompanied their unveiling, ultimately demonstrating the collective power of the public to reject 'gifts of the state' in the late 1980s.

The second section places East German art in dialogue with the West and explores the various channels of influence that transcended the geographical and ideological divisions of Cold War. Whereas most studies involving internationalisation and the GDR have tended to focus either on the state's relationship with its Warsaw Pact neighbours or on attempts to foster links with sympathetic Third World nations, the essays by Sigrid Hofer, Sara Lennox, and Joy Calico explore the GDR's international profile along the East-West divide. As they show, artists in the GDR developed means by which to encounter and reinterpret western artistic currents, including the founding of underground artists' collectives and academic analysis of western artwork. More importantly, their scholarship suggests that the transfer of ideas travelled in both directions, thus negating an impression of GDR culture as isolationist and irrelevant.

Sigrid Hofer depicts a subculture inspired by international cross currents in her essay on Art Informel. Examining underground artists' collectives in Dresden in the 1950s and 1960s, she documents a vibrant transfer of ideas between artists on both sides of the border. Hofer characterises the abstract and non-conformist art created in Dresden not as an openly hostile political attack on the state, but rather as a reflective, personal defence of artistic self-assertion. She suggests that the Dresden painters were less concerned with political rebuke and protest, as has been commonly argued, and more interested in nurturing aesthetic concerns and the international transfer of cul-

tural thought. Sara Lennox, in contrast, explores the official face of internationalism. Her essay examines the impact of American black authors in the GDR, merging the methods of Africana studies with those of German literary criticism. She asserts a theory of transnationalism, which probes beyond Cold War dichotomies to document East German interpretations of Black American literature, most notably the writings of Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Langston Hughes. Finally, Joy Calico's analysis of *Regieoper* exposes a more maverick brand of international exchange between East and West Germany, tracing the export of opera directors from West to East and, more importantly, vice versa. The daring stage productions of figures such as Ruth Berghaus, Götz Friedrich and Harry Kupfer in Frankfurt, Bayreuth, and further afield reveal East German culture not only to have been internationally relevant in its own time but also to have produced a lasting legacy of artistic interpretation that survives into the twenty-first century.

The essays in the final two sections of the volume focus on art music and the visual arts respectively, the fields that have been most resistant to revisionist accounts and alternative narratives. While figures such as Christa Wolf and Stefan Heym have gradually been accepted into the canon of German twentieth-century literature, their contemporaries in the visual arts and music have been very obviously sidelined, not least because the discourse surrounding both is heavily driven by advocates for traditional canonical repertory. Music, in particular, represents a microcosm of the problems surrounding the legacy of GDR art. It has been a victim not only of the moralistic paradigms that have been used to evaluate art produced in dictatorships, but also of the hegemony of western aesthetics in musicology. The romantic ideology of the work concept sits uncomfortably with conventional interpretations of art created according to socialist principles, and the reluctance to incorporate East German composers into the narrative of German music history can be ascribed, at least in part, to the tenacity of artistic autonomy to western thought processes.³⁴ The essays in this section of the volume exemplify a new wave of scholarship that seeks to evaluate GDR music on its own terms. The authors explore methodologies that not only expose the full spectrum of musical life in the GDR but also impact on established perceptions of musical creativity in the West.

These concerns are paramount in Matthias Tischer's essay, which appropriates Michel Foucault's discourse theory as a useful theoretical framework by which to locate and reconcile marginalised voices within musical historiography. Drawing on Foucault's concept of power as a productive rather than repressive force, he explores the ambiguities of composing simultaneously *for* and *against* the regime, reasserting the importance of the artwork as a site of memory and criticism. Building on Tischer's exposition of power and discourse, Nina Noeske discusses the implications of the inherently patriarchal structures of the GDR for performance, composition and aesthetics. She locates the marginalised voices of the female and the feminine in music, and explores their exclusion from a society that prided itself on gender equality but was itself firmly constructed in terms of masculine norms. In the final essay, Laura Silverberg posits the strength of alternative voices in the upper echelons of the state's musical elite, documenting the very public stand-off that took place between leading composers and the more conservative party members who dominated the VDK in 1956. Charting a series of articles in *Sonntag* and *Musik und Gesellschaft* surrounding the need to reform and revitalise East German composition and musical life, Silverberg debunks the perception that the aesthetics of socialist realism were dictated by a unified party voice.

The final section examines the practicalities of dealing with the legacy of the GDR's visual arts since the fall of the Wall, with three essays focusing on the difficulties of exhibiting GDR art in museums and art galleries in Germany and beyond. These exhibitions represent the public face of GDR reception and have served as a focal point for the anxieties and tensions surrounding unification. On the one hand, they function as a barometer of public opinion. Yet, such exhibitions can also play an instrumental role in changing perceptions, in prompting re-evaluations of the East German artistic heritage and its place in the twenty-first century.

Jonathan Osmond's essay provides a historical account of the major exhibitions of GDR art that have taken place since 1989, examining the role that these have played in mediating attitudes and valuation (or devaluation). He uncovers the various agendas and subtle suggestions of these showings, and raises questions about how curatorial decisions evaluate and impact the aesthetic worth of East German art. The final two essays of the volume provide a counterpart

to Osmond's essay by offering insights into the actual issues facing curators of GDR art in the here and now. Silke Wagler, director of the Kunstfonds in Dresden, speaks candidly about the political and institutional challenges associated with maintaining one of the largest repositories of GDR art in Germany. She describes the creative approaches necessary for dealing with limitations such as shortage of space, and the role of the Kunstfonds in encouraging active engagement between the public, contemporary artists, and GDR art. Finally, Justin Jampol, director of the Wende Museum in Los Angeles, explores the city's position as an alternative space for the re-evaluation of East German art. He traces Los Angeles's historical relationship with Germany, and examines the extent to which the city's own attempts to interpret the legacy of German Cold War history can challenge the deep-seated historical and cultural divide that remains nearly twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Notes

¹ This is a central argument of Paul Cooke's *Representing East Germany since Unification: From Colonization to Nostalgia*, Oxford: Berg, 2005. Also interesting in this regard are the comparisons Christa Wolf makes between the Spanish colonisation of Native Americans in California and the fate of the GDR in her short diary entry titled 'Santa Monica, Sonntag den 27. September 1992', published in *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou. Texte 1990-1994*, Cologne: Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1994, pp. 232-47.

² Quoted in Cooke, *Representing East Germany*, p. 4.

³ Historians suffered particularly in this process of *Abwicklung* or liquidation; the West German political scientist Hermann Weber, for instance, dismissed pre-1989 work by East German historians simply as 'rubbish'. See 'Zum Stand der Forschung über die DDR-Geschichte', *Deutschland Archiv*, 31:2 (1998), 249-57 (here: pp. 249-50). For a general discussion of this phenomenon see Catherine Epstein, 'East Germany and Its History since 1989', *The Journal of Modern History*, 75:3 (2003), 634-61, and Mitchell G. Ash, 'Becoming Normal, Modern, and German (Again?)', in: Michael Geyer, ed., *The Power of Intellectuals in Contemporary Germany*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001, pp. 295-313.

⁴ Cited in James McAdams, *Judging the Past in Unified Germany*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 113. In the years of *Ostpolitik* western commentators were reluctant to use the totalitarian model in discussions of the GDR. Such qualms disappeared once the state was consigned to history.

⁵ The term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* derives from Adorno's 1959 phrase, 'Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit', which originally referred to the dilemma of placing the Holocaust within German history and consciousness. See Theodor W. Adorno, 'What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?' in: Geoffrey H. Hartman, ed., *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986, pp. 115-29.

⁶ *Politisch fest in unseren Händen. Musikalische und musikwissenschaftliche Gesellschaften in der DDR: Dokumente und Analysen*, Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1997. The book and Klingberg's related publications caused serious consternation among musicologists who had been active during the GDR. See for example the correspondence between Klingberg and Georg Knepler, and Knepler and Gerd Rienäcker in the Stiftung Archiv Akademie der Künste (SA-AdK): Knepler 34 and Knepler 56.

⁷ The manner in which the GDR art was hung, often askew or without frames, drew comparisons between the display of East German art and the controversial exhibiting of modernist or Jewish art at the Degenerate Art exhibition, which the Nazis curated in 1937, suggesting that the East German art was degenerate and furthering its status as anti-aesthetic. A comparable mindset is explored in Daphne Berdahl's discussion of the portrayal of the GDR by the *Zeitgeschichtliches Forum Leipzig*, which is similarly orientated in terms of dictatorship. See Daphne Berdahl, 'Museums and Memory in the Former GDR', in: Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, eds, *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008, pp. 345-66.

⁸ *Kunstsammlungen zu Weimar*, ed., *Der Weimarer Bilderstreit: Szenen einer Ausstellung: Eine Dokumentation*, Weimar: VDG, 2000.

⁹ For alternative models of totalitarianism, see Jürgen Kocka's 'The GDR: A Special Kind of Modern Dictatorship', and Konrad H. Jarausch, 'Care and Coercion: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship', both in: Konrad H. Jarausch, ed., Eve Duffy, trans., *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, New York: Berghahn Books, 1999, pp. 17-26 and 47-72.

¹⁰ Wolfgang Engler, *Die Ostdeutschen. Kunde von einem verlorenen Land*, Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 1999. See also Daphne Berdahl, '(N)ostalgia for the Present: Memory, Longing, and East German Things', *Ethnos*, 64:2 (1999), 192-211.

¹¹ A notable recent example is the *Ostel* 'DDR-Design-Hostel' in Berlin.

¹² See for example the discussion in Claudia Sadowski-Smith, 'Ostalgia: Revaluing the Past, Regressing into the Future', *GDR Bulletin*, 25 (Spring 1998), 1-6.

¹³ Cooke, *Representing East Germany*, p. 159.

¹⁴ In this context Michael Geyer notes the prescience of the title of Otthein Ramstedt and Gert Schmidt's 1992 survey of the FRG: *BRD ade! Vierzig Jahre in Rück-Ansichten*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992. See Geyer, 'The Long Good-Bye', in: *The Power of Intellectuals in Contemporary Germany*, pp. 355-80 (here: p. 356).

¹⁵ Published by Deutsche Musikrat in conjunction with Red Seal SONY/BMG Music Entertainment. Financial support for the project was provided by the Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien.

¹⁶ Hanno Rauterberg, 'Kunst in BRD und DDR: Nun kann die Mauer fallen', *Die Zeit*, 29 January 2009.

¹⁷ Anneli Hartmann, 'Was heißt heute überhaupt noch "DDR-Literatur"?' in: Margy Gerber, ed., *Studies in GDR Culture and Society: Selected Papers from the Ninth New Hampshire Symposium on the German Democratic Republic* Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985, pp. 265-80.

¹⁸ Marc Silberman, 'Whose Story Is This?: Rewriting the Literary History of the GDR', in: Jost Hermand and Marc Silberman, eds, *Contentious Memories: Looking Back at the GDR*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2000, pp. 25-57 (here: pp. 47-9).

¹⁹ Frank Hörnigk, 'Reconstructing the GDR Canon of the 1960s and 1970s', in: *Contentious Memories: Looking Back at the GDR*, p. 195.

²⁰ Sigrid Hofer, ed., *Gegenwelten. Informelle Malerei in der DDR*, Frankfurt am Main and Basel: Stroemfeld, 2006.

²¹ An interesting parallel can be found in the contentious discussions that took place about post-war American modernism in the 1970s. See Francis Francina, ed., *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, London: Routledge, 2nd rev. edn, 2000.

²² A rich picture of the interchange between composers in post-war Germany emerges in Paul Dessau, ed. Daniela Reinhold, *'Let's Hope for the Best': Briefe und Notizbücher aus den Jahren 1948 bis 1978*, Hofheim: Wolke, 2000.

²³ Joy H. Calico, 'Jüdische Chronik: The Third Space of Commemoration between East and West Germany', *The Musical Quarterly*, 88:1 (2005), 95-122 (here: p. 96). Calico appropriates her theory from Homi Bhaba's post-colonial writings as well as Jeffrey Herf's binary model of Nazi reception. See Bhaba, *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1994, and Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.

²⁴ See Paul Dessau, *'Let's Hope for the Best'* and 'Informationsblatt', Verbandes Deutscher Komponisten und Musikwissenschaftler (VDK), SA-AdK.

²⁵ Werner Filmer and Heribert Schwan, eds, *Alltag im anderen Deutschland*, Düsseldorf: Econ-Verlag, 1985, p. 9.

²⁶ Stefan Sommer, *Das große Lexikon des DDR-Alltags der DDR*, Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2002, pp. 3-4. The lexicon contains entries ranging from A (*Aber Vati!*, a television sitcom from the 1970s) to Z (*Zum Wohle des Volkes*), one of the official phrases of the SED.

²⁷ See Gustav Seibt, 'Austellung im Deutschen Historischen Museum. Weichgespülte Ostalgie', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 3 April 2007.

²⁸ Michael Kimmelman, 'Abroad – Before the Wall Fell, Art in Two Germanys Often Spoke the Same Tongue', *The New York Times*, 12 February 2009. This is a theme that also emerges prominently in Hanno Rauterberg's previously-mentioned review in *Die Zeit*.

²⁹ Hanno Rauterberg, 'Kunst in BRD und DDR: Nun kann die Mauer fallen'.

³⁰ Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR*, London: Arnold, 2002, p. 201.

³¹ As Elizabeth A. Clark observes regarding the perils of archival work: 'documents do not record everything and as such are not necessarily representative. The historian has no control over the chance selection of documents that remain.' *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004, p. 94.

³² For further discussion on the importance of postcolonial studies to GDR studies, see Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, 'Introduction', in: *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, p. 12.

³³ Stuart Taberner and Paul Cooke, *German Culture, Politics, and Literature into the Twenty-First Century: Beyond Normalization*, Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006. See also Ash, 'Becoming Normal, Modern, and German (Again?)'.

³⁴ Anne Shreffler has alluded to this problem on more than one occasion. See her 'Berlin Walls: Dahlhaus, Knepler, and Ideologies of Music History', *Journal of Musicology*, 20:4 (2003), 498-525; and 'Review of *Socialist Realism and Music; Zwischen Macht und Freiheit; Musik zwischen Emigration und Stalinismus; Nationale Musik im 20. Jahrhundert*', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 60:2 (2007), 453-63.

Public Confrontations of GDR Art

April A. Eisman

**In the Crucible:
Bernhard Heisig and the Hotel Deutschland Murals**

This chapter focuses on the series of murals Heisig created for the Hotel Deutschland in Leipzig in 1965. The murals became the centre of an intense debate shortly after they were finished, one of several between artists and GDR cultural functionaries. The primary disagreement revolved around a proper definition of socialist realism, which was left purposefully vague by the party. An investigation of these murals and the controversy surrounding them demonstrates that East German cultural politics were more complex than is currently thought and provides a deeper understanding of how Cold War-era thinking impacts current scholarship about East German art.

Bernhard Heisig (b. 1925) is one of former East Germany's best-known and most successful artists. Indeed, many consider him to be one of the most important German painters of the post-war era.¹ Since unification, scholarship on Heisig has focused primarily on his painterly commitment to early modernist styles and his thematic focus on the traumas of war. Works like *Weihnachtstraum des unbelehrbaren Soldaten* (1977) are praised for their impressionist brushwork, complex compositions and seeming relationship to the artist's own experiences as a teenage soldier in the Second World War.² Heisig's struggles to create these paintings – he is famous for painting multiple canvases with the same subject matter and for repainting some to the point of destruction – are viewed most frequently today as a microcosm of Germany's attempts to come to terms with this traumatic past. This similarity has led some to praise Heisig as the quintessential post-war German artist. Connections between his art and the East German society in which he lived and worked for nearly forty years, however, have been largely ignored or dismissed from this paradigm of trauma. Stemming in part from unified Germany's discomfort with communism as well as the dominance of West German authors in post-*Wende* scholarship, this elision of the East German past from Heisig's art has led to an oversimplification of his life and work in recent years.³

This essay focuses on a series of murals Heisig created for the Hotel Deutschland in Leipzig in 1965. These murals, like Heisig's

architectural art in general, remain virtually unknown today, yet they comprise an important part of his oeuvre in the Ulbricht era (1949-71). In contrast to his paintings on canvas, his murals display an optimistic tone and an abstracted, lyrical style. Those he made for the Hotel Deutschland were also at the centre of an intense debate shortly after they were finished, one of several that took place between artists and cultural functionaries in the GDR in the mid 1960s.⁴ In essence, these debates were over the very definition of art in East Germany: did painting have to remain slavish to Soviet aesthetics, or could it incorporate modernist techniques? The polarisation of opinion around Heisig's murals, especially *Schwedt*, suggests that they embodied the very essence of the debates taking place at the time. An investigation of these murals and the controversy around them thus illustrates the complexity of East German cultural politics and provides a deeper understanding of Heisig's life and work. Such an investigation also reveals the continuing impact of Cold War-era thinking on current scholarship about East German art.

The Hotel Deutschland Murals

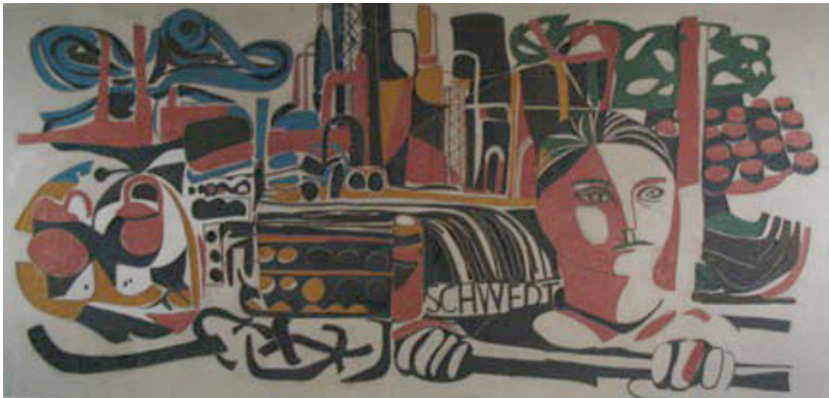
In the summer of 1964, Heisig received the prestigious commission to create three murals for the Hotel Deutschland, a new building then under construction in Karl-Marx-Platz, one of the most important city squares in Leipzig. Almost completely destroyed in World War II, this historic square, known today as Augustusplatz, was rebuilt gradually over the course of four decades beginning in the latter half of the 1950s. Located on the eastern edge near the recently completed Oper Leipzig and Hauptpost, the Hotel Deutschland was built in just seventeen months between 1963 and 1965 and constituted 'das größte Objekte des Hotelbauprogrammes in der 800jährigen Messemetropole Leipzig.'⁵ Like the Hauptpost next to it, Hotel Deutschland had seven floors and a modern construction, including a metal-and-glass facade.

A crucial element of the hotel, considered 'ein Reisehotel 1. Ordnung' and thus a showcase for East German design and thinking, was its artistic decoration.⁶ Among the many works of art commissioned were seven large murals for the *Bettenhaus*, or sleeping quarters. Located near the elevators on each floor, the murals represent the creative work of four artists from Leipzig: Wolfgang and Ursula Mattheuer, Hans Engels, and Bernhard Heisig. In accordance with the national theme of the hotel, each work depicted an important German

city: Weimar, Trier, Leipzig, Eisenach, Rostock, Halle, and Schwedt.⁷ The last three were by Heisig.

Heisig's murals, which can still be seen today in their original location, are colourful abstractions that emphasise the importance of each city to the GDR.⁸ *Rostock* depicts one of East Germany's primary ports and therefore contains numerous images of boats and fish. *Halle* includes an image of the Little Trumpeter, a reference to the Freie Deutsche Jugend, which was founded there. *Schwedt* includes numerous factory buildings and towers, reflecting the city's position as a centre of industry in East Germany. Of all the murals created for the hotel this last one most divided opinion, receiving both the highest praise and the sharpest criticism in the debates that followed.

Bernhard Heisig, *Schwedt* (1965)



In terms of subject matter, *Schwedt* appears as a 'Symbol für das Neue, das Vorwärtsdrängende unserer Republik' with its large chemical plants.⁹ Yet Heisig also emphasised the importance of the worker in the industrial landscape in that the face of a working woman dominates the right half of the picture and therefore the composition as a whole. In her fists, she holds the long handle of a tool, perhaps a sledgehammer, and looks out of the right-hand side of the image as if toward a goal. On a more literal level, she seems to look out a window of the hotel, a fact that subtly emphasises the relationship between art and architecture encouraged in East Germany at the time. The worker appears earnest, strong, and proud – a woman with an important

mission. The strong red, blue, yellow, and green tones as well as the artistic play of the abstracted forms convey an optimistic tone frequently commented upon by those who praised the work.

Heisig's colourful, organic abstractions were quite different from the more conventional and largely black-and-white murals created by his colleagues, although all followed the dictates of the commission itself, which stipulated that:

Entsprechend der Grundkonzeption soll in einfacher sinnbildhafter Ablesbarkeit das Thema der nationalen Landschaft in Verbindung mit progressiven Traditionen der nationalen Geschichte der Vergangenheit und Gegenwart künstlerisch gestaltet werden. [...] Um die einfache sinnbildhafte Ablesbarkeit zu erreichen, sollte dabei nach Möglichkeit linear-graphisch gearbeitet werden.¹⁰

Of all the murals, Engels' *Weimar* is the most linear with the majority of images made from a simple black line, similar to a drawing. As such, white dominates the composition, which includes references to Fritz Cremer's Buchenwald monument, the Deutsches Nationaltheater and a sculpture of Goethe and Schiller. The Mattheuers' murals are also largely black and white, but they find their inspiration in the woodcut medium rather than drawing. As such, these murals appear more complex than those by Engels and are also darker in tone. In *Eisenach*, for example, most of the objects and faces depicted are black, with the details excised in white. Colour appears only as an accent confined to the centre of the image.

Heisig's murals, in contrast to those of his colleagues, burst with colour and are also more complex in their construction. Whereas the images in both Engels' and the Mattheuers' murals simply unfold horizontally across the picture plane, Heisig's seem to explode from the centre and reflect his interest in exploring the possibilities of the sgraffito medium, which requires cutting into the wall to reveal the coloured layers beneath and therewith the image.¹¹ As such, these murals are both the most difficult to create and the most difficult to read – the playful use of abstracted forms requires time and effort on the viewer's part to be understood. Despite their complexity, however, the swirling forms and bright colours convey a sense of optimism and life absent from the other works. It is these two aspects of Heisig's murals – their semi-abstract style and optimistic tone – that polarised opinion in 1965, placing them, and especially *Schwedt*, at the centre of a heated debate about what was an appropriate style for East German

art. This debate was apparently triggered by the comments of just one man: Alfred Kurella.

The *Schwedt* Controversy

Head of the Kulturkommission of the Politburo until 1963 and vice president of the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, Kurella exerted considerable power in the East German cultural realm. He was also personally invested in the art scene in Leipzig, having played an instrumental role in bringing national attention to works by the younger generation of artists, most notably Werner Tübke, in the late 1950s and early 1960s. On 11 February 1965, less than two weeks after all but one of the murals in the *Bettenhaus* were finished, he wrote a five-page report titled ‘Gedanken über die Wandbilder im “Hotel Deutschland” (Leipzig)’, in which he lambasted the works as a whole for depicting ‘einen ernsten Einbruch des Modernismus [...] in unserer Kunstleben.’¹²

As he explained it, murals throughout history have reflected the same style as the paintings of the day. The abstracted murals in the Hotel Deutschland thus constituted an attempt, in his opinion, ‘unter der Losung “Kunst am Bau” den ganzen Unfug formalistischer, antirealistischer, abstrakter, symbolischer “Kunst” bei uns einzuschmuggeln.’¹³ Of all the murals in the *Bettenhaus*, he deemed the two by the Mattheuers to be ‘relativ annehmbar’.¹⁴ Engels’ work, on the other hand, he found ‘völlig unqualifiziert’ in that the primitive means of the work lay, in his opinion, ‘noch unter dem Niveau von Kinderzeichnungen.’¹⁵ His strongest criticisms, however, targeted Heisig’s work and occupied an entire page of his report. Kurella noted:

Am ernstesten ist die Demonstration gegen unsere Kunstauffassung in den 3 Bildern von *Heisig*. Hier ist das Prinzip absichtlicher *Deformation, Verstümmelung und Verhässlichung der Wirklichkeit* [...] auf die Spitze getrieben. Nur mit Mühe kann man im Prinzip der Anordnung dieser Bruchstücke zum Zweck rein *formaler Effekte* [...] erkennen. In dem Bild ‘Schwedt’ bringt dieser Anti-Realismus eine (dem Künstler vielleicht unbewusste) *Technikfeindschaft* zum Ausdruck. Das *rhythmische* und *harmonische Bild* des Systems von Röhren, Kondensatoren, Krakingtürmen, Schwelttürmen, das ein moderner Erdöl-Chemie-Betrieb jedem zerbrochen, zerquetscht, unrythmisch gemachter Fragmente technischer Details verwandelt!¹⁶

Clearly Kurella saw more at stake in Heisig’s murals than simply aesthetic issues.

Kurella's comments in this report reflect the backdrop of the Fifth Congress of the Verband Bildender Künstler Deutschlands (VBKD), which had taken place just a few months earlier in April 1964. This congress has become famous in the history of East German art as a moment in which a handful of artists and art historians, including Heisig, spoke out against the cultural politics of the day. Heisig argued in favour of artistic experimentation with modern art styles, warning that to ignore art movements taking place on the other side of the Iron Curtain would lead to provincialism.¹⁷ In essence, he argued for artistic freedom, for giving artists and not politicians the responsibility of deciding what was suitable for communist art. His speech, like many others, was presumably encouraged by the relaxation in cultural policy that had taken place in the wake of the building of the Wall in 1961 and, especially, by calls made by Walter Ulbricht at the Sixth Party Conference of the SED in 1963 and the Second Bitterfeld Conference in 1964 for a higher quality of art suitable for the 'educated nation'. Nonetheless, the speeches at the Fifth Congress were viewed by cultural functionaries as an attack, and a multi-week investigation ensued. Heisig, for his part, received a 'strong reprimand' in the party book and ended up giving an official self-criticism two months later to prove his loyalty to the party.¹⁸

In the wake of these events, Heisig created the Hotel Deutschland murals, works that Kurella railed against as expressing a life-view foreign to East Germany, a 'Zeitbewusstsein' nearer to western pessimistic worldviews like existentialism. *Schwedt*, in particular, he saw as expressing 'eine fremde *Kunstauffassung*. Hier wird eine Kunst propagiert (und praktiziert), die es ablehnt, Wirklichkeit abzubilden, und fordert, daß der Künstler der Wirklichkeit grundsätzlich eine Gegen-Wirklichkeit gegenüberstellt.'¹⁹ Appearing a mere six months after the Fifth Congress, these murals, which mark a significant change in Heisig's artistic style, must have cast doubt on the sincerity of his self-criticism.

Although Heisig is best-known now for having a 'modern' style, the loose, impressionist brushstroke and simultaneous narrative compositions that characterise his work today did not appear publicly in his art until after his speech at the Fifth Congress in 1964. Before that, his work evinced the kind of illusionism most westerners expect from socialist realism, as can be seen in works like *Zirkel junge Naturforscher* (1952), *1848 in Leipzig* (1954-58), and *Pariser*

Märztage I (1960). Indeed, this inconsistency between his speech at the Fifth Congress and his art drew attention from commentators at the time.²⁰ Heisig's murals for the Hotel Deutschland must thus be understood as an early attempt to put his controversial words into practice, to create a more complex art for 'the educated nation'. Indeed, it was presumably while working on these murals, that is, while he was struggling to come to terms with the challenges of an unfamiliar medium, that Heisig encountered the Picasso print at an Antiquariat in Leipzig that he states opened his eyes to the possibilities of modern art for his own work.²¹ In this same year, he created a series of paintings called *Picassoides* that deal with aesthetic issues similar to those he confronted in the murals: namely, how to convey a subject matter in two dimensions without recourse to illusionism. The *Picassoides* were followed shortly thereafter by *Pariser Kommune* (1965), one of the first oil paintings in his oeuvre to exhibit Heisig's characteristic modern style. A comparison between *Pariser Kommune* and the murals reveals a similar explosion from the centre that appears in the Hotel Deutschland murals. A more direct correlation appears in the third panel of his mural *Halle*, a similar stacking of figures that he once referred to as barricade fighters.²² Significantly, *Pariser Kommune* became a centre of controversy in late 1965 – just a few months after the debate over the Hotel Deutschland murals – when it was shown at the 7. Kunstausstellung des VBKD Bezirk Leipzig, an exhibition now famous for marking the emergence of the Leipziger Schule of modern artists onto the East German art scene.

The animosity in Kurella's report about Heisig's murals for the Hotel Deutschland thus results from his disappointment at the change in style they embodied:

Das Unglück ist nur, daß Heisig seiner Begabung und Anlage noch ein *Realist* ist. [...] Er muss sich also *zwingen*, Antirealismus zu machen, und muss deshalb zu *Anleihen bei Picasso und Leger* greifen. Es ist peinlich zu sehen, wie dilettantisch er sich Formelemente dieser Künstler aneignet.²³

Kurella's acrimony presumably also stems from a sense of personal betrayal of his earlier support. More importantly, however, the ire in the report reflects his belief that Heisig was a key figure for the future of East German art and thus any change in his art was of national significance. As he states: 'die ideologische und kunsttheoretische

Auseinandersetzung mit Heisig an Hand dieser Bilder ist von grundsätzlicher Bedeutung für unsere ganze Kunst und muss gründlich vorbereitet und geführt werden.²⁴ If Heisig embraced modern art in his own work, Kurella argued, it did not bode well for the future of illusionism in East German art overall.

Within a week of Kurella's report, which was forwarded to the Politburo in Berlin, the various organisations and individuals responsible for overseeing the murals in Leipzig had filed written explanations of their view of and role in the project.²⁵ Together, these documents provide a fascinating glimpse into the complicated inner workings of East German cultural bureaucracy, which was far from monolithic. They also suggest, like Kurella's report, that Heisig played a key role in the discussions about art taking place at the time, especially in Leipzig.

On 15 February 1965, Heinz Mäde, head of the painting and graphics section of the Verband Bildender Künstler in Leipzig (VBK-L), sent a one-page letter to the Leipzig branch of the SED (SED-L) in which he stated that the VBK-L leadership welcomed the murals as 'grundsätzlich die Lösungen der gestellten Aufgaben'.²⁶ He pointed out that the murals were not oil paintings with precisely readable details, but rather decorative ornamental creations that tried to create a unity with the building. Of all the murals, he reported, the VBK-L leadership found *Schwedt* and the Mattheuer's *Eisenach* the most satisfying because they captured 'der Schönheit, der Kraft und dem Optimismus unseres Lebens'.²⁷

Gerhard Winkler, curator of the Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig and consultant for the hotel project, also defended the murals. In a four-page letter addressed to Paul Fröhlich, head of the SED-L, he began by explaining that sgraffito and plaster relief had been chosen as the media for the hotel's decoration because they related more closely to the essence of the building itself. He then focused primarily on Heisig's murals, over which he and Fröhlich had strongly disagreed when they visited the hotel a couple days earlier. Winkler praised Heisig's contribution, pointing out that the combination of sgraffito technique with fresco in two of the works – including *Schwedt* – was a complicated one that had never been attempted before in the GDR. It also constituted the first attempt of which he was aware, 'das Ornament auf der Basis einer politisch inhaltlichen Thematik zu entwickeln'.²⁸ Acknowledging that the works were not

perfect, he nonetheless praised Heisig's murals as 'a step forward' on the path to create a truly East German art, creations worthy of a 'fruitful discussion' about the synthesis of art and architecture.²⁹

The Rat der Stadt (RdS), which was ultimately responsible for the murals, wrote a ten-page report that also positively portrayed the murals, albeit more reservedly so. It began with a detailed description of how the project had unfolded. Gerhard Winkler, the report stated, had been chosen in January 1964 to report between the RdS and artists working on architectural projects. In mid May, the content of the murals had been established: they were to show 'die deutsche Landschaft in Verbindung mit den jeweiligen progressiven Traditionen der deutschen Geschichte, besonders der Arbeiterbewegung'.³⁰ By the end of the month, most of the artists, including Heisig, had been selected and matched to specific works. By late June, the artists submitted their first sketches for an initial critique by the project manager, investor, hotel proprietor, and a member of the RdS, among others. Most of the sketches were approved over the course of the next several months, and by mid November, designs at one-fifth scale were submitted. The Mattheuers' and Heisig's were approved, although *Halle* needed further work with the design. Engels' murals, on the other hand, were criticised as having 'neodadaist' tendencies, and he was asked to deliver new sketches by mid December. On 12 December, a final meeting occurred in which all of the sketches, except for Heisig's *Halle* and Engels' *Trier*, were approved. *Halle*, it was determined, should portray the new construction taking place in the city. *Trier*, on the other hand, was criticised on political-ideological grounds. New designs for both were to be submitted to the mayor for approval.

The RdS's report then gave its evaluation of the finished murals. The Mattheuers' works, as well as Engels' *Weimar*, were deemed successful. Engels' *Trier* was pronounced artistically immature and politically unconvincing. Portions of Heisig's *Halle* also received negative appraisals. Overall, the judgements given echoed those found in Kurella's letter, with the exception of the RdS's valuation of Heisig's *Rostock* and *Schwedt*, two 'successful' works that found 'general approval', respectively.³¹ Indeed, *Schwedt* was distinguished for its portrayal of both the city as a new industrial centre of the GDR and the decisive role of the new man: 'Diese Synthese ist in der Vordergrunddarstellung eines optimistischen Menschenantlitzes und

der Auffassung des dynamischen Arbeitsprozesses gelungen [...]. Die Darstellung fand allgemeine Zustimmung.³²

The longest and final report on the Hotel Deutschland murals was written on 16 February by the Rat des Bezirkes Leipzig (RdB). Like the RdS, the RdB described how the murals had come into being, although in contrast to the earlier report, they emphasised what had gone wrong in the process. Part of the problem, as they saw it, stemmed from the commission itself as well as the architect; apparently the latter had expressed interest in ‘eine sogenannte kühne moderne’ rather than a socialist realist portrayal.³³ The RdB also pointed the finger at the RdS, blaming them for not holding enough meetings, letting deadlines slide, and making mostly content-based suggestions for changes to the murals rather than stylistic or ideological ones.

As for the murals themselves, the RdB’s valuations echoed Kurella’s. Engels’ work was dismissed as weak. The Mattheuers’ murals were judged suitable, and possibly even a starting point for future decorative murals. Heisig’s work, on the other hand, received harsh criticism. *Halle* and *Schwedt*, in particular, were denounced for the ‘die Verwischung des Inhalts und die Überbetonung des Formalen.’³⁴ *Schwedt* was further criticised for ‘die willkürlichen inneren Disharmonien in der Farbwahl’ with its use of blues, greens, blacks and browns.³⁵ According to the report, these murals ‘dienen nicht unserer allgemeinen Bemühung, den Menschen mit Optimismus zu erfüllen und ein klares marxistisches Weltbild zu geben.’³⁶ Significantly, the report also pointed to Heisig’s controversial speech at the Fifth Congress held the previous year, which it saw as related:

Herausgekommen ist eine formalistische Auffassung, die sich vom vielen westlichen Kunstwerken tatsächlich kaum noch unterscheidet und keinen Weg für die realistische Kunstgestaltung in modernen Bauobjekten für die weitere Zukunft darstellen kann.³⁷

The report concluded by calling for a discussion about the ideological-aesthetic question of East Germany’s cultural politics, especially that of the relationship between art and architecture.

In all of the documents written in the immediate wake of Kurella’s report, the Mattheuers’ works received positive reviews, while Engels’ *Trier* received negative ones. A general consensus emerged that Heisig’s mural, *Halle*, fell short on an aesthetic level. Opinion varied

greatly, however, on Heisig's murals *Rostock* and, especially, *Schwedt*. Mäde singled the latter out for its beauty, strength, and optimism, a view that stood in sharp contrast to Kurella's, who saw the same work as 'absichtlicher Deformation, Verstümmelung und Verhässlichung der Wirklichkeit.' The RdB reiterated Kurella's concerns, seeing in *Schwedt* a work of distorted forms and arbitrary colouring. The RdS, on the other hand, which was ultimately responsible for the works, expressed restrained praise, stating Heisig's work had found general approval.

Although Kurella and the RdB agreed that the murals, and especially Heisig's, were a threat to East German art, the SED handed down no official judgment at either the national or local level. Instead, a meeting was convened for several months later between Fröhlich of the SED-L and a number of visual artists in Leipzig, including those who created the murals, to discuss important questions 'über künstlerische Probleme und Probleme der Zusammenarbeit zwischen Künstlern und Partei- und Staatsorganen.'³⁸ At this meeting, held on 21 June 1965, artists and cultural functionaries seemed to be in agreement that they needed to work together and that more should be done to educate the general public about art. The result was a series of articles to be written about the Hotel Deutschland murals and published later that summer in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, the local party newspaper. The series was intended to segue into reviews of the 7. Kunstausstellung des VBKD Bezirk Leipzig that autumn with the hope of creating a larger and more educated audience for it.

The first article in the series, 'Wir stellen zur Diskussion: Bilder auf der Etage. Ein erstes Gespräch mit Prof. Bernhard Heisig', appeared on 10 July, almost exactly five months after Kurella's venomous report. Significantly, it featured a large image of *Schwedt* and began with the story of an 'ordinary' cleaning woman who was so enthusiastic about Heisig's work that she offered 'uns die Wandbilder zu erklären, damit auch wir ihre besonderen Schönheiten erkennen könnten.'³⁹ With this introduction, Rita Jorek, the visual arts editor of the newspaper, subtly challenged her readers to take the time needed to 'see' the image and to understand it. She then went on to praise the collaboration between artist and architect evident in the project as well as the artistic fantasy of the mural, which was, according to Heisig, to be understood 'nicht als Illustration von Gedanken und Ideen [...], sondern als eigenständige künstlerische Gestaltung.'⁴⁰ Indeed, Heisig

praises the commission's freedom from a literal interpretation in the article: 'Allzuoft wird noch vergessen, daß auch das heitere Lebensgefühl, das ein Kunstwerk vermittelt, eine ideologische Funktion hat.'⁴¹ The article ended with an invitation to readers to send in their impressions of the murals.

Whereas Jorek's piece was wholly positive, the tone of the article published the following week was slightly defensive, suggesting a discussion about the murals was continuing to take place behind the scenes. Written by Günter Meißner, an art historian in Leipzig, this article argued against the idea that the murals were too abstract:

Von vornherein verbot es sich, ein fotogetreues Panorama dieser Städte auszuweiten, denn die Wandbilder in diesen Durchgangsräumen sollten knapp und schnell erfaßbar das Wichtigste vor Augen stellen und den Raum schmücken.⁴²

Of all the murals, Meißner liked *Schwedt* the best and dedicated almost a fourth of his article to it, three times as much as to any other artist. His commentary reads as a defence of Heisig against the type of criticism found in Kurella's report:

Dieser Künstler, dessen Hang zum Phantastischen manchmal in die skurrile Deformierung umschlägt, will nicht wohlgefällige Pathetik offerieren, sondern Sinn und Phantasie mit beruhigender Intensität packen. Er drängte die Symbolvielfalt zugunsten der großen einheitlichen Wirkung zurück, zwingt alles in eine eigentümlich bewegte Formensprache, die zunächst bestürzend wirken kann, deren Sinn aber aus dem Inhalt seiner Aufgabe entspringt. So ist vieles 'verfremdet', und was das Auge zuerst als schönes Spiel der Formen und Farben wahrnimmt – eine durchaus legitime Funktion der baugebundenen Kunst – enträtselt die Phantasie beim Betrachten.⁴³

Two weeks later a complete change in tone took place in the series. In his article of 31 July 1965, Herbert Letsch, head of the cultural department of the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, called Heisig's work, 'nicht hinreichend gelöst' if also 'einen interessanten Versuch'.⁴⁴ For one thing, he noted, the sgraffito technique did not seem suitable for the closeness of an inner room: 'Der Betrachter empfindet m.E. einen Mißklang zwischen der Intimität des Raumes und der harten, sozusagen zyklischen Symbolik der Bildgestaltung'.⁴⁵ Similarly, he found the complexity of the image unsuitable for the quick view of the hotel guest: 'nur wenige Menschen [...] werden die Gelegenheit haben, das Bild längere Zeit und wiederholt zu betrachten'.⁴⁶ He also mentioned Heisig several times in the article, the only artist to be so

named. Letsch's was the last substantive article on the murals published in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*. His presentation seems a compromise between the two sides expressed earlier in the reports: the artists were praised for their efforts, but the murals themselves remained unsuitable. A week later, a short and relatively neutral article by the architect of the building followed, which ended the series earlier than had been planned originally.

The public discussion of the murals, however, did not end with the negative evaluation printed in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, but rather continued on at the national level. In August, an article about the working relationship between artists and architects appeared in *Deutsche Architektur*; largely a discussion between architects and artists from Leipzig, including Heisig, it was illustrated with a photograph of *Schwedt*.⁴⁷ In October, Meissner published an article about the murals in *Bildende Kunst*, the GDR's most important art journal.⁴⁸ It delivered a positive assessment of *Schwedt* and included several preliminary sketches for the mural. Indeed, a detail of the working woman's face appeared as the cover illustration for the issue.

In comparison to the discussion that took place in the reports written about the murals, the articles in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* were not as vehement in their criticisms, suggesting a difference between public and private discussions. The sense that style was an indicator of political persuasion and could thus represent a threat to East Germany had been removed from the debate, which focused, instead, on the appropriateness of the forms to the task at hand. Ten months after Kurella's report, the debate over the murals was finally over. It ended just in time for another one to begin: in the same month that Meissner's article on the Hotel Deutschland murals was published in *Bildende Kunst*, the legendary 7. Kunstausstellung des VBKD Bezirk Leipzig opened. Within weeks, Heisig would be at the centre of yet another debate – his third in two years – this time over his painting, *Pariser Kommune*.

Conclusion

In 1965, *Schwedt* polarised opinion: its combination of a modernist aesthetic with an optimistic, East German subject matter embodied the very essence of the debates then taking place about art. The many reports written testify to its importance in the discussion in Leipzig as well as to the importance of art more generally in East Germany. In

the mid-1960s, artists like Heisig were fighting with politicians and cultural functionaries over what East German art was and should be, and about who got to decide. Ultimately, artists in each case were responding to the call made by Walter Ulbricht at the Sixth Party Conference of the SED and the Second Bitterfeld Conference to create art for an educated audience. Such calls emboldened artists to take up the challenge of trying to create an art for East Germany, one that was not dumbed down for the general public, but rather that required the public be educated to understand art. Artists like Heisig wanted a complex, dialogical art rather than a simple, didactic one.

The many reports written about the Hotel Deutschland murals also show that cultural policy in the GDR was far from monolithic. Multiple organisations were involved in the decisions being made, especially when it came to architectural art. In Leipzig alone, the VBK-L, the RdS and RdB all engaged the question of artistic suitability within the state. As the reports show, these organisations did not always agree in their views. Indeed, opinion tended to be split between artists and art historians on the one side and cultural functionaries and politicians on the other. Moreover, the discussion was not limited to the private sphere, but was introduced to the public for a discussion about art that ultimately lasted many months. This public discussion took place in a number of articles for the local newspaper as well as in national journals, with the views expressed ranging from highly positive to strongly negative.

The Hotel Deutschland murals show Heisig's ability to strike a chord in East Germany, to create art that hit a cultural nerve and polarised opinion. That it was the second of three major controversies in less than two years involving Heisig suggests that he was consciously pushing the envelope of what East German art could be. His deep involvement in the cultural politics of the day – not as a dissident or victim as current scholarship suggests, but rather as someone trying to change the definition of what art was and could be in East Germany – underscores his commitment to the GDR and to the idea of improving it from within.

Significantly, of the three controversies in which Heisig was involved during these years, the one around the murals is the only one not well documented in current scholarship. Presumably this absence stems from the fact that these murals do not fit comfortably into the paradigm of repression and resistance that has come to dominance

since unification; their strong connections to East Germany – in subject matter, medium, and origin as a commission – cannot be overlooked. Conversely, Heisig's controversial speech at the Fifth Congress and the contentious reception of *Pariser Kommune* have become staples of recent scholarship, where they are used to emphasise his commitment to modern art and the difficulties he had with the regime as a result.

This tendency to overemphasise Heisig's difficulties with the regime can also be seen in the myth that has come to prominence since the *Wende* that Heisig lost his job as rector of the Leipzig Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst in 1964 as a result of his controversial speech at the Fifth Congress.⁴⁹ New archival evidence, however, confirms Heisig actually resigned from the position and did so a couple months before the Congress took place.⁵⁰ Furthermore, he received the prestigious and lucrative commission for the Hotel Deutschland murals after this speech but before he delivered his official self-criticism, suggesting either that he was not in as much trouble as current scholarship alleges, or that the cultural politics of East Germany were more heterogeneous than currently thought.

Lastly, the Hotel Deutschland murals are important for understanding the development of Heisig's work, which is not static and unchanging. A close examination of these murals within Heisig's oeuvre suggests that they played a crucial role in the stylistic change that took place in his art in the mid 1960s. Indeed, as discussed earlier in this essay, his interest in exploring the sgraffito medium seems to have been the very catalyst for this change.

Heisig is best known today as a modern artist and a painter of trauma. Yet far from withdrawing into his own world, Heisig was actively engaged in the cultural politics of the GDR for the entire forty years of its existence. The battles he had there helped to change East German art by pushing the envelope of what was accepted; they also helped him to define his own views on art – a commitment to figuration and the audience, and to a complex, modern style. The artist known and praised today as the quintessential post-war German artist is, in fact, the product of the artistic crucible that was the GDR.

Notes

¹ Eberhard Roters, Eduard Beaucamp, Klaus Honnef, Peter Ludwig, Jörn Merkert, Uwe M. Schneede, Carla Schulz-Hoffmann, and former Bundeskanzler Gerhard Schröder are just a few of the people who consider Heisig to be one of Germany's most important post-war painters.

² This reflects a particularly western way of approaching Heisig's work that has become paradigmatic in the wake of unification, when former West Germans came to dominate Heisig scholarship. It first emerged in the late 1980s in publications by West German writers such as Eberhard Roters. At this point in time, scholarship was dominated by East Germans and the emphasis was on Heisig as an artist actively engaged with society. For a detailed look at the historiography of Heisig's life and art, see chapter 1 of my dissertation, 'Bernhard Heisig and the Cultural Politics of East German Art', Ph.D. Diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2007.

³ For a recent example see Eckhart Gillen, ed., *Bernhard Heisig: Die Wut der Bilder*, Cologne: Dumont, 2005.

⁴ As will be discussed later in this essay, the debate over the Hotel Deutschland murals was the second of three major debates in less than two years in which Heisig was a key figure. It was preceded by the controversial Fifth Congress of the Verband Bildender Künstler Deutschlands and followed by the 7. Kunstausstellung des VBKD Bezirk Leipzig.

⁵ Gerhard Winkler, *Leipzig Hotel Deutschland*, Leipzig: Seemann, 1967, unpaginated.

⁶ Wolfgang Scheibe, 'Hotel 'Deutschland'', *Deutsche Architektur*, 14:8 (1965), 454-63 (here: p. 454).

⁷ All but one of the cities was located in the GDR. Trier, located in the West, was Karl Marx's birthplace.

⁸ These murals were restored after unification, although there has been some minor damage since then. The hotel is now a Radisson.

⁹ Marga Tschirner, 'Schwedt wird international', *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 25 July 1965. The article and a photograph of the city Schwedt were published while Heisig was working on these murals.

¹⁰ 'Schreiben der Ständigen Kommission Kultur, Arbeitsgruppe Dokumentation, vom 23.5.1964, Vorschläge für die künstlerische Ausgestaltung des "Hotel Deutschlands" entsprechend der Beratung am 22.5.64', Sächsisches Staatsarchiv Leipzig (SächsStAL): VBK-L 114.

¹¹ For sgraffito, the wall itself is made up of layers of colour, so the artist needs to cut down to the corresponding level to reveal the image. By its very nature, it resists the illusionism of an oil painting, giving it an almost cartoon-like quality.

¹² Alfred Kurella, ‘Gedanken über die Wandbilder im “Hotel Deutschland” (Leipzig)’, 11.2.65, SächsStAL: SED-L 362.

¹³ *Ibid.* Architectural art was frequently given more leeway in the GDR than easel painting because of the constraints of the medium itself, which makes illusionism difficult, if not impossible.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.* All italics are original to the document.

¹⁷ Heisig’s speech from an audio tape at the Stiftung Archiv Akademie der Künste (SA-AdK): VBKD 70. See also Ulrike Goeschen, *Vom Sozialistischen Realismus zur Kunst im Sozialismus. Die Rezeption der Modernen Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft der DDR*, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001, pp. 138-47, for a more detailed discussion of this conference.

¹⁸ Scholarship since 1989 has emphasised this moment in Heisig’s life as a breaking point with the East German system. The myth that Heisig lost his position as rector of the Leipzig Hochschule as a result of this speech, however, is incorrect, as will be discussed in more detail later in this essay.

¹⁹ Kurella, ‘Gedanken über die Wandbilder im “Hotel Deutschland” (Leipzig)’.

²⁰ See Gerhard Bondzin’s speech from the Fifth Congress. SA-AdK: VBKD 67. See also *Bericht vom Auftreten der Leipziger Genossen auf dem V. Kongress*, Leipzig, 2. April 1964, SächsStAL: SED-L 362.

²¹ Eckhart Gillen, “‘Schwierigkeiten beim Suchen der Wahrheit.’ Bernhard Heisig im Konflikt zwischen “verordnetem Antifaschismus” und der Auseinandersetzung mit seinem Kriegstrauma’, Ph.D. Diss., University of Heidelberg, 2004, pp. 71-2. Picasso was an important figure for many East German artists because he was both a committed communist and a modern artist. Already in the mid-1950s, a discussion was taking place in *Bildende Kunst* about whether or not he was a good role model for East German artists.

²² Gabriele Kihago, ‘Probleme der baugebundenen Kunst – nachgewiesen an den neuen Hotels in Leipzig’, Diss., Pädagogischen Institut ‘Dr. Theodor Neubauer’ Erfurt, 1968, p. 24.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Kurella, 'Gedanken über die Wandbilder im "Hotel Deutschland" (Leipzig)'.

²⁵ Kurella's report was sent to Kurt Hager, who was one of the highest ranking cultural figures in the SED.

²⁶ Mäde, letter to the SED-L, 15.2.65, SächsStAL: VBK-L 117.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Gerhard Winkler, letter to Paul Fröhlich, 15.2.65, SächsStAL: SED-L 362.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Kresse, 'Bericht des Rates der Stadt Leipzig über die Konzeption und Durchführung der künstlerischen Angestaltung des Hotels "Deutschlands"', 15.2.65, SächsStAL: SED-L 362.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Häußler, 'Bericht für das Sekretariat der SED-Bezirksleitung zur künstlerischen Ausgestaltung des Hotels "Deutschland"', 16.2.65, SächsStAL: SED-L 362.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Kreck, 'Der Künstler Aktiver Mitgestalter der Gesellschaft. Paul Fröhlich sprach mit bildenden Künstlern', 1965 (undated, c. 21 June), SächsStAL: SED-L 362.

³⁹ Rita Jorek, 'Wir stellen zur Diskussion: Bilder auf der Etage. Ein erstes Gespräch mit Prof. Bernhard Heisig', *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 10 July 1965. Heisig's *Rostock* is the mural on the third floor.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Günter Meißner, ‘Schönheit und Überfülle, Diskussionsbeitrag zum Thema “Bilder auf der Etage”’, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 17 July 1965.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Herbert Letsch, ‘Wir diskutieren: Bilder auf der Etage, Das Bild im Raum’, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 7 July 1965.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid. Here Letsch makes a reference to – and subtle refutation of – Jorek’s article from a few weeks earlier.

⁴⁷ Another article in this issue focuses on the Hotel Deutschland as a whole. (The murals in the *Bettenhaus* were just some of the art created for the building.)

⁴⁸ A letter by Jutta Schmidt at *Bildende Kunst* indicates the article was nearing the final stages of preparation for publication already in late July. In the letter Schmidt indicated that she shared Meißner’s view of *Schwedt*. Letter from Dr. Jutta Schmidt, Henschelverlag Kunst und Gesellschaft, to Günter Meißner, 26 July 1965. Thank you to Dr. Günter Meißner for providing me with a copy of this letter.

⁴⁹ This story first appears in *Bernhard Heisig: Retrospektive*, Munich: Prestel, 1989.

⁵⁰ Heisig’s resignation letter, 19.2.64. A letter recommending G. K. Müller as Heisig’s replacement, 9.3.64. A letter confirming Müller as Heisig’s replacement, 12.3.64. Archive of the Hochschule für Graphik und Buchkunst Leipzig. I uncovered this information in 2004 while doing research for my dissertation, ‘Bernhard Heisig and the Cultural Politics of East German Art’.

Skyler J. Arndt-Briggs

**The Invisible Uprising:
Filmmaking and East Germany's 'Day X'**

This chapter explores the public memory of 17 June 1953 as encapsulated in DEFA films, contextualising the discussion in terms of the political impact of the uprising on the DEFA studios. Kurt Maetzig's officially-sanctioned representation of 1953, *Schlösser und Katen*, is contrasted with other films from the era in which overt references to the uprising are conspicuously absent. Yet, as films such as Herwig Kipping's *Das Land hinter dem Regenbogen* suggest, 1953 exerts its influence on these and later films as a shadow memory that pervaded public consciousness up to and beyond 1989.

As more research is done on the arts in the GDR, a somewhat surprising conclusion must be drawn: namely, that periodisation in this historiography differs radically for different art forms. Histories of the GDR's intelligentsia have traditionally revolved around the key focal points that impacted on authors and playwrights in the state – the Hungarian uprising of 1956, the Bitterfeld Way, the Prague Spring of 1968, and the extradition of Wolf Biermann in 1976. While these events clearly affected intellectuals and artists across East German society, it is nevertheless curious that other crackdowns are practically invisible in this model. In the *Kahlschlag* ('clear cutting') exercised against the film industry after the Eleventh Plenum in 1965, for example, a dozen films – almost an entire year's production – were banned post-production at great financial, as well as artistic sacrifice, to be screened only in 1989.¹

This essay proposes to address one such lacuna by looking at the relationship between East German filmmaking and an event largely ignored in film historical research, namely the popular uprising of 17 June 1953. It begins by looking at how the radical energies and insights expressed in the uprising influenced the organisation of creative work at the East German state film studios, the *Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft*, or DEFA. In an effort to evaluate the influence of these energies and insights on the style and content of films, it then contrasts the one officially-sanctioned filmic representation of the 1953 uprising, Kurt Maetzig's *Schlösser und Katen* (1957), with other

films made in the mid- to late-1950s. Finally, it looks at references to the 1953 uprising in films made during the brief uncensored florescence of filmmaking that occurred in East Germany in 1989 and 1990, in an effort to assess the broader proposition that these events formed both a haunting memory of a path not taken, and a shadow side of the GDR's foundation myths.

Post-Cold War access to new archival sources has allowed historians to re-evaluate the events of June 1953. It is now generally agreed that the uprising was not restricted to Berlin, but rather extended across the entire country, with parallel protests arising elsewhere in the Eastern Bloc as well; likewise, what was long characterised as a 'workers' rebellion' in the most narrow sense is now thought to have extended across class lines and included political, as well as economic demands.² Nevertheless, for many, *der 17. Juni* is still imbued with the musty overtones of Cold War refrains. At the time, East German official rhetoric was quickly mobilised to dismiss and exploit the uprising as a Western attempt to destabilise and take over the GDR. Of all taboo topics, 17 June was perhaps the most successfully suppressed. In West Germany the event was just as quickly codified and celebrated as the central symbol of communist repression by the Adenauer administration. Once relations were established between the two Germanies in 1971, however, the memory of the uprising was increasingly ignored in the face of realpolitik.

As historian Charles Maier remarks, '1953 came to seem distant and irrelevant. But from the perspective of 1989 [...] we can see that it had represented an alternative world'.³ It is this paper's contention that this alternative world, this path not taken, became an unacknowledged national repository of repressed memories, hopes and fears. As Maier notes, 'the East German state was built on the memory of 1953, which set the limits to change as well as revealing the limits of consensus.'⁴ June 1953, in short, became the repressed dark underside, or shadow side of official GDR foundation myths.

17 June 1953 – Day X

The nature of the unrest on 17 June 1953 – in particular, whether it was an *Arbeiteraufstand* (a workers' rebellion) or a *Volksaufstand* (a popular uprising) – has long been a subject of debate. Most familiar are the protests of workers against production quota increases that took place from 15-17 June at the showpiece construction site on

Stalinallee in East Berlin. A general strike was announced for the 17th. Masses of workers poured into the centre of town; by 9 a.m., 25,000 people had gathered in front of the House of Ministries.⁵ Between 80 and 100 demonstrators stormed the building, forcing their way past *Volkspolizei* and GDR garrison police deployed the day before. At 10:30 a.m., leaders of the SED were instructed to move to Soviet headquarters in Karlshorst for safety; at noon, Soviet tanks and troops fired into the crowd; and, at 1 p.m., martial law was declared in East Berlin. Demonstrations and rioting continued into the evening and Soviet troops and the Stasi made hundreds of arrests. Ultimately, an estimated 8,000-10,000 activists were imprisoned; the official death toll was 131.

In his introduction to a collection of recently released documents on the 1953 uprising, Christian F. Ostermann describes how new evidence has altered and expanded our understanding of events. On 3 May 1953, hundreds of tobacco workers went on strike in Plovdiv and Khaskovo, Bulgaria. On 1 June, workers struck at the Škoda munitions plant in Plzeň, Czechoslovakia, demanding free elections and a new government; work stoppages, riots and violent clashes with the Czechoslovak militia lasted until 3 June. Within the GDR, Ostermann describes widespread and enduring protests:

Strikes and strike threats had occurred in the fall of 1952 and appeared with greater intensity in the spring of 1953 at individual plants (although they remained limited to the shop floor). We know now that these actions continued into July – less forcefully to be sure – but the fact that they took place at all under conditions of martial law was indicative of the depth of the crisis in the GDR. Numerous studies also now reveal the history of the 1953 uprising as it played out in various East German localities and among prominent professional groups. With the recent boost in access to relevant materials it has also become clear that anti-regime activities in the countryside were more intense and widespread than Western observers had assumed.⁶

Such anti-regime activities, in fact, resulted in the eventual imposition of martial law in 167 of 216 districts across East Germany.

As reflected in its sleek nickname, 'Day X', the 17 June became the symbolic centre of this critical period. Within the GDR, the subject of the uprising was strictly taboo. Witness Ruth von Cancrin, for example, whose husband was picked up early on 18 June 1953 and never returned home, was not allowed to refer to the date, let alone make inquiries about her husband's fate.⁷ The situation was no easier

for artists. Stefan Heym's novel on the subject of the uprising, *Der Tag X*, was banned after an altercation between him and Walter Ulbricht at the Fourth GDR Writers' Congress in 1956; further vilified by Erich Honecker at the SED's Eleventh Plenary in 1965, the novel was finally published in West Germany in 1974 under the title *Fünf Tage im Juni*.

Crucial to the evaluation of the lasting impact of 1953 on GDR culture is the thesis that the uprising played a central role in the collective memory of East Germans until the GDR was dissolved in 1990. It seems that the memory of the uprising did, indeed, remain very present for Hermann Axen, second secretary of the Berlin SED from 1953 to 1956 and architect of East German foreign policy in the late 1960s. In a filmed interview, the West German politician Egon Bahr, who helped create West Germany's *Ostpolitik* under Willy Brandt, recounts a conversation in which Axen told him: 'Wir haben das [den 17.6.53] in der Führung nie vergessen. Das ist immer im Hinterkopf, aber sehr präsent gewesen.' Axen further explained to Bahr how the government's experience formed an enduring basis for domestic policy:

Ich sage Ihnen auch, welche Lehre wir daraus gezogen haben. Wir hatten doch die Normen erhöht, und dann haben wir die runtergesetzt. Um Gottes willen, nicht runtersetzen! Wenn Druck auf dem Kessel ist und man hebt den Deckel ein bißchen hoch, fliegt einem alles um die Ohren. Es hat uns bestimmt, hart zu bleiben und konsequent, [...] damit es ein 17. Juni nie wieder geben sollte.⁸

Making Movies in the Workers' and Farmers' State

Filmmaking was prioritised soon after the end of the Second World War by the Soviet Military Administration, in keeping with Leninist confidence in the medium's ability to win the hearts and minds of the people. After being rejected in the Western sectors, where German filmmaking was viewed with suspicion in 1945, the production of the first post-war German film, *Die Mörder sind unter uns* (1946), was supported in the Soviet sector, in which the historic Babelsberg studios were located. The Politburo of the SED established a DEFA Commission as early as November 1947; by the time the DEFA studios in Babelsberg were closed down in 1991, 7,500 films had been made in East Germany. As with other art forms, the political tenor of different periods had a strong impact on what it was possible to produce when. Taken overall, however, the resulting range of films

created in the state-run studios is impressive. Production included newsreels and educational films of all sorts, as well as an internationally respected tradition of documentaries made in the GDR and overseas. Perhaps most surprising is the wide range of feature films that were produced over forty-five years.

While filmmakers who participate directly in creative work with film directors can clearly be considered artists, the collaborative and industrial aspects of film production arguably differentiate the experience and working conditions of filmmakers from those of many other artists. This is perhaps particularly true of those working in large-scale studios, such as DEFA, which at the start of 1953 employed 1,950 people, ranging from craftspeople and technical workers, to artists, managers and other intellectuals. Among workers at DEFA, the first signs of discontent were apparently detected by January 1953, in a case of alleged sabotage in the developing of colour film samples for the socialist realist biopic of the nation's communist father, *Ernst Thälmann, Sohn seiner Klasse* (1954).⁹ The best account of what took place at the studios in mid-June 1953 is by screenwriter Wolfgang Kohlhaase; interestingly, in describing a meeting at the main feature film studio in Babelsberg on June 18, he finds it impossible to distinguish between workers and intellectuals:

Es entlud sich die aufgestaute Unzufriedenheit mit der ökonomischen Entwicklung, Preiserhöhungen zum Beispiel, auch mit der sehr oberflächlichen Weise, wie diese Dinge bekanntgegeben wurden. [...] Es hatte sich viel aufgestaut, wie man weiß. Da waren auch – ich habe es noch im Ohr – Rufe wie 'Ulbricht muß weg' oder 'Freie Wahlen'. Es kam aus verschiedenen Ecken, unterschiedlich. Viele Kollegen wollten über den Betrieb reden und über das, was an Normerhöhungen und Ungereimtheiten mit den Löhnen passiert war und ihnen einfach über den Kopf gezogen worden war. Andere wollten über anderes reden. Aber die standen nicht nebeneinander, es war Dämmerung in der Halle, das war schwer zu unterscheiden.¹⁰

Among the upper echelons of creative filmmakers at the DEFA feature film studio, organisation of labour and pressure for increased production were clearly topics of discontent by the spring of 1952. Restrictions in the early post-war years, which had been overseen by the Soviet occupation, had remained at a minimum. This period saw the production of excellent films, several of which critically explored the debacle of the preceding twenty years, such as *Ehe im Schatten* (1947), *Die Affäre Blum* (1948), and *Rotation* (1949). As film

historian Günther Jordan makes clear, this critical, artistically liberal tradition was exemplified by the choice of theatre director and former anti-Nazi resistance fighter Falk Harnack as artistic director in 1949.¹¹

The honeymoon period of East German film came to an abrupt end after the censure in 1951 of Harnack's film, *Das Beil von Wandsbek*, however. The film had opened to very positive reviews, but now became the central example for the type of work that artists should henceforth avoid. The case of film, which had been excluded from the purview of the newly-founded Staatliche Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten (Stakuko), which would now oversee literature, architecture, music, theatre and the other arts, was addressed during the Fifth Congress of the SED Central Committee in March 1951. The desired reduction of movies to 'mass agitation via artistic means' was to take place through the reorganisation of the industry under the direction of the state. On 1 April 1951 Harnack was relieved of his duties as DEFA's last artistic director, leaving leadership of the studio to Sepp Schwab, DEFA's administrative director and a party functionary. Finally, in its protocol dated 11 September 1951, the Politburo extended the jurisdiction of and consolidated the control exercised by the DEFA Commission.¹²

In March 1952, a meeting was called by the well-established director Kurt Maetzig and attended by several other feature-film directors, including Harnack, to discuss what they considered to be an unsustainable organisation of production at the studios. Maetzig's proposal was to substitute vertically-integrated production groups for the existing inefficient, horizontally-integrated structures, which were based on the production assembly line model. Harnack alternatively proposed setting up a second film company, which would indirectly raise the quality of DEFA productions through competition. All who attended the meeting were in agreement, however, that they had to clarify relations between the film studios and the DEFA Commission; banding together, Party members and politically unaffiliated directors succeeded in obtaining a hearing with the DEFA Commission in May 1952.¹³

At that hearing Harnack made an impassioned plea on behalf of film directors for respect, requesting 'daß wir Regisseure nicht nur als Material betrachtet werden oder als Instrument, daß wir lediglich Aufträge empfangen, um sie auszuführen, sondern daß man uns [...] mehr als einen Partner betrachtet.'¹⁴ His statement also gives insight

into the problems brought about by the current organisation of film production – problems that were being protested by the filmmakers:

Wenn nun ein Auftrag durch die Firma oder durch die Kommission erteilt worden ist, dann gehen die Autoren oder Regisseure mit Lust und Liebe an die Arbeit heran und die Arbeit erhält einen ganz bestimmten Rhythmus, einen bestimmten Erhitzungsgrad, man entzündet sich gegenseitig und erreicht die erste Stufe, sagen wir das Treatment, und dann kommt man in eine dunkle Höhle, eine, vier, acht, zwölf Wochen, die ganze Energie, die in einem steckt, der ganze Motor wird auf diese Weise systematisch – ich möchte fast sagen – ruiniert. Man wird gleichgültig. Und einer so wichtigen Arbeit wie der Filmarbeit gegenüber gleichgültig zu werden, ist gefährlich. Der schöpferische Schwung ist dahin. Außerdem ist es für jeden Menschen völlig nervend, diese Arbeitsweise durchzuführen. Hier ist jemand dafür, hier ist jemand dagegen, man überlegt nur noch, wer könnte dafür sein, wie kann man den Stoff durchbringen.¹⁵

For both the SED and GDR film directors, questions of industrial reorganisation were implicitly intertwined with artistic questions, in particular the SED directive to move from making 'critically realist' to 'socialist realist' films. A July 1952 Politburo document goes into some detail on this distinction. Critically realist films, it argues,

erschöpfen sich im wesentlichen in der gesellschaftlichen Analyse und der gesellschaftlichen Kritik, aber erfüllen kaum oder nur sehr ungenügend die Aufgabe der "ideellen Umgestaltung der Erziehung der arbeitenden Massen im Geiste des Sozialismus".¹⁶

Moreover, 'in den meisten DEFA-Filmen treten die Vertreter des Bürgertums in den Vordergrund und werden prägnanter gezeichnet als die der Arbeiterklasse.' This, it claims,

entspricht aber keineswegs der historischen Wahrheit des Kampfes gegen den Hitlerfaschismus, gegen den amerikanischen und wiedererstehenden deutschen Imperialismus, im Kampf um den Frieden, in dem in Wirklichkeit die Arbeiterklasse die entscheidende Rolle spielt.¹⁷

As Cyril Buffet notes, the cultural offensive of the SED translated into a reintroduction of Sepp Schwab's anti-formalism campaign, which maligned entertainment films as having 'false and deceptive content' and an excess of visual effects that masked their conceptual weakness.¹⁸

Such cultural policies contributed to a decrease in the number of annual DEFA productions, from eleven in 1949 to six in 1952. They were also linked to a sharp decline in East German audiences for East

German films, as opposed to the romantic comedies, musicals and melodramas that had been made by the Nazis and were now made in West Germany and the United States. This was a situation that continued into the late 1950s and was only slowly remedied.¹⁹

The state bid to improve the consumer experience in East Germany in the wake of the June 1953 uprising included a general relaxation of restrictions on the types of movies that could be made. Despite recurring sporadic periods of retrenchment, filmmakers working in the years after 1953 clearly benefited from governmental interest in increasing box-office revenue and placating the public. The need to increase production and support new directors who would remain in the GDR was now also prioritised. Kurt Maetzig – all the while directing films that supported the regime and its policies – proposed founding the Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen in Potsdam-Babelsberg, which he directed when it opened in November 1954.

The conflation of structural and artistic issues that was forged between 1951 and 1953 had a lasting impact, and resulted in significant shifts in German filmmaking that begin to become apparent in 1956. In September of that year, soon after the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, Kurt Maetzig published an article in *Deutsche Filmkunst* calling for artistic freedom and the economic and structural reorganisation of DEFA feature film studio productions according to ‘das freiwillige Zusammenfinden von Gruppen von Filmregisseuren, Autoren und anderen Filmkünstlern,’ with ‘einer eigenen Dramaturgie [...] und schliesslich [einer] wirtschaftlichen und künstlerischen Selbständigkeit’.²⁰ He argued:

Das Verhältnis des Staates zu den Filmkünstlern muss geändert werden. [...] Fortschrittliche junge Künstler sollen in unseren Gruppen verantwortlich zu Wort kommen, und zwar in einer solchen Form, daß auch dem Zuschauer klar wird: nicht aus jedem unserer Filme spricht die Regierung der DDR, sondern hier sagen verschiedene fortschrittliche und leidenschaftliche Künstler ihre differenzierten Meinungen zu den Problemen unseres Lebens.²¹

The proposal for reorganisation into vertical working groups was not Maetzig’s invention, but rather reflected a new approach being adopted across the Eastern Bloc. In fact, East Germany lagged behind in what was perceived as a liberalising reform. While the issue was still being hotly debated in the pages of *Deutsche Filmkunst* at the end of 1956, the new method had already been implemented to good effect eighteen months earlier in Poland and Czechoslovakia.²² Although, as

Dieter Wolf argues, Maetzig's ideas for reform were never fully implemented and the Party leadership soon regretted such decentralising 'revisionist tendencies', the impetus took hold and work at the feature film studio was reorganised into vertically-integrated production groups.²³ Among other, smaller groups were the big three: Maetzig himself headed the *Roter Kreis* group; Konrad Wolf named his group after the deceased actor, Heinrich Greif; and Slatan Dudow assembled young directors, such as Gerhard Klein, Joachim Kunert and Heiner Carow, into the Berlin group.

The Invisible Uprising on Film

The range of films brought out by DEFA in 1957 indicates that a noticeable shift in East German filmmaking took place after these changes were made. Alongside the large-scale, state-commissioned socialist realist production *Schlösser und Katen*, the year's releases included works by a second generation of filmmakers – most notably, Gerhard Klein, Wolfgang Kohlhaase and Konrad Wolf – who took advantage of new liberties in terms of content, genre and style.

Strongly supported by the state, Kurt Maetzig's *Schlösser und Katen*, like his earlier two-part Thälmann biopic (1954, 1955), epitomised socialist realist artistic conventions. In his glowing March 1957 review of the film, Klaus Wischnewski fires a salvo into the debate on socialist realism and artistic freedom that had raged throughout the previous year:

Der Film *Schlösser und Katen* kommt wie aufs Stichwort als künstlerisch gestaltete 'Stellungnahme' für den sozialistischen Realismus! In den Jahren angeblicher totaler künstlerischer Unfreiheit war Kuba [the scriptwriter Kurt Barthel] so frei, das Material für diesen Film zu sammeln und ihn zu schreiben. Und im Jahre der Diskussion um die absolute Freiheit waren Kurt Maetzig und seine Mitarbeiter so frei, diesen Film für die Arbeiter und Bauern unserer Republik zu drehen.²⁴

But while the Thälmann titles canonised the German communist leader who died at the hands of the National Socialists in August 1944 as the spiritual father of East Germany, the 1957 film tells the saga of those who built up the country after the end of the War. Set in rural East Germany from 1945 to 1953, *Schlösser und Katen* follows life in a small village and a nearby estate through initial hunger years and the process of agricultural collectivisation. Given its role as the model iteration of East German foundation myths, it is perhaps not surprising

that *Schlösser und Katen* should also explicitly and centrally thematise the events of June 1953. Indeed, the film's treatment of what came to be known as *der Tag X*, or 'Day X', gives us a baseline on official orthodoxy regarding representation of the popular uprising.

As the film opens, the local wealthy landowners – the count and his wife – are fleeing the advancing Russians, leaving behind a chaos of refugees, farm labourers and smaller landholders. From the start, the count's foreman, Bröker, and his family try to manipulate the situation to their advantage. When the benign Soviet forces arrive, they quickly set about establishing a new order, providing people with housing, food and work. In a few years there begins the project of establishing an agricultural collective (LPG), a development that is greeted in a range of ways by different characters; it is this diversity that is being praised in the passage above. The leading advocate of collectivisation is a charismatic young German mechanic, Heinz, who has returned from the USSR with modern technology and know-how. Heinz also wins the love of the young female lead, Annegret.

Unbeknownst to all but her parents, Annegret's birth resulted from the rape of her mother by the count; a series of events and relationships devolving from this fact becomes one of the film's two intertwined plotlines. Meanwhile, Bröker's son has slipped away to the nearby West, where he has become involved in a revanchist plot by Western powers to retake the Soviet zone. The countess secretly visits the other landholders to sabotage the attempts of the LPG and prepare for Day X. On the night of 16 June 1953, young Bröker then sneaks home to alert his parents and others that the time has come. He points out that Eastern stocks are going up and tunes into reports of unrest on the West Berlin radio station, RIAS (Radio in the American Sector). The building confrontation between the landholders and collective farmers dissipates when they discover the murder of Christel, a young widow and refugee from East Prussia who has become the head of the LPG. The camera cuts to where Bröker, the murderer, is trying to escape through a wooded area near the river that marks the border to the West Zone. Through an opening in the trees, we see a series of tanks rumbling by, presumably on their way to Berlin. Bröker's escape is foiled by Annegret's father and a German border patrol. The film then turns to the resolution of the plotline involving Annegret's identity and her relationship with Heinz, thereby distancing the Day X

plot by framing it within the tropes of romantic love and the *Bildungsroman*.

In *Schlösser und Katen* the party line on 17 June 1953 is thus crystal clear: the uprising was the result of Western warmongering, implemented on the ground by means of agitating a disgruntled and dishonest local bourgeoisie, natural allies of the capitalist forces we never see. The natural ally of the hardworking, honest and democratic locals, the Soviet Union, is represented in more concrete, but likewise mediated fashion. When Soviet forces first arrive, they are depicted by tanks and trucks driving toward the camera, but any sense of threat is quickly dispelled. Indeed, the role of representing a benevolent Soviet presence in *Schlösser und Katen* is transferred onto the charismatic, young German, Heinz, who has come home with the technical information and outlook needed to build a better life. In contrast, the Soviet role in quelling the June 1953 uprising is referred to only obliquely; while we see tanks in the distance, protecting the hard-won advances of socialism, no mention at all is made of Soviet involvement. The rural setting of *Schlösser und Katen*, in fact, removes the confrontation of 17 June 1953 from the urban and industrial settings in which it originated and with which it was identified, so that the uprising becomes an external occurrence – threatening, but nevertheless distant.

Direct confrontation with this official interpretation of 17 June was entirely off-limits for East German filmmakers. Indeed, any mention of the events at all was strictly taboo before 1989. The social and economic issues that had come to a head in the uprising, however – including difficult living conditions, flagging morale in the building of socialism, problematic relations both between workers and intellectuals and with the Soviet occupiers, and the magnetism of the West – were soon being addressed by younger filmmakers head-on. Konrad Wolf's *Sonnensucher* (1958), for example, presents us with radically shifted representations of the Soviet presence, the threat of war, and East German society itself. Encouraged by the 'thaw' promised at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, which he had attended and addressed in an October 1958 article in *Deutsche Filmkunst*, Wolf undertook to portray a highly dramatic and differentiated view of the Nazi past, Stalinist political practices and the energetic chaos of the early post-war period. As Jennifer Good remarks, 'the artistry of the film lies in its neorealist attention to detail

within its socialist realist narrative.’²⁵ Stylistically, the film combines Wolf’s Russian training with traits of Italian neorealism, characterised by stories set among the post-war poor and working classes and filmed on location, frequently using non-professional actors. The film also makes explicit references to G.W. Pabst’s 1931 mining film, *Kameradschaft*, and to American depictions of the Wild West.

Set in the top-secret Wismut uranium mines in 1950, *Sonnensucher* portrays a ragtag group of voluntary and involuntary participants in the project of capturing ‘the power of the sun’ – ostensibly as a means to ensure continued peace in an age of nuclear bombs. Amidst the anarchy of a mining camp is an array of adventurers, poor souls and forced labourers. Among them is Lutz, a young woman who lost her parents as a child and has been going from one bad situation to another since the end of the War. In the mining community, Lutz becomes the romantic object of a competition between the German foreman Beier, a former Nazi, and the Soviet engineer Sergei, whose wife was killed by the SS during the war. Despite their rivalry, the two men work together in the interest of the project goals they share. At the end, Lutz chooses Beier, who respects and protects her, but she seems to love Sergei.

Barton Byg saw the film thus:

a socialist story of ‘atoms for peace’ and compulsory labor in an East German uranium mine under Soviet control, the film is impressive even today, in its political complexity, variety of characters, and realistic portrayal of daily work in a forbidden zone of the industrial landscape.²⁶

It is impossible to know how audiences or critics would have responded to *Sonnensucher* in 1958, as the film was banned at Soviet insistence just before its release. Possible reasons included ‘Soviet concern with international talks on the control of atomic weapons,’²⁷ the film’s disclosure of the secret uranium mining project, and its depiction of conflict between Soviet management and German workers and communists. But the power of the film is undeniable. Its release became one of Wolf’s first priorities when Honecker’s ascension to power in 1971 signalled a change in cultural policies, and the film enjoyed a further revival in 1989 in the company of the eleven other ‘Rabbit films’ banned during the 1965 *Kahlschlag*.

In contrast to *Sonnensucher*, responses to another film that was heavily influenced by Italian neorealism and portrayed ‘marginal’

members of GDR society are well-documented. *Berlin – Ecke Schönhauser* (1957), the third and most influential of four 'Berlin films' by director Gerhard Klein and scriptwriter Wolfgang Kohlhaase, was significant on several counts, as encapsulated by Barton Byg. First, these filmmakers sought to develop a 'critical entertainment cinema; as an alternative to Stalinist Socialist Realism.' Second, they attempted to revive the populist aesthetic of Weimar-period Berlin films, which had been considered suspect 'since Stalinist elements had crystallised in the East.' Stylistically, their films 'attended to small-scale issues with neo-realist aesthetics to make films that looked shockingly different from the grand, instructive, uplifting films of classic Socialist Realism.' Technically, 'they used grainy, high-speed newsreel stock; they filmed on location with minimal supplementary lighting; they employed lay actors and sometimes featured children as protagonists.'²⁸

Berlin – Ecke Schönhauser became the classic East German contribution to the international 'youth film' genre, with which the filmmakers were clearly familiar. Byg reasons that Klein and Kohlhaase 'would not have dared cite either the taboo films of the pre-Stalinist past or the immensely popular youth films from the West, such as *Blackboard Jungle* or *The Wild One*.' But he also points out that

the fact that the latter films had caused a number of riots among teenagers in West German cities – as well as in Berlin, where East Germans could still cross into the Allied zone to join audiences – attests to both the demand for films that addressed real issues facing young people and the terror such works could instill in the generally conservative political leadership of both German states.²⁹

In *Berlin – Ecke Schönhauser* a group of teenage boys and one girl, Angela, hang out under the S-Bahn trestles above Schönhauser Allee, where they horse around, make stupid bets, and dance to rock'n'roll. Angela must vacate the apartment twice a week, when her mother's boyfriend visits. Dieter, an orphan, is a Marlon Brando-like tough guy; although he has a steady job in construction, he refuses the invitations of co-workers to join the Freie Deutsche Jugend and wholeheartedly embrace a squeaky-clean socialist lifestyle. The gentle Kohle is avoiding an abusive father and spends all his pocket money going to the movies in West Berlin. Karl-Heinz is from a well-off family that entertains the thought of moving to the West; he has

dropped out of school because it no longer interests him and is now involved in illegal currency exchanges and other black market dealings with shady characters in West Berlin. After a series of events set off by these dealings, Dieter and Kohle flee to the West, where they are questioned and interned with other youths as part of an immigration process that is depicted as unfeeling, if not downright hostile. These interactions are set in stark contrast to the relationship the youths have at home with a concerned and committed East Berlin policeman, who is trying to get Kohle an apprenticeship. In the denouement, Kohle dies trying to make himself sick and Dieter returns to his neighbourhood and Angela; Karl-Heinz gets ten years in prison. That social order is restored is emphasised by the last line spoken by the friendly policeman – ‘Wo wir nicht sind, sind unsere Feinde’ – which Byg translates as: ‘If we’re not there [for our young people], our enemies will be.’³⁰

In September 1957, *Berlin – Ecke Schönhauser* received a somewhat mixed, but overall positive review from Klaus Wischnewski in *Deutsche Filmkunst*, despite the negative estimation of *Gegenwartsfilme* he had expressed in his review of *Schlösser und Katen* six months earlier.³¹ A year later, however, within a long article on ‘Aktuelle Probleme und Aufgaben unserer sozialistischen Filmkunst’, Secretary of State and Deputy Minister of Culture Alexander Abusch conducted a sustained critique of youth films, focusing on their unwitting use of ‘bürgerlichen Denkweisen und Vorstellungen’ and the tendency ‘anormale oder gar abnorme Figuren als angeblich interessantere Filmfiguren zu bevorzugen, was der Kunstauffassung der bürgerlichen Dekadenz entspricht.’³² After he further bemoans the paucity of engaged adult working-class and communist role models, it becomes clear that these social representations are not Abusch’s main complaint. Directly addressing *Berlin – Ecke Schönhauser*, which ‘interessiert uns besonders, [wegen] der Entwicklung solch starker künstlerischer Kräfte für die Gegenwartsthematik, wie unsere Freunde Kohlhaase und Klein,’ Abusch attributes what he considers a failure of political vision and commitment to the conventions of Italian neorealism. He concludes with a Byzantine analysis of why, as the product of a capitalist film industry, neorealism can never surpass a critique of the social conditions within the nation and is, therefore, merely critical realism; only socialist countries, like the Soviet Union, are capable of making true socialist realist art.³³

In the Abusch article, as elsewhere, it is clear that Kohlhaase and Klein had earned the respect of the cultural authorities; indeed, both Klein and Kohlhaase were *Nationalpreisträger*. But it is just as clear that they were pushing the limits in terms of both content and style. In the next issue of *Deutsche Filmkunst* there appeared articles by both Kohlhaase and Klein addressing this and other criticism their films had received.³⁴ In their own way both authors seem to try to strike a balance between an honest discussion of the issues, and a (presumably required) exercise in self-criticism. Kohlhaase's article, in particular, seems angry and at times tongue-in-cheek, as it alternates between verbal genuflections, self-justification and anecdotes that are thinly veiled critiques of cultural policies. Despite their promise as young filmmakers, Klein and Kohlhaase's fourth Berlin film, *Berlin um die Ecke*, was one of the twelve banned in 1965, alongside *Das Kaninchen bin ich* by, ironically, Kurt Maetzig.

Sonnensucher and *Berlin – Ecke Schönhauser* are but two examples of films made in the second half of the 1950s in which filmmakers sought stylistically and ideologically to break out of the strictures of socialist realism, draw on non-Soviet sources, and treat some of the issues that had come to a head and been repressed in 1953. Given the multitude of social and political factors at work in the GDR in the mid 1950s, it would be both impossible and unwise to make a simple bilateral connection between the aesthetic and political challenges waged by certain DEFA filmmakers in this period and the 17 June uprising. At the same time, it seems safe to assume that at that point the (still recent) uprising was very much present in their mental landscape. But can we interpret the continued ban on making films about 17 June 1953 as evidence of the on-going presence of the suppressed uprising in the minds of the leadership? Can films help us evaluate the extent to which 1953 did, indeed, represent a persistent shadow side of East German foundation myths? One way to get at these questions is to look at what happened during the 'peaceful revolution' of autumn 1989 and in the last films made by East German filmmakers.

On 16 October 1989, after long uncertainty and delay, three DEFA documentary crews were finally dispatched to film the growing activism in Leipzig, Dresden and Berlin. In describing his reasons for wanting to shoot the 1989 demonstrations, Gerd Kroske, part of the Leipzig crew, referred to the 17 June uprising:

I also had a personal motive; namely, the ‘blank spot’ in DEFA film history represented by 17 June 1953. These events that took place in summer 1953 were not documented by former DEFA colleagues. I always felt that this was embarrassing and did not want to repeat this situation myself.³⁵

This time the protests were indeed caught on camera, in the rapidly-edited, prize-winning *Leipzig im Herbst* (1989), directed by Kroske and Andreas Voigt. As Voigt points out, however, things could have worked out differently; although

the [interim studio manager] was as worked up as we were [...] to be on the safe side, he declared the shooting was ‘for archival purposes’. That meant: if things had worked out differently, the material would have simply disappeared into the archive.³⁶

An unprecedented situation occurred in the DEFA studios between November 1989 and when they closed in 1991: the annual filmmaking budget was still in place, but the approval and censorship apparatus and procedures had fallen apart. Filmmakers found themselves in the unique situation of having access to funds, personnel, equipment and permission without necessarily having a film project in the pipeline. Some of the directors who took advantage of the opportunity to make a film at this point, such as Ulrich Weiß, had a history of serious problems with the censors; others had been part of the last generation of filmmakers at DEFA and had spent years in the studio without having the opportunity to direct a film. In both cases, the films that came to fruition between 1990 and 1992 were often the result of long-deferred, pet projects. Films made in this period most often depicted life in the GDR from a new perspective or focused on stories related to flashpoints in Eastern Bloc history.

Addressing 1953 became the subject of two films, one a documentary and one a feature film. Andrea Ritterbusch’s documentary *Wehe den Besiegten – der 17. Juni 1953* (1990) explores both the events and people’s memories of 17 June 1953, blending historic footage of the uprising with interviews of people who participated and were punished for taking part. Of particular interest in the context of this study is footage of a demonstration that was held on 17 June 1990 in memory of ‘all victims’ of the East German state. It is here that the witness Ruth von Cancrin is interviewed, as she tries to find out what happened to her husband thirty-seven years earlier.

Herwig Kipping's first feature-length film, *Das Land hinter dem Regenbogen* (1991), is at the opposite end of the spectrum from documentary. As Leonie Naughton remarks in her pioneering book on filmmaking and German unification, Kipping's film, like others, 'disavows the [post-unification] Western equation of East Germany with the rural idyll.'³⁷ Indeed, it would be closer to say that he proposes 'the East as the antithesis of *Heimat*'.³⁸ Originally entitled *Schaukelpferd im Regen*, Kipping's film was to be based on his childhood in rural East Germany in the early 1950s. Despite his difficulty in getting permission to make a film in the GDR, thanks to a 1986 scholarship Kipping conducted research about this period with family and friends in the village of Mayen. As Reinhild Steingröver points out, however, the film would never have been approved in the form it took. Kipping had already made waves with his thesis and diploma film in 1982, which drew heavily on the Russian avant-garde:

Like the early Russians, Kipping had propagated a concept of socialist avant-garde art that merges life and art, but not through the liquidation of art as art itself (as in some Western conceptions of the avant-garde) but in a merging of the political and artistic.³⁹

Highly allegorical and bitingly critical, *Das Land hinter dem Regenbogen* is set in an anarchic village named Stalina in 1953. In the midst of its nasty society, in which there exists every corruption and hypocrisy imaginable, the child Marie tells her vision of a land beyond the rainbow in a sort of philosophical poetry spoken directly into the camera's lens. She is loved by two boys: the sadistic Hans, and the idealistic Rainbow-Maker. The Rainbow-Maker's grandfather, the village elder, speaks to a holy bust of Stalin, leads communal rites dedicated to his idol, and hopes to make Stalina into a paradise. Radio programmes playing in the background report the grief that grips the globe upon Stalin's death. Meanwhile, Stalina's agricultural collective is in disarray. When Heinrich is deposed as its head, he launches an attack – apparently on 17 June 1953 – upon the visiting district leaders of the Party in their local office in the public outhouse. Soviet soldiers intervene. Hans blows himself up. At the end, the grandfather is crucified on a border-post draped in the black, red and gold flag, and Marie and the Rainbow-Maker set out into the devastated landscape.

The rural setting within a struggling agricultural collective already indicates that *Das Land hinter dem Regenbogen* is, in some way, a

nightmarish revisiting of Maetzig's *Schlösser und Katen*. Here the lines between social structures are so hazy that mayhem flourishes in the interstices. Roving bandits terrorise the children in the woods and cellars, weapons and mines explode haphazardly across the landscape, rotting, death and disarray are everywhere. Whereas in *Schlösser und Katen* hard-working farmers convene in neat courtyards and homes to create fair and democratic institutions, the meetings of the dissolute LPG members in *Das Land hinter dem Regenbogen* take place on a huge manure pile, centrally located near the outhouse that serves as the seat of both official power and corruption. The clearest contrast between the two films, however, may be in their gender representations. While Maetzig depicts focused, hard-headed women, placing education in the hands of Annegret and community responsibility in the hands of Christel, in Kipping's film a brutish heterosexuality reigns; women (and children) are repeatedly disenfranchised, humiliated and violated.

In *Das Land hinter dem Regenbogen*, Kipping clearly envisioned a reckoning with the German Democratic Republic, even as it was evaporating. It is no coincidence that the events of 1953 provide the focal point for that reckoning. The film's press kit included a telling citation from Luis Buñuel's autobiography: 'We deny our history and invent, make up a new one. We are afraid of what we have done. Subconsciously we sense our guilt and deny it.'⁴⁰ By 1992, the window of opportunity for East German filmmakers to concentrate on the story of their country had closed.

Conclusion

Although it is difficult to disentangle multiple historical strands and arrive at any clear sense of cause and effect, a few things do emerge from this evaluation of the impact of 17 June 1953 on East German filmmaking. First, it is clear that many of the filmmakers working in the 1950s proceeded to institute organisational changes at the DEFA studios meant to address questions of working conditions and artistic freedom, in keeping with the themes voiced during the uprising. Second, some filmmakers also pioneered significant changes in the style and content of their work. Third, the revisiting of 1953 by filmmakers during the period 1990-92 supports the growing historical consensus that, far from being an inconsequential event in Eastern Bloc history, the uprising of 17 June 1953 'foreshadowed the deep

crisis of legitimacy that would finally overtake the GDR and the Soviet control of Eastern Europe in autumn 1989.⁴¹ Finally, in its haunting portrayal of the shadow image of GDR foundation myths, *Das Land hinter dem Regenbogen* makes it clear that the watershed year of 1953 is crucial to understanding the hypocrisy and repression that twisted at the root of the nation to the very end.

Notes

¹ See Daniela Berghahn, 'Film Censorship in a "Clean State": the Case of Klein and Kohlhaase's *Berlin um die Ecke*', in: Beate Müller, ed., *Censorship & Cultural Regulation in the Modern Age*, Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2004, pp. 111-39, and Stefan Soldovieri, 'Negotiating Censorship: GDR Film at the Juncture of 1965/66', Ph.D. Diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1998.

² See the interview with Christoph Klessmann included in the 2008 DVD release of Andrea Ritterbusch's 1990 documentary film *Wehe den Besiegten – der 17. Juni 1953*, Berlin: Icestorm Entertainment, 2008, and the Introduction and Acknowledgements to Christian F. Ostermann's edited volume, *Uprising in East Germany 1953: The Cold War, the German Question, and the First Major Upheaval behind the Iron Curtain*, Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2001, pp. xix-xxv.

³ Charles S. Maier, 'Preface', in: *Uprising in East Germany 1953*, p. xvii.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ostermann, *Uprising in East Germany 1953*, pp. xxxi-xxxvii.

⁶ Ibid., p. xxii.

⁷ Ritterbusch, *Wehe den Besiegten – der 17. Juni 1953*.

⁸ Interview with Bahr in *Wehe den Besiegten – der 17. Juni 1953*.

⁹ Ralf Schenk, ed., *Eine kleine Geschichte der DEFA: Daten, Dokumente, Erinnerungen*, Berlin: DEFA Stiftung, 2006, p. 77.

¹⁰ Ingrid Poss and Peter Warneke, eds, *Spur der Filme: Zeitzeugen über die DEFA*, Berlin: Ch. Links, 2006, pp. 89-90.

¹¹ Günther Jordan, 'Der Verrat oder Der Fall Falk Harnack', in: Ralf Schenk, Erika Richter and Claus Löser, eds, *apropos: Film 2004 – Das 5. Jahrbuch der DEFA-Stiftung*, Berlin: Bertz + Fischer Verlag, 2004, pp. 148-73.

- ¹² Ibid., pp. 148 and 165.
- ¹³ Ibid., p. 166.
- ¹⁴ Günther Jordan, 'Der Verrat oder Der Fall Falk Harnack', p. 166.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., p. 165.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Cyril Buffet, *Défunte DEFA: histoire de l'autre cinéma allemande*, Paris and Condé-sur Noireau: Cerf, 2007, p. 74.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 94-6.
- ²⁰ Kurt Maetzig, 'Die Zeit ist reif', *Deutsche Filmkunst*, 9 (1956), 257-60 (here: p. 257).
- ²¹ Ibid., p. 258-9.
- ²² Regarding developments in Polish film see Ludwig Starsky, 'Erste Ehrfahrungen mit Produktionsgruppen in Polen', *Deutsche Filmkunst*, 11 (1956), 346-7; 'Dezentralisierung des Filmwesens in Volkspolen.' *Deutsche Filmkunst*, 8 (1956), 255; and 'Der Themenplan des polnischen Films im Zeichen der Produktionsgruppen', *Deutsche Filmkunst*, 6 (1956), 190-1. Czechoslovakian developments were discussed in Daniel, František, 'Produktionsgruppen in der CSR', *Deutsche Filmkunst*, 12 (1956), 364.
- ²³ Dieter Wolf, 'Das kurze Leben der Gruppe SOLIDARITÄT: Erinnerungen eines Hauptdramaturgen', in: Ralf Schenk, Erika Richter and Claus Löser, eds, *apropos: Film 2005. Das 6. Jahrbuch der DEFA-Stiftung*, Berlin: Bertz + Fischer Verlag, 2005, pp. 243-63 (here: p. 243).
- ²⁴ Klaus Wischnewski, 'Lebenswahrheit und Parteilichkeit – Schlösser und Katen', *Deutsche Filmkunst*, 3 (1957), 68-71 and 84 (here: pp. 68-9).
- ²⁵ Jennifer Good, Introduction to *Schlösser und Katen* DVD, Amherst, MA: DEFA Film Library, 2004.
- ²⁶ Barton Byg, *Sonnensucher*, DEFA Film Library, www.umass.edu/defa (accessed 25 November 2009).
- ²⁷ Good, Introduction to *Schlösser und Katen*.

²⁸ Barton Byg, Introduction to DVD of *Berlin – Ecke Schönhauser*, Amherst, MA: DEFA Film Library, 2007.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Klaus Wischnewski, 'Wer sind wir? – Berlin – Ecke Schönhauser', *Deutsche Filmkunst*, 9 (1957), 264-6.

³² Alexander Abusch, 'Aktuelle Probleme und Aufgaben unserer sozialistischen Filmkunst', *Deutsche Filmkunst*, 9 (1958), 261-70 (here: pp. 266-7).

³³ Ibid., pp. 267-8.

³⁴ Gerhard Klein, 'Das Grosse im Kleinen spiegeln', *Deutsche Filmkunst*, 10 (1958), 300-1, and Wolfgang Kohlhaase, 'Das Neue in neuen Formen gestalten', *Deutsche Filmkunst*, 10 (1958), 298-300.

³⁵ Gerd Kroske, Interview, *Leipzig im Herbst*, Amherst, MA: DEFA Film Library, 2009, DVD.

³⁶ Andreas Voigt, Interview, *Leipzig im Herbst*.

³⁷ Leonie Naughton, *That Was the Wild East: Film Culture, Unification, and the 'New' Germany*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2002, p. 214.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 227.

³⁹ Reinhild Steingröver, 'Blackbox GDR – DEFA's Untimely Avant-Garde', in: Randall Halle and Reinhild Steingröver, eds, *After the Avant-Garde: Contemporary German and Austrian Film*, Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2008, p. 122.

⁴⁰ Cited in Steingröver, 'Blackbox GDR – DEFA's Untimely Avant-Garde', p. 124.

⁴¹ Maier, *Uprising in East Germany 1953*, p. xvii.

Kristine Nielsen

***Quid pro quo:*
Assessing the Value of Berlin's Thälmann Monument**

The Thälmann Monument, conceived by the artist Lev Kerbel and erected in East Berlin's district of Prenzlauer Berg in 1986, was one of the only major political monuments in Berlin that the SED constituted as a special gift to the people of Berlin. Its dedication took on a highly theatrical character in which the SED staged the act of gift giving, suggesting that its intended memorial functions went beyond those of commemoration, education, and veneration; rather, the monument demands a more nuanced examination of the social relationships surrounding the dedicatory ritual. Rather than judge monuments according to a template of artistic, historical, or ethical criteria, this chapter explores how artistic objects accrue social value and provoke public attention and defence.

During the Austro-Italo-French war of 1859, Karl Marx wrote a series of articles comparing the political events on the European stage to a theatrical performance. In particular, he turned Prussia's self-proclaimed portrayal as a mediator between warring nations into a comedy in three acts. The first act exposed Prussia's perverse tricks performed in an effort to appear powerful. The second act revealed, in Marx's words, the 'hollowness', 'illusion' and 'misty image' of Prussia's rhetoric, designed to euphemistically hide its 'secret thoughts' and self-interests. In the third act, Marx showed how Prussia sought recognition for its role as a powerful leader. According to Marx, Prussia deliberately staged an image of good social relations through its diplomatic strategies and mistook an image of an anticipated triumph for actual victory. Prussia was engaged, according to Marx, in an act of *quid pro quo*.¹

Marx adhered to the French definition of the Latin phrase meaning the confusion of one thing with another, or a misunderstanding or mistaken substitution (*quiproquo*), a phrase often used in connection with theatre performance. A more traditional definition of *quid pro quo* describes an attitude of reciprocity in a social arrangement; it is a conditional negotiation between two parties, based on the expectation that the other will repay a given favour. The threat of retaliation exists should one party violate the social contract, leaving open the possibility that some form of retribution will take place if proper reavment

fails to materialise.² *Quid pro quo* is in many ways similar to the giving of a gift, for these social exchanges benefit and reinforce the social order while requiring a return that upholds that order.

In 1986, the SED party presented the Thälmann monument as a gift to the people of Berlin.³ Gift giving was a thoroughly common practice in the GDR, but the Thälmann monument represents one of the only major political monuments in Berlin endowed so heavily with the character of a gift by the government.⁴ This special feature signals that the monument's intended functions went beyond those of commemoration, education, and veneration, and thus demand a more nuanced examination of the social relationships surrounding the monument. This essay approaches the cultural history of the Thälmann monument through the optic of *quid pro quo*, conceived both as a confused, erroneous act and a social arrangement of expected reciprocity.⁵ Placing the Thälmann monument within the context of a greater social exchange shifts the focus away from the value judgments of the early 1990s, when the political monuments of East Germany became victims of endless critique and were threatened with destruction.⁶ Rather than judge the monuments according to a template of criteria that determine their artistic, historical, or ethical value, or lack thereof, this essay considers their value based on the responses produced in relation to them.⁷ It argues that the Thälmann monument gained social value precisely because of the attention it demanded both before and after 1989.

An Image of Victory

In 1981, at the Tenth Party Congress and after thirty-two years in the planning process, the SED confirmed arrangements for the erection of a monument honouring the German antifascist Ernst Thälmann, a prominent communist leader in Berlin between 1925 and 1933 who was killed by the Nazis in 1944. In the 1979-81 version of the planned project, the Politburo envisaged the monument as a frontispiece to a building complex called the Ernst-Thälmann-Park in Berlin's district of Prenzlauer Berg. The planned community was to consist of 1,336 newly constructed apartments over twenty-six hectares of land with grocery stores, shops, restaurants and entertainment, institutional facilities for education, culture and sports, a museum dedicated to Thälmann,⁸ and a renovated train station renamed, to the annoyance of many commuters, the S-Bahnhof 'Ernst-Thälmann-Park'.⁹ Soon to

open in the Park was a planetarium, 'das Zeiss-Großplanetarium Ernst-Thälmann-Park', a grand theatre exhibiting the technological and scientific progress of the GDR in astronomy.¹⁰ By all accounts, its makers portrayed the Ernst-Thälmann-Park as a microcosm of an advanced socialist society where the Thälmann monument, a 'symbol of antifascism',¹¹ would serve as the gateway entrance into this progressive socialist community. The image would show, as Honecker imagined, how 'die Thälmannsche Garde, seinem Vermächtnis getreu, unser Volk in die sozialistische Gegenwart und die kommunistische Zukunft führt.'¹²

For the project, the SED commissioned the Soviet sculptor Lev Kerbel, who collaborated with Erhard Giesske, the director-general of building projects, and a team of architects and urban planners.¹³ It was apparently Honecker's decision to hire a Soviet artist rather than adhere to the initial plan, which recommended employing a GDR sculptor from the Verband Bildender Künstler. East German artists and intellectuals responded in an uproar when the news was made public on 3 March 1982 in *Neues Deutschland*.¹⁴ One critic expressed his disapproval of the selection of a Soviet artist in a letter to the SED's regional management, only to be reprimanded immediately for his outspoken criticism of the leadership.¹⁵ By inviting a Soviet sculptor to create a national monument honouring a German antifascist, Honecker was implying the nation's debt to the Soviet Union. This reliance on a Soviet model was curiously anachronistic by 1986 in that Gorbachev's emerging reforms, which had resonated sufficiently with the SED regime, became perceived as a threat to Honecker's political model. As a gesture of diplomacy, the act of commissioning a Soviet artist for a state monument would provide, at the very least, an appearance of good relations.

Creating the perfect scenic view of the planned Thälmann monument required the eradication of old structures in its immediate vicinity. The Central Committee, spurred by Kerbel, ordered the destruction of three gasometers listed under monument protection as Berlin's oldest gasworks in the district of Prenzlauer Berg.¹⁶ Unanticipated by the leadership, almost 200 East Berliners protested their destruction on the grounds that the gasworks were historical monuments worthy of preservation. In light of the opposition, the SED defended its destruction of the gasworks by conveying its good intentions on behalf of the people's well-being: the leadership was

concerned, it explained, with the pollution generated by these nineteenth-century gasometers.¹⁷

The protest did not prevent the bronze Thälmann statue from obtaining its allocated view and space, and it still stands today *in situ*. The statue represents a portrait bust of the German communist leader from Hamburg shown with his characteristic bald head, thick neck, worker's shirt, and raised fist symbolising the gesture of the Red Front. The colossal head gazes resolutely toward the centre of Berlin while framed from behind by the flag of the Spartacist League of the German Revolution, the top of the flagpole displaying the hammer and sickle. Both the artist and leadership created visual effects that would persuade the viewer of the monument's striking presence. Using the sky as the monument's background, the artist exploited an ancient visual trick that strengthens an illusion of monumentality.¹⁸ The importance of the monument's perpetual visibility was made evident by the installation of an internal heating mechanism inside the nose of the bronze head.¹⁹ The heated nose prevented snow from jeopardising one's sight of the face during the winter months.

A significant component of the monument's visual presentation results from the bronze pedestal and two-step platform of red Ukrainian granite. Larger than life-size, the pedestal dwarfs and excludes the viewer through the distance it demands. What the platform lacked in grandeur, it gained in symbolic value: the granite was proclaimed a gift from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to the GDR. More accurately, the GDR's council of ministers had in fact specifically asked for a supply of granite from the Soviet Union for the Thälmann statue because the GDR did not have the resources, a request that complicates its sincere designation as a gift. The granite was supplied to them a month later.²⁰

Bronze was the preferred material for monuments in the GDR because of the material's prestige and permanence, but while the durability of bronze appeared near infinite, the state's material supplies were not. Decades before the actual construction of Berlin's Thälmann monument, the state secretary of material supplies in the GDR suggested to the political elite that metals be collected wherever possible, gathering them from everyday items in order to obtain enough bronze for the construction of the monument. Wood, he suggested, could be used instead of metal for household objects such as doorframes.²¹ The Thälmann monument's fifty tonnes of bronze –

rising well above the horizon at a height of thirteen metres and a width of sixteen metres – poses the question of the costs required for this generous gift to the people. The regime had always placed superior value on this particular state image, yet they apparently did so at the expense of the more day-to-day household items that quickly lagged in quality. Regardless of the costs, the dimensions of the monument remained of the utmost importance to its makers, who believed its size should be symbolically equivalent to the magnitude of the represented hero's greatness.²²

Viewers' criticism of the Thälmann monument's appearance, both before and after 1990, primarily addressed its physical proportions. The kind of 'megalomania' that the Thälmann monument exhibited was exactly what the East German sculptor Fritz Cremer had been arguing against for thirty years.²³ 'Hättetet ühr's nich ne Nummer grösser?' mocked a graffiti artist in 1991 in writing inscribed on the monument's stone steps.²⁴ To many, the image exaggerated and distorted what seemed a shallow signifier. It is 'plakativ', 'abartig', said one viewer.²⁵ Others characterised it as a grossly enlarged badge, a pin-on button advertising a political slogan, a giant stamp.²⁶

The post-1989 visual descriptions of the Thälmann monument emphasise, in particular, its theatrical character. The waving flag behind the bronze head and the space around the monument are formed according to baroque architectural principles.²⁷ Four diagonal paths run from the square outward in different, but symmetrical directions, creating a decidedly open and dynamic, ornamental form. The way in which the flag behind Thälmann's head functions as a theatrical backdrop struck some as too pompous, stripping the monument of any proper moral or aesthetic value.²⁸ The grotesque, the alien, and the absurdly pretentious came to characterise the Thälmann portrait bust, the bald head comically referred to as the 'Monsterschädel'.²⁹ In the eyes of many Berliners, before and after 1990, what the image was pretending to be seemed thoroughly incongruous with what it actually was.

Averting one's gaze became a regular practice among viewers when confronted with heavily ideological imagery before 1989.³⁰ This was especially the case for the Thälmann monument, which seemed to demand to be honoured in a way that appeared dangerously close to the act of worshipping a divinity. Indeed, in the 1990s, the monument was publicly referred to as the 'Thälmann-Altar'.³¹ Viewers often

compared the rectangular block pedestal to a sarcophagus or an altar due to its table-like shape, a comparison further facilitated by the space guiding the viewer up to the pedestal.³² The physical space situated the monument as if it were a ‘temple’, even invoking an ‘apsidal’ space.³³ It suggested, provocatively, that the viewer obey the image as a ‘gewaltigen Motivbild’.³⁴ To these viewers, the Thälmann monument was an idol, a false image of the sacred, which begs the questions: Was the monument a false image of an icon or an image of a false icon? Was the perception of Ernst Thälmann as a hero the real error?

The Myth of Ernst Thälmann

The modified historical representation of Ernst Thälmann that emerged among German scholars in the early 1990s caused the Thälmann monument to be perceived as intolerable for yet another reason: it did not do justice to the historical *in*-significance of its subject.³⁵ Ernst Thälmann was a former dockworker from Hamburg, known during his lifetime as a simple man with narrow-minded views. In 1927, the German communist politician Clara Zetkin described Thälmann as unschooled in theory, uninformed, and under the delusion that he was Germany’s Lenin. In 1950, Ruth Fischer, a Jewish communist leader in Berlin in the 1920s, also remembered Thälmann as uneducated, describing his difficulty with Marxist terminology and foreign words.³⁶ The straightforward, though disconnected messages in his speeches from the late 1920s and early 1930s appealed primarily to the emotions, demonstrating his penchant for addressing the masses by direct and affective means. His potential for mass appeal, combined with his uncritical support for Stalin, led Stalin to appoint him leader of the KPD despite Thälmann’s unpopularity among German communists.³⁷ After the Reichstag Fire Decree in 1933, which banned the KPD, Thälmann spent the final eleven years of his life imprisoned, until he was transferred to Buchenwald and shot by the SS in 1944.

Post-unification scholarship has stressed the ways in which the SED thoroughly mythologised Ernst Thälmann in order to maintain the image of a hero. Omitted from official GDR accounts, for example, was the fact that while at Buchenwald Thälmann had hoped to be favoured by the communist Kapos, who regularly and secretly replaced communist prisoners with non-communists on the execution

list. In return, the communists helped the SS carry out the torture and execution.³⁸ Thälmann's correspondence with Stalin from prison and his pleas for release, knowing Stalin's Nazi connections, were deliberately excluded from historical records in the GDR.³⁹ It was an open secret before his death that communist and socialist leaders saw Thälmann as more valuable as a victim dying for the antifascist cause than a survivor living in exile in Moscow.

The re-creation of Thälmann as a national hero after 1949 required his insertion into a national legacy. The earliest artistic competitions for a Thälmann monument in Berlin, sketched out in 1949-50, show the agenda clearly: Thälmann was to be directly linked with the identity of the nation through the establishment of a secular religion that would emphasise the nation's ideology. Thälmann, 'Germany's immortal son', had given his life so that the German Democratic Republic could be born.⁴⁰ The Thälmann icon continued and strengthened with time so that, by 1988, a children's biography of Thälmann, relying heavily on quotes by Honecker, spoke at length of Thälmann's afterlife and how his spirit lived on in the GDR.⁴¹ In general, the myths often aimed to transform him into a secular and figurative Christ figure through concepts such as persecution, martyrdom, and resurrection.⁴²

Based on the idea that Thälmann sacrificed his life for the love of his country and the faith in his beliefs, he was enshrined by the SED and especially by Erich Honecker. During his leadership, Honecker saw himself as akin to the mythological figure of Thälmann, often seeking ways to display their faces together as parallel personas. In schools, Honecker's portrait hung next to Thälmann's.⁴³ During parades and other festivities, Honecker would often mimic the gesture of Thälmann with his clenched fist. At the site of the Thälmann monument in Prenzlauer Berg, this pairing was enacted in the erection of two block-like bronze stelai, each two metres tall on their pedestals on either side of the monument. The stele to the viewer's right contained a lofty Thälmann quotation while the stele on the left held a self-citation by Honecker.⁴⁴ This substitution of images suggests that the Thälmann monument was perhaps also Honecker's image of himself. Indeed, at the time, many viewers interpreted the monument precisely as Honecker's self-portrait in Thälmann's image.⁴⁵ Thälmann, one might say, was the body politic; he was the figure of power, the immortal ruler and embodiment of the nation. Honecker,

on the other hand, was the body natural, the mortal ruler striving for the power that a representation might possess. Like many Honecker-related memorials in East Berlin, the stelai in front of the Thälmann monument were removed from public view in 1990.⁴⁶

Every aspect in the creation of the Thälmann monument was meticulously planned in an attempt to create an authentic image that would help legitimise the anti-fascist state. It was erected in the capital of the GDR in what the SED preferably conceived as a traditional worker's district. Made by the best Soviet artist of monumental art, with the best materials, it depicted a true German worker – Thälmann was often referred to as 'ein echter Proletarier'⁴⁷ – and antifascist hero dying for the cause of the state. The production of the monument took into consideration the suitable reverence of this figure through its monumentality, the grand pedestal with its tribune, the arrangement of the space around it, and its insistent visibility as a centrepiece of pride in the urban landscape. In an effort to guarantee the perfection of this image, the theatre production crew of the Berlin Staatsoper built a stand-in, prop cut-out (*Phantombild*) of the monument before its final erection.⁴⁸ Before the unveiling, the life-size model was placed on the site as a form of dress rehearsal so that Honecker could imagine what it would look like. While the Thälmann monument apparently served to strengthen and reconfirm Honecker's own right to rule, in his search for power via a representation he had essentially fabricated a fictional viewer in his mind. This viewer was a simulacrum or, in the words of Louis Marin, a 'mannequin-addressee', a viewer intended to be 'perfectly and absolutely subjugated'.⁴⁹ Many East Berliners perceived the intended imaginary viewer precisely as such. This group of viewers could neither partake in this designated role, nor embrace Honecker's much-anticipated ceremonial inauguration of the Thälmann monument, including the presentation of the gift to the people of East Berlin.

Staging the Gift

According to *Neues Deutschland*, more than 100,000 people witnessed the ceremonial inauguration of the monument at the Ernst-Thälmann-Park on 15 April 1986.⁵⁰ The presence and rank of the guests gathered were impressive, including an assembly of leaders that counted among them the country's four most powerful men: Erich Honecker, chairman of the Council of State, general secretary and

head of the SED; Willi Stoph, the chairman of the Council of Ministers, head of the government and member of the SED Politburo; Horst Sindermann, president of the People's Chamber and member of the Politburo; and Egon Krenz, Honecker's crown prince.⁵¹ Also present were Lev Kerbel and Ernst Thälmann's daughter, Irmgard Gabel-Thälmann, both serving as sources of authenticity for the soon-to-be-unveiled image.⁵² Linking the monument's inauguration with powerful leaders and, moreover, aligning it with the quinquennial Party Congress – the supreme organ and forum of the SED, this time leading to Honecker's re-election – was perfectly constructed in an effort to convey a political, national, and historical event of unusual proportions.

The veil covering the Thälmann monument above the tribune compelled the anticipation of a spectacle. As a sight not yet attained, the value of the wrapped gift seemed to increase for the receivers because of their desire to behold it, a sense further aided by the always-present suggestion of a monument's latent aura. In an attempt to guarantee the connotations embedded in the monument – an endeavour that almost always fails – the unveiling occurred only after its intended meanings had been imparted by all speakers.

Following the initial address, Achim Piehler, the production leader for the housing and building project, gave his speech while still wearing his hard hat and work clothes. He represented not only the workers who had constructed the Ernst-Thälmann-Park but the audience as well, a majority of whom consisted of members of the Freie Deutsche Jugend who had worked on the project. In his speech, Piehler addressed Erich Honecker directly, informing him that every aspect of the project had been successfully completed. He promised Honecker that they would continue to contribute to greater tasks for the peace and progress of the GDR. By wearing his uniform, Piehler was marking his identity, and through his emphasis on hard work, responsibility, and loyalty in his speech, he solidified in language what that identity entailed.

The final presenter, Erich Honecker, spoke of the conceptual innovation of the assignment. Its ideology was in agreement, said Honecker, with 'den Zielen, für die Ernst Thälmann gekämpft, gearbeitet und gelitten hat, für die er sein Leben gab.'⁵³ In a gesture suggesting both paternal nurture and moral discipline, Honecker cautioned the audience that while much had been achieved to improve

conditions in the GDR, it would not suffice to be content with the accomplishments thus far. In this moment, Honecker conceptually merged the monument with its governing principles, the most important of which was the bond of the social contract: the gift required perseverance in labour and loyalty in return, reciprocal acts which would be rewarded with future success.

The unveiling of the Thälmann monument, 15 April 1986



Invariably, speeches serve as a means to connect guest and audience by establishing a relationship between them, one that turns the honouring of a guest into an act of receiving: the guest *gives* his or her presence to the audience. The speeches at inaugural ceremonies in the GDR were thoroughly standardised, and those of Piehler and Honecker were no different with the exception of one detail: the emphasis in both on the value of the SED's gift to the people. Piehler's speech demonstrates that gifts were being exchanged in both directions, with the reciprocated gift consisting of the workers' past efforts and promised future loyalty and labour. At the conclusion of his speech, Piehler gave Honecker a gift – a document outlining the construction of the Ernst-Thälmann-Park that symbolically represented their efforts exerted for the project. Accompanied by the sound of applause, Piehler placed the gift in the hands of Honecker, the monument's main patron.

The giving of a gift to the people allowed Honecker, acting as the primary donor, to establish a degree of social order and seize control, for if the anticipation of a *quid pro quo* enactment is not fulfilled, a threat of revenge keeps the self-interests of the donor intact. This enactment of rigid order also exists within the Thälmann ceremony, for the inauguration of monuments in the GDR were fully planned and controlled; they were 'closed worlds'.⁵⁴ Official state events in the GDR functioned like a mirror; the city and the state represented themselves to themselves. The event held up a mirror to the social order but reflected only selective parts, which it intensified and euphemised in the staging of the event.⁵⁵ While intentions, interests, and the actual results are never quite so pure or controllable, the 'public transcript', that is, the official and staged version of the dealings between a leadership and its subordinates, functions here as the self-portrait of a leadership as they would like to be seen.⁵⁶

After unveiling the Thälmann monument, Honecker and the guests walked through the Ernst-Thälmann-Park while residents in the Park, according to *Neues Deutschland*, 'waved from their windows'.⁵⁷ Readers undoubtedly recognised this portrayal of self-adulation precisely as such, for it was, in fact, forbidden for citizens to stand on balconies or by open windows when Erich Honecker was on a visit. The people waving from their windows were staged participants.⁵⁸ The public transcript of the inaugural ceremony for the Thälmann monument provided, then, the necessary appearance of complete

consensus precisely because the leadership doubted its existence. The ban on open windows, for example, implied their fears of dissidence, for activities above their heads could effectively invite anonymous and unauthorised gestures.

The day-to-day practices surrounding the Thälmann monument further served the maintenance of social order through education and discipline in that those present naturally conformed to the hierarchy of relations prescribed by the space and monument. New members to the Pionierorganisation 'Ernst Thälmann', vowed to love their country and were accepted into the youth group under the sign of the Thälmann monument.⁵⁹ The space around the monument was well suited for the regulation of rituals because the two-step pedestal of the monument served essentially as a tribune at which the spectators would necessarily have to look up in a gesture of reverence. The square's spaciousness, while clearly made for the gatherings of crowds, still centres all visual attention on the sculpture as the square's primary occupant. It does so at the expense of an audience who become participants, willingly or not, in a show led by the monument.⁶⁰

To the best of its ability, the SED regime sought to stage the career of the Thälmann monument by inserting the image into everyday experience. The state mobilised its omnipresence in various forms of media. In an effort to promote the monument, for example, a poster competition on Thälmann was held.⁶¹ Fernsehen der DDR 1. Programm televised a chronicle about the creation of the monument and park, aired the day after its inauguration. Indeed, the preparations for Thälmann's 1986 centennial led to an 'orgy', as one writer remarks, in the legends of Thälmann, most adamantly through film and television.⁶² The propaganda films *Ernst Thälmann – Sohn seiner Klasse* and *Ernst Thälmann – Führer seiner Klasse* became popular even among leftists in West Berlin and were shown in alternative West Berlin cinemas.⁶³ During May Day parades in East Berlin, participants in the streets carried images of the Thälmann monument on placards, alongside other signs showcasing the successful housing modernisation accomplished by the government and the people collectively.⁶⁴

The image of the Thälmann monument was intended not only as a city emblem facing internally toward East Germans, it was also meant to be the official face toward West Berlin. This was already part of the

plan when the Thälmann monument was inaugurated, since the SED saw the monument as part of the anticipation for the 750th anniversary of Berlin the following year.⁶⁵ The most expensive stamp issued for the 750th anniversary of Berlin disseminated an image of Berlin's Thälmann monument twice: on the face of the stamp and on the Berlin postmark, as specifically encouraged by Kerbel.⁶⁶ This intensification of the image through repetition guaranteed its migration through the everyday.⁶⁷ The mediation of the image through the circulation of the stamp constituted a way to instil in the people a claim for legitimate ownership of historical Berlin – 'Berlin, Hauptstadt der DDR'. The state presented the eastern part of the city as the authentic Berlin and, notably, turned the Thälmann monument into the exemplary representative of Berlin and the GDR's progress and national pride, as measured against that of the West.

Maintaining the value of the gift to the people of Berlin required that it be staged continuously in a rigid manner. The gift was neither freely given nor freely received, based as it was on a conditional arrangement and anticipation projected onto the people. The problem increasingly articulated was that many viewers did not necessarily recognise themselves in the mirror of society held by the leadership. The mirror image was for them a phantom. Three days before the wall fell, and merely a few weeks after Honecker had been forced to resign, the art historian Hermann Raum sent transcripts to two members of the Central Committee. He requested the immediate destruction of the Thälmann monument, 'weil es künstlerisch und politisch verlogen ist', and 'aufgrund des persönlichen Geschmacks von E. Honecker zur Aufstellung kam'.⁶⁸

Finale: Reciprocity or Retribution?

The contractual relationship of the gift exchange pervaded everyday life in the GDR. For example, the state gave gifts to the citizens by allowing access to new luxury consumer products, even though the availability of the products would be limited in time and quantity.⁶⁹ A commodity object and a public monument are, however, notably different forms of gifts. Placing the gift of a monument at the centre of attention in recurring national ceremonies and as an image so relentlessly visible at all times, Honecker's regime upheld the wish for and appearance of a social contract that confirmed and maintained a preferred hierarchical relationship. And unlike commodity objects in

the conventional sense, the gift of the monument was inalienable from the subject who gave it. Thus, the monument's permanence demanded the enforcement of Honecker's rigid social order through the act of sustaining the necessary return gift. The transaction was upheld by making a commitment but, in the case of the Thälmann monument, the contract appears to have remained in dispute.

The value ascribed to the Thälmann monument by the leadership had extended beyond the market: the monument was a 'trans-valued object'.⁷⁰ For Honecker would by no means have procured the expenses involved if he had not fully believed in the image's efficacy. The mediatory role of the gift represents, perhaps, Honecker's belief in a socialist society that presumes that giver and receiver are 'everything to one another'.⁷¹ Taking the gift at face value would require the conviction that giving one's labour served a positive function for society, that duty and homage were ultimately greater in value than what one renounced. To some East Germans, the gift gesture was indeed a valuable *quid pro quo*, grounded in a solid belief in the possibility of a successful socialist society to come. Their admiration for the icon and the battle against fascism were genuine.⁷² Some residents had fond memories of the inauguration of the monument and living in the clean and socially oriented park.⁷³ The historian Andrew Port has shown how social stability in the GDR was often made possible through the establishment of a degree of leeway or choice given to workers, resulting in an 'ongoing and increasingly refined process of give-and-take between the so-called rulers and ruled'.⁷⁴ Perhaps the Thälmann monument provides an example of a contractual arrangement that inspired loyalty from GDR citizens while they adhered to a sense of personal choice in their actions, despite their position as subjects of a dictatorship?

But what happens if we invert the presumed hierarchical relations so that, rather than think of the *quid pro quo* contract as placing the donor – the SED leadership – in a position of superiority, the donor was demonstrating, paradoxically, his desire to improve his own social position? What if one considers, instead, how gifts were often given 'upward' to cadres by subordinates in the hopes that it would widen the subordinates' social circle and raise their social rank?⁷⁵ This practice of giving upward was by no means foreign to the established social customs in the GDR. Gifts were not only given to functionaries in the upper echelons, especially in institutions such as the Stasi, but

also between party members themselves, for example at the Party Congress. If we consider the possibility that the intention behind a gift may be driven by the desire to widen one's influence through *recognition*, then this should also modify our understanding of the motivations and hierarchical relations involved in the act of giving the Thälmann monument to the people of Berlin.

To this end, Marx's use of *quid pro quo* sheds a different light on the gift gesture. As mentioned, the French definition of *quid pro quo* describes a substitution, a confusion of one thing for another, or an error in perception. Marx targeted Prussia's misguided political tactics and diplomacy, its confusion of theatrical acts and action, future promises and concrete results, imagined victory and actual success. Indeed, to many viewers, the ritual surrounding the Thälmann monument was theatre: an illusion, 'künstlerisch und politisch verlogen'. To many East Germans, the promise that was fabricated amounted to little more than a simulacral image in the GDR of the late 1980s; most East Germans had stopped taking the public transcript at face value. For this annoyed audience, the gift as a rhetorical device could be received as a gift of recognition where the SED's gesture was an attribution of agency to the audience through the acknowledgement that their loyalty was in desperately high demand. Interpreted as an error, the theatrical performance was an idolatrous practice, alien to the lifestyles and beliefs of many East Berliners.

This multi-faceted definition of *quid pro quo* encompasses, then, both the demonstration of a valuable social contract based on reciprocity and 'die geballte Faust den Machtanspruch der DDR-Oberen'.⁷⁶ These two perceptions of the events surrounding the Thälmann monument were by no means the only ones existent, as the majority of East Berliners were, in fact, thoroughly indifferent about the monument.⁷⁷ Yet the intense responses that have prevailed endow the object with cultural value. On a consistent basis in the 1980s and 90s, the Thälmann monument provoked enough affect and controversy to demand persistent attention and energy from viewers, including politicians, legislators, scholars, the news media, and the Berlin Senate. The value attributed to the monument covered, then, a full and remarkable range; it was a trans-valued object beyond market value, an unnoticed public monument, as well as an all too conspicuously worthless idol to be smashed.

Illuminating the social relations and actors given agency around the Thälmann monument allows one to reassess its cultural history, but its historical significance may be even greater. The 1984 protest in Prenzlauer Berg that involved two-hundred East Berliners demonstrating against the SED's decision to destroy three gasworks located on the site of the future Ernst-Thälmann-Park was among the first protest of its kind in East Berlin during the late SED regime.⁷⁸ While it had no lasting effect on the fate of the gasworks, the experience of striking against the authorities was new for the people and remembered as a sign of hope, as one participant recalls.⁷⁹ Without wishing to construct a teleological interpretation, it has been noted, nonetheless, that a symbolic aggression becomes a layer in memory facilitating the potential for change.⁸⁰ The disapproval of Kerbel's Thälmann monument demanded the critical attention of artists and intellectuals, and it was also this particular group of East Germans, no less, who were the primary instigators of the fall of the wall. The conclusion to draw is not that of a direct cause and effect relation; rather, the value of the social relations collected around the Thälmann monument allows one to consider it, and other GDR objects and images steeped in post-1989 controversies, within a greater social exchange, one involving state anticipations of reciprocity met with the public's possibility of retribution.

Notes

¹ Karl Marx, 'Quid Pro Quo' first published in *Das Volk*, 30 July and 6, 13 and 20 August 1859; *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, vol. 16: 'Marx and Engels 1858-60', New York: International Publishers, 1975-2005, p. 445.

² Ely Garfinkle, 'Quid pro Quo: The Inverse of Talion', *Canadian Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 7 (1999), 245-70; Marcel Mauss, trans. W.D. Halls, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, New York: Norton, 1990; Boaz Keysar, Benjamin A. Converse, Jiunwen Wang, and Nicholas Epley, 'Reciprocity Is Not Give and Take: Asymmetric Reciprocity to Positive and Negative Acts', *Psychological Science*, 19 (December 2008), 1280-6.

³ Dirk Schumann, 'Ernst-Thälmann-Denkmal', in: *Erhalten, Zerstören, Verändern? Denkmäler der DDR in Ost-Berlin. Eine Dokumentarische Ausstellung*, Berlin: Aktives Museum Faschismus und Widerstand in Berlin and Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, 1990, p. 37.

⁴ On the GDR's twentieth anniversary, 7 October 1969, Walter Ulbricht gave the Fernsehturm on Berlin's Alexanderplatz to the people. Conversely, GDR citizens were frequently expected to give gifts to their city on its anniversary, as if the city were a person to be honoured. Adelheid von Saldern, 'Zusammenfassung', in: Adelheid von Saldern, ed., *Inszenierte Einigkeit: Herrschaftsrepräsentationen in DDR-Städten*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2003, p. 375.

⁵ My interpretation is inspired, in part, by Jacques Derrida, trans. Peggy Kamuf, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, New York and London: Routledge, 1994.

⁶ See in particular, Eberhard Elfert, *Denk Mal Positionen zum Ernst Thälmann Denkmal*, Dokumentation zur Ausstellung vom 14. Juli - 13. August 1993 im Prenzlauer Berg Museum, Berlin: Kulturamt Prenzlauer Berg, 1993; Abgeordnetenhaus von Berlin, Drucksache 12/2743, 'Kommission zum Umgang mit den politischen Denkmälern der Nachkriegszeit im ehemaligen Ost-Berlin', unpublished report, Berlin, 15 February 1993; *Erhalten, Zerstören, Verändern? Denkmäler der DDR in Ost-Berlin. Eine Dokumentarische Ausstellung*, Exhibition Catalogue, Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, Berlin: Aktives Museum Faschismus und Widerstand in Berlin and Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, 1990; *kritische berichte*, 3 (1992); Bernd Kramer, ed., *Demontage ... revolutionärer oder restaurativer Bildersturm?*, Berlin: Karin Kramer Verlag, 1992. See also Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997, and Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.

⁷ Kristine Nielsen, 'Gestures of Iconoclasm: East Berlin's Political Monuments, From the Late German Democratic Republic to Postunified Berlin', Ph.D. Diss., University of Chicago, 2010.

⁸ For more on this heavily ideological museum, including its history and post-1989 critical interventions, see Kulturamt Prenzlauer Berg and Aktives Museum Faschismus und Widerstand Berlin, ed., *Mythos Antifaschismus – Ein Traditionskabinett wird kommentiert*, Berlin: Links, 1992; and Martin Schönfeld, 'Die kritische Kommentierung: Zwei Beispiele eines veränderten Umganges mit dem kulturpolitischen Erbe der DDR', in: Katharina Flügel and Wolfgang Ernst, eds, *Musealisierung der DDR? 40 Jahre als kulturhistorische Herausforderung*, Leipzig: Verlag und Datenbank für Geisteswissenschaften, 1992.

⁹ Because the concept was so reliant on a political goal, the leadership realised that: 'Um diesen Volkspark interessant und abwechslungsreich zu gestalten, sollen Einrichtungen der Gastronomie, der Freizeitgestaltung und des Sports mit vorgesehen werden'. Landesarchiv Berlin, C Rep. 902, Nr. 4493; compare 'Ernst-Thälmann-Park städtebaulicher Lösungsvorschlag Erläuterungsbericht', Berlin, April

1981, and Letter from Konrad Naumann to Günter Mittag, ‘Betr.: Information über den gegenwertigen Stand zur Umgestaltung des Gaswerkes Dimitroffstrasse zu einem Volkspark und Errichtung einer Gedenkstätte “Ernst Thälmann”’, Berlin, 29 November 1978.

¹⁰ Baudirektion der Hauptstadt Berlin des Ministeriums für Bauwesen in Zusammenarbeit mit Archenhold-Sternwarte Berlin, *Zeiss-Großplanetarium Berlin Ernst-Thälmann-Park 1985 bis 1987*, Berlin: Bauakademie der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1987; Baudirektion Hauptstadt Berlin des Ministerium für Bauwesen, *Ernst-Thälmann-Park in der Hauptstadt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Berlin*, Berlin: Bauakademie der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1986.

¹¹ Wolfgang Spickermann and Jochen Zimmermann, ‘100000 bei Einweihung des Ernst-Thälmann-Denkmal in traditionsreichen Arbeiterbezirk Berlins’, *Neues Deutschland*, 16 April 1986.

¹² Erich Honecker at the Tenth Party Congress of the SED, April 1981, in: *Ernst-Thälmann-Park in der Hauptstadt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Berlin*, p. 9.

¹³ Kerbel also partook in the creation of the gigantic Soviet war memorial in Berlin’s Treptow Park (1945-9), conceived by Evgeny Vuchetich and I.B. Belopolskii, as well as the Tiergarten Soviet war memorial (1945-6). Michael Wines, ‘Sculpting Soviet Giants, Watching Them Fall’, *New York Times*, 14 June 2003.

¹⁴ For more on the early projects by East German sculptors such as Ruthild Hahne, see Thomas Flierl, “‘Thälmann und Thälmann vor allen”. Ein Nationaldenkmal für die Hauptstadt der DDR’, in: *Berlin: Perspektiven durch Kultur. Texte und Projekte*, Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2007, pp. 37-98; and Peter Monteath, ‘Ein Denkmal für Thälmann’, in: Peter Monteath, ed., *Ernst Thälmann: Mensch und Mythos*, Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000, pp. 179-201.

¹⁵ Landesarchiv Berlin, C Rep. 902 Nr. 5333, Eingaben an die Abteilung Kultur 1982, Brief von Werner Richter an 1. Sekretär der Bezirksleitung der SED Berlin, 14 March 1982.

¹⁶ Thomas Flierl, ‘Mit der Geschichte Leben’, in: Sonjya Guhr, ed., *Berlin, Prenzlauer Berg, Strassen und Plätzen: Mit der Geschichte Leben*, Bezirksamt Prenzlauer Berg von Berlin and Edition Hentrich: Berlin, 1991, pp. 6-13 (here: p. 8). Landesarchiv Berlin C Rep. 902 Nr. 5469, Letter from Jürgen Schuchardt to Horst Oswald, Berlin, 16 September 1981.

¹⁷ Thomas Flierl, ‘Gegen den Abriss eines Baudenkmal. Eine Rede aus dem Jahr 1984’, *kritische berichte*, 3 (1992), 53-7. The rhetorical nature of the SED’s claim was demonstrated about a decade later, in 1995, when poison was found in the soil where

the gasworks had stood. The pipes from the gasworks had been left in the ground and simply covered with grass. See for example, Thilo Gabelmann [Egon Grübel], *Thälmann ist niemals gefallen? Eine Legende stirbt*, Berlin: Verlag Das Neue Berlin, 1996, p. 303.

¹⁸ Lev Kerbel may very well have had the Egyptian sphinx in mind, since it was his inspiration for his enormous head of Marx erected in Chemnitz in 1971. A more recent precursor to the East German formal device of using the sky as a backdrop stems from cinematic techniques employed in the 1930s and 1940s, such as in Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* where Hitler appears with the sky behind him. See Gabi Dolff-Bonekämper, 'Optimale Sicht auf den erzwungenen Konsens', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 5 January 1994; Dolff-Bonekämper, 'Kunstgeschichte als Zeitgeschichte: Das Thälmann-Denkmal in Berlin', in: Wolfgang Kersten, ed., *Radical Art History: Internationale Anthologie. Subject: O.K. Werckmeister*, Zurich: Zip, 1997, p. 139.

¹⁹ Dirk Schumann, 'Marx geht, die Monumente bleiben?', *taz*, 4 August 1990. Deemed an unnecessary expense after 1989, the heating system is no longer in operation.

²⁰ Compare Baudirektion Hauptstadt Berlin, *Ernst-Thälmann-Park in der Hauptstadt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, Berlin, p. 23-4, and Landesarchiv Berlin, C Rep. 902, Nr. 5420, 'Ministerrat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik an N.A. Tichonow, Vorsitzenden des Ministerrats der Union der Sozialistischen Sowjetrepubliken', Berlin, 22 May 1984.

²¹ Bundesarchiv-SAPMO (BA-SAPMO) NY/4090/556, Letter from Binz, Staatssekretariat für Materialversorgung, to Dr. Liebknecht, Berlin, 15 December 1950, 'Betrifft: Material für Ernst-Thälmann-Denkmal'.

²² Maoz Azaryahu, trans. Kerstin Amrani and Alma Mandelbaum, *Von Wilhelmplatz zu Thälmannplatz: Politische Symbole im öffentlichen Leben der DDR*, Gerlingen: Bleicher, 1991, p. 24. Azaryahu briefly mentions Berlin's Thälmann monument, but erroneously names the sculptor Nikolai Tomsky.

²³ Flierl, 'Thälmann und Thälmann vor allen', p. 87.

²⁴ Quoted in Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin*, p. 202.

²⁵ Isabel Bayer, 'Schandmale verordneter Geschichte oder lebendige Erinnerung? Die ungewisse Zukunft der politischen Denkmäler der DDR in Berlin', NDR3 radio broadcast, 21 January 1992.

²⁶ Günter Feist, 'Platz gemacht für Monumentalpropaganda. Ein Kapitel Stadtbildpflege in der "Hauptstadt der DDR"', in: Eckhart Gillen and Rainer Haarmann, eds,

Kunst in der DDR, Berlin: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1990, pp. 126-36 (here: p. 136); Friedrich Dieckmann, 'FRIEDRICH UND ILJITSCH: Zwei Berliner Monumente', in: *Demontage ... revolutionärer oder restaurativer Bildersturm?*, p. 47.

²⁷ Schumann, 'Marx geht, die Monumente bleiben?'

²⁸ Isabel Bayer, 'Schandmale verordneter Geschichte oder lebendige Erinnerung?'

²⁹ Sabine Vogel, 'Symbole der Systemüberwindung?', *Tagesspiegel*, 29 April 1990.

³⁰ Maria Rüger passed by East Berlin's Lenin monument daily for twenty years and stubbornly refused to look at it. Similarly, on several occasions Peter Ustinov passed Kerbel's Marx head in former Karl-Marx-Stadt also never looking in its direction. 'Das Berliner Lenin-Denkmal', *kritische berichte*, 3 (1992), 36-42. Published in English as 'The Lenin Statue in Berlin', in: James Aulich and Tim Wilcox, eds, *Europe Without Walls: Art, Posters and Revolution 1989-93*, Manchester: Manchester City Art Galleries, 1993.

³¹ Bayer, 'Schandmale verordneter Geschichte oder lebendige Erinnerung?'

³² Schumann, 'Marx geht, die Monumente bleiben?'; Hubertus Adam, 'Zwischen Anspruch und Wirkungslosigkeit. Bemerkungen zur Rezeption von Denkmäler der DDR', *kritische berichte*, 1 (1991), 44-64 (here: p. 55).

³³ Annette Lettau, 'Soll Marx den Sockel räumen?', *Pan. Zeitschrift für Kunst und Kultur* 12 (November 1990), 42-7.

³⁴ Schumann, 'Marx geht, die Monumente bleiben?'

³⁵ See Monteath, *Ernst Thälmann: Mensch und Mythos*, and Elfert, *Denk Mal Positionen zum Ernst Thälmann Denkmal*, p. 10.

³⁶ Clara Zetkin, letter to Nikolai Iwanowitsch Bucharin (9 November 1927), in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung*, 33 (1991), 778-82; Ruth Fischer, *Stalin und der deutsche Kommunismus. Der Übergang zur Konterrevolution*, Frankfurt am Main: Frankfurter Hefte, 1950, p. 514; both Zetkin and Fischer are quoted in René Börrnert, *Wie Ernst Thälmann treu und kühn! Das Thälmann-Bild der SED im Erziehungsalltag der DDR*, Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt, 2004, pp. 67-8. See also Annette Leo, 'Liturgie statt Erinnerung: Die Schaffung eines Heldenbildes am Beispiel Ernst Thälmann', in: *Ernst Thälmann: Mensch und Mythos*, pp. 17-30.

³⁷ Hermann Weber and Bernhard H. Bayerlein, eds, *Der Thälmann-Skandal: Geheime Korrespondenzen mit Stalin*, Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 2003.

³⁸ For critical post-unification research on the historical representation of Thälmann, see Gabelmann, *Thälmann ist niemals gefallen?*; Kulturamt Prenzlauerberg, *Mythos Antifaschismus – Ein Traditionskabinett wird kommentiert*; Monteath, *Ernst Thälmann: Mensch und Mythos*; Börrnert, *Wie Ernst Thälmann treu und kühn!*; and Alan Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth: Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999, p. 99.

³⁹ Annette Leo, 'Die Berichte der Thälmann-Kuriere', in: *Ernst Thälmann: Mensch und Mythos*, pp. 81-91.

⁴⁰ In German the diction was: 'Thälmann und Thälmann vor allen! Deutschlands unsterblicher Sohn. Thälmann ist niemals gefallen. Stimme und Faust der Nation.' Monteath, 'Ein Denkmal für Thälmann', 194; BA-SAPMO NY/4090/556, 'Ernst Thälmann-Denkmal: Wettbewerb.'

⁴¹ Günter Hortschansky and Walter Wimmer, *Ernst Thälmann. Kleine Biographie*, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1988, pp. 297-300.

⁴² Leo, 'Liturgie statt Erinnerung', p. 28.

⁴³ Börrnert, *Wie Ernst Thälmann treu und kühn!*, p. 82.

⁴⁴ Honecker's stele reads: 'Mit der Gestaltung des Sozialismus in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik setzen wir Ernst Thälmann, dem kühnen Streiter für Freiheit, Menschlichkeit und sozialen Fortschritt unseres Volkes, ein würdiges Denkmal.' As spoken by Erich Honecker at the keynote address for the Second Meeting of the Central Committee of the SED on 3 September 1976. Thälmann's stele states:

Mein Leben und Wirken kannte und kennt nur eines: Für das schaffende deutsche Volk meinen Geist und meinen Willen, meine Erfahrungen und meine Tatkraft, ja, mein Ganzes, die Persönlichkeit zum Besten der deutschen Zukunft für den siegreichen sozialistischen Freiheitskampf im neuen Völkerfrühling der deutschen Nation einzusetzen!

Ernst Thälmann, excerpt from a letter to a fellow prisoner, January 1944. Both quotations appear in Baudirektion Hauptstadt Berlin, *Ernst-Thälmann-Park in der Hauptstadt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Berlin*, p. ii.

⁴⁵ Bruno Flierl, 'Politische Wandbilder und Denkmäler im Stadtraum', in: Monika Flacke, ed., *Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen Staat: Die Kunst der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR*, Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum and Ars Nikolai, 1994, pp. 47-60 (here: p. 57).

⁴⁶ Schumann, 'Ernst Thälmann', p. 37.

- ⁴⁷ Börrnert, *Wie Ernst Thälmann treu und kühn!*, p. 188.
- ⁴⁸ Baudirektion Hauptstadt Berlin, *Ernst-Thälmann-Park in der Hauptstadt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Berlin*, p. 24.
- ⁴⁹ Louis Marin, trans. Martha Houde, *Portrait of the King*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, pp. 45-6.
- ⁵⁰ Wolfgang Spickermann and Jochen Zimmermann, '100000 bei Einweihung des Ernst-Thälmann-Denkmal in traditionsreichen Arbeiterbezirk Berlins', *Neues Deutschland*, 16 April 1986.
- ⁵¹ Stephen R. Burant, ed. *East Germany: A Country Study*, Washington D.C.: Federal Research Division, United States Government, 3rd edn 1988, p. 171.
- ⁵² In actuality and unofficially, she barely knew or cared for her father. Börrnert, *Wie Ernst Thälmann treu und kühn!*, p. 57.
- ⁵³ Spickermann and Zimmermann, '100000 bei Einweihung des Ernst-Thälmann-Denkmal in traditionsreichen Arbeiterbezirk Berlins'.
- ⁵⁴ Don Handelman, *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 16.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 41, 48.
- ⁵⁶ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990, p. 18.
- ⁵⁷ Spickermann and Zimmermann, '100000 bei Einweihung des Ernst-Thälmann-Denkmal in traditionsreichen Arbeiterbezirk Berlins.'
- ⁵⁸ Gabelmann, *Thälmann ist niemals gefallen?*, 301-2.
- ⁵⁹ Martin Schönfeld, 'Die Konstruktion eines politischen Idols: Darstellungen Ernst Thälmanns in der Kunst der SBZ/DDR und ihre Funktion', in: *Ernst Thälmann: Mensch und Mythos*, pp. 147-78.
- ⁶⁰ Dolff-Bonekämper, 'Kunstgeschichte als Zeitgeschichte', p. 141.
- ⁶¹ See Wilfried Karger, 'Kämpfer wie Thälmann: Ergebnisse des Plakatwettbewerbs zum 100. Geburtstag Ernst Thälmanns', *Bildende Kunst*, 3 (1986), 102-3.
- ⁶² Gabelmann, *Thälmann ist niemals gefallen?*, p. 296.

⁶³ Kirsten Küppers, 'Thälmann soll wider glänzen', *taz*, 17 October 2001.

⁶⁴ Produced by the Politburo-led Fernsehen der DDR for the program 'Aktuelle Kamera', broadcast on 1 May 1989. Film footage housed at the privately owned DDR Museum Berlin.

⁶⁵ *Neues Deutschland*, 16 April 1986.

⁶⁶ Landesarchiv Berlin C Rep. 902 Nr. 5421, Letter from Günter Schabowski to Erich Honecker, 18 December 1985. The 1987 postmark depicting the monument was shown in the exhibition, 'Hin & weg – Postgeschichten von Berlin – Prenzlauer Berg' (20 December 2006 – 29 April 2007), held at the former Prenzlauer Berg Museum in Berlin. The value of the 1987 stamp depicting the Thälmann monument was 1.35 DM and 2.4 million copies were printed. See *Michel. Briefmarken-Katalog Deutschland 1987/88*, Munich: Schwaneberger, 1987-88, No. 3123.

⁶⁷ Stamps indicate in a particularly germane way the markers that a city and state wish to employ as part of their ideal image, and not solely because of the value attributed to the stamp and hence the subject portrayed. Lenin had insisted on the crucial function of the postal system in society, seeing it as one of the most important media through which to establish and strengthen social relations. 'Socialism', said Lenin in April 1918, 'without the postal system, the telegraph and the machine is an empty phrase.' See Fritz Steinwasser, *Berliner Post: Ereignisse und Denkwürdigkeiten seit 1237*, Berlin: Transpress, 1988, p. 6.

⁶⁸ Recalled in a discussion meeting at the Akademie der Künste, Berlin, on 8 February 1994. Quoted in Dolf-Bonekamp, 'Kunstgeschichte als Zeitgeschichte', p. 143.

⁶⁹ Rainer Gries and Cordula Günther, "'Jeden Tag ein neues Geschenk". Gedanken zum Geschenkgestus in der DDR', in: Dieter Vorsteher, ed., *Parteiauftrag: Ein neues Deutschland. Bilder, Rituale und Symbole der frühen DDR*, Berlin: Koehler & Amelang, 1996, pp. 241-53.

⁷⁰ Arjun Appadurai, 'Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value', in: Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 4th edn, 2006, p. 23.

⁷¹ Mauss, *The Gift*, p. 42.

⁷² Russel Lemmons provides an inadequate account of the people's relationship to Thälmann in his article, "'Imprisoned, Murdered, Besmirched": The Controversy Concerning Berlin's Ernst Thälmann Monument and German National Identity, 1990-1995', in: Silke Arnold-de Simine, ed., *Memory Traces: 1989 and the Question of German Cultural Identity*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2005, pp. 309-34. Lemmons's title

(‘EINGEKERKERT ERMORDERT BESCHMIERT’) refers to graffiti meticulously stencilled on the pedestal of the Thälmann monument during the winter of 1995-6. Lemmons concludes too hastily that the graffiti aimed to attack the former SED regime rather than post-1989 viewers who had disgraced (besmeared) the figure of Thälmann. Lemmons’s argument is curious when he then contends that, ‘Officials hoped that this brief comment would place the massive statue in its proper historical context’ (p. 331). Lemmons not only mistakenly makes local officials supporters, even agents of the anonymous graffiti, he also discounts the degree to which the figure of Thälmann was beloved by many locals.

⁷³ Matthias Oloew, ‘Ein Wohnpark als Bastion’, *Tagesspiegel*, 14 April 1998.

⁷⁴ Andrew I. Port, *Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 8.

⁷⁵ For an example of this kind of gift practice under Socialism, see Yunxiang Yan, *The Flow of Gifts: Reciprocity and Social Networks in a Chinese Village*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

⁷⁶ Annette Kurth, ‘Streit um Thälmann auf dem Höhepunkt – Abriss oder nicht?’, *Berliner Morgenpost*, 16 April 1993.

⁷⁷ Flierl, ‘Thälmann und Thälmann vor allen’, 92.

⁷⁸ Marked unrest also took place in 1977, during the 7 October celebrations of the founding of the GDR on East Berlin’s Alexanderplatz.

⁷⁹ Uwe Rada, ‘Gasometer sprengt man nicht!’ *taz*, 31 March 1994.

⁸⁰ Feist, ‘Platz gemacht für Monumentalpropaganda’, p. 134; Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, p. 212.

Internationalism and GDR Art

Sigrid Hofer

**Beyond Socialist Realism:
Alternative Painting in Dresden**

This chapter debunks long-held myths about painting in the GDR, undermining the tenet that artists were compelled to work within an impersonal mandate of socialist realism and isolated from artistic currents in the West. Focusing on the Art Informel movement that dominated underground Dresden art circles in the 1950s and 1960s, the chapter explores how those involved with the movement rejected socialist realism in favour of personal spontaneity and the fortuity of the painting process. They engaged not with the dictates of the East German cultural authorities but with the pre-war avant-garde and new post-war aesthetic experiments emanating from the West.

A myth that still persists today regarding the development of the visual arts in the German Democratic Republic is the thesis that, apart from the obligatory socialist realism prescribed by the state, hardly any other art forms were able to take root. This view can be ascribed, at least in part, to the exposure of the state's totalitarian power structures after 1989, which would appear to have made free artistic self-determination unthinkable. In the debate over formalism, the state and the party defamed abstract tendencies as inimical to state ideology; unyielding artists were forced out of universities and academies and had to fear a wide range of restrictions. Despite these adverse circumstances, however, from the 1950s onwards numerous artists created alternative pictorial worlds which were discussed almost exclusively in private circles.

Among these sub-cultural movements was Art Informel, which became established in particular in Dresden in the 1950s and 1960s. This essay explores Dresden's unique role in the hope-filled climate of the immediate post-war era, and investigates the conditions that allowed for non-conformist art to flourish. Of key importance were the private and institutional networks that enabled the development of non-conformist pictorial worlds by providing those involved in the creation of abstract art with a forum for the constructive exchange of ideas. An examination of Art Informel painters and their work documents the existence of a lively dialogue with the West, connecting abstract artists in the GDR with the international avant-garde. The

postulates and functions of Art Informel changed only gradually over the years; they must be considered within the context of the artistic self-image, which, as an expression of inner necessity on the part of these artists, sought a disassociation from cultural-political circumstances.

Early GDR Censorship and the Post-War Avant-Garde

The development of Art Informel in Dresden benefited from the city's long-standing engagement with international artistic traditions and its special position within the GDR after 1945. The early achievements of Die Brücke, a collective of expressionistic painters who propagated an explicit break with academic conventions, the comprehensive reform movements in Hellerau, and an active and diverse gallery scene, all served to bring the international avant-garde to Dresden shortly after 1900. The city's image of itself as a cultural metropolis led to the mounting of thematic retrospective exhibitions that emphasised local connections to modern trends, including the Dresden Impressionists and modern painting in Dresden after 1925.¹ From the outset, this artistic scene was concerned primarily with innovation and progress. By the 1930s, Hans Hartung was already experimenting with a free linear style; by making dynamic circular movements the object of his painting, he anticipated the validity and relevance of the gestular impulse – a notable characteristic of Art Informel – as a means of representation. The ardour for new beginnings and departures continued after the war and is reflected in the names of the early artists' associations in post-war Dresden, most notably 'der ruf' and 'Das Ufer', which were established in 1945 and 1947 respectively.² Thus, Dresden was well placed to emerge as a centre for the avant-garde in the GDR.

Also decisive for the artistic climate of the city were the state-funded Deutsche Kunstausstellungen that were organised regularly starting in 1946.³ Conceived as pan-German shows, they allowed to a certain extent – at least in the euphoria of the GDR's earliest years – the exhibition of avant-garde art in East Germany, making it possible for such works to be seen first-hand. Moreover, the exhibitions served as important platforms of communication between East and West; because the artists that dominated the West German art scene after 1945 tended to be well represented in the Dresden exhibitions. Karl Otto Götz, Werner Heldt, Adolf Hölzel, Ernst Wilhelm Nay, Heinz

Trökes, and Fritz Winter, for example, all showed their recent works at Dresden exhibitions in 1946 and 1949. Such events characterised the uneven politico-cultural development in the early GDR; alongside strict censorship there persisted artistic niches in which non-dogmatic behaviour was permissible.

By the time of the Dritte Deutsche Kunstausstellung in 1953, however, a more conservative course had prevailed. Abstract art was officially banned, and from that point forward only works that corresponded to state-ordered socialist realism were allowed. Such policies had direct implications for state educational institutions, which were restructured in order to affect a rapid realisation of the cultural agenda and to ensure artists' commitment to a uniform conception of socialist art. Such standardisation required the dissolution of several educational establishments, most notably the visual arts department at the Hochschule für Baukunst und Bildende Künste Weimar (1951),⁴ the Staatschule für Handwerk und Angewandte Kunst, Weimar (1953), and the Fachhochschule für Angewandte Kunst, Erfurt (1955).⁵ With the exception of the Pädagogische Hochschule Erfurt, whose jurisdiction included the training of art teachers, few third-level provisions for art were left in the Weimar-Erfurt region after these closures. Moreover, those programmes that escaped termination generally focused on the applied arts rather than painting. The University of Leipzig, for example, had been geared toward graphic design and literary illustration since 1900 and retained this specialisation.⁶ Burg Giebichenstein in Halle an der Saale was rededicated to commercial art and industrial design;⁷ training in painting was not introduced there until after 1970.⁸ Outside of Dresden, only the Kunsthochschule in Berlin-Weißensee provided a broad curriculum, ranging from the applied arts and architecture to more free forms of art.⁹

Dresden was home to the largest institution for the study of art, an institution that was developed in the immediate post-war period, as part of the drive for cultural regeneration.¹⁰ In 1946 a number of working groups were established in the University of Dresden; these efforts culminated in the opening of the Akademie der Bildenden Künste on 17 April 1947 under the leadership of Hans Grundig and in accordance with the orders of the Soviet military administration.¹¹ For his teachers' collective at the Akademie, Grundig, a founding member of the Assoziation revolutionärer bildender Künstler (ASSO), selected members whose work he considered representative of anti-fascist art.

In his opinion, realism should be the foundation of socialist art, a concept that was quickly applied to the Akademie's three specialties – painting, graphics, and sculpture. Moreover, social engagement on the part of teachers and students became a new prerequisite.¹² Fritz Dähn, who took over as rector in 1950, continued Grundig's Marxist directive,¹³ and under Rudolf Bergander, who was appointed in 1953, socialist realism was adopted as the sole basis of training.¹⁴

Yet despite this official curriculum, several teachers as well as students embraced a vocabulary of abstract forms, albeit with varying consequences. The concentration of visual artists at the Dresden Akademie unintentionally established the school as a venue for the development and exchange of non-conformist artistic ideas, and exchange flourished during the 1950s and 1960s. Hans Christoph (1901-92), who was appointed to a lectureship in painting at the Akademie in 1949,¹⁵ embodies the conflicting faces of the school. In public, Christoph conformed to the dictates of socialist realism; he submitted the realistic painting *Junge Pioniere* (Young Pioneers) to the 1951 exhibition 'Künstler schaffen für den Frieden' in order not to lose his lectureship.¹⁶ In his personal work, however, he did not subscribe to socialist realism. More problematically, he refused to conceal this art, behaviour which was deemed provocative. Eventually both students and colleagues at the Akademie accused him of formalism. He finally resigned in 1955, after which he dedicated himself exclusively to abstract colour experiments.¹⁷

Others, such as Herbert Kunze (1913-81), retreated into inner emigration. Initially appointed to teach industrial design and later basic studies at the Akademie, where he remained until his retirement in 1975, Kunze entrusted his own works only to a small group of selected students. In private meetings, he provided them with insights into the French avant-garde, particularly the work of Georges Braque and Nicolas de Staël, both of whom served as influences on his own works. Hans Jüchser (1894-1977), on the other hand, treated abstract painting like a secret lover; his abstract works were created exclusively in his private atelier and were only known to a small circle of collectors. Not even Werner Schmidt, the director of the Kupferstich-Kabinett Dresden who considered himself a supporter of avant-garde approaches, was allowed to see these works due to concerns about possible consequences.

Artistic withdrawal forced many to earn a living outside of private artistic work. Hermann Glöckner (1889-1987), who had already worked with abstraction in the early 1920s, did not see a public exhibition of his work in the GDR until his eightieth birthday. In order to secure a living he accepted commercial commissions, executing decorative designs for buildings. Edmund Kesting (1892-1987), on the other hand, was among the most popular portrait photographers in East Germany and received commissions from public figures, writers, dancers, and even prominent politicians. In his more private works, however, Kesting's art works provide evidence that he by no means bowed to socialist realism. His photographic and film work provided him with an abstract framework which he later adopted to his experimental painting. With time, his teaching career became closely connected with the stormy formalism debate, and despite appointments to various academies, he endured repeated suspensions. In 1956, he was finally rehabilitated and resigned himself to teaching utilitarian photography courses at the Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen in Potsdam.¹⁸

Alternative Networks in Dresden

Under such circumstances, works of a decisively radical nature such as Art Informel could not have been conceivable in Dresden without opportunities for contact between like-minded colleagues and knowledge of international developments. As is now apparent, communication between East and West was much livelier and more intense than the Iron Curtain once led us to believe, especially before 1961 when travel was still possible although not officially permitted. In 1958, for example, two exhibitions of American art in West Berlin – 'Jackson Pollock 1912-1956,' and 'The New American Painting' – made a significant impression on artists living in the GDR. Moreover, the contacts that East German artists maintained across the FRG-GDR border and throughout Western Europe have now been documented in many cases.¹⁹ Hans Christoph, for instance, kept himself informed of artistic trends through the Galerie Rosen in West Berlin, where he found validation of his own work in the years directly after the war: 'Es zeigte sich, daß ich mit meinen Arbeiten und Kunstauffassungen nicht allein stand.'²⁰

When 'der ruf' planned its second exhibition in 1948, Christoph's contacts through Galerie Rosen proved useful. At the request of

Wolfgang Balzer, director of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden and a supporter of 'der ruf', Christoph encouraged artists from the West to participate by using his connections to Hans Uhlmann, the director of Galerie Rosen whose own wire sculptures had impressed Christoph with 'their perfectly shaped, spatially clear, transparent and also technically flawless design'.²¹ Through Uhlmann, Christoph made the acquaintance of Heinz Trökes, Mac Zimmermann, and Theodor Werner.²² His familiarity with the current scene in the West increased appreciably, and he was able to win the participation of Nay, Götz and several other leading West German abstract artists for the exhibition, thus bringing the works of western artists to Dresden once again. Another turning point came in 1952 when Christoph saw originals by Henry Moore, Max Beckmann, Willi Baumeister, Pierre Soulage, and Hans Hartung for the first time in a gallery at Bahnhof Zoo in West Berlin, works which he had previously known only as reproductions.²³

Between 1955 and 1961, Hermann Glöckner participated in exhibitions arranged by the Deutscher Künstlerbund, which had been re-established in Berlin after the war. The locations chosen for the exhibitions in 1955, 1956, and 1957 – Frankfurt am Main, Düsseldorf, and West Berlin, respectively – were cities in which the avant-garde of the post-war period had become rooted. Represented in these exhibitions were the most important West German representatives of Art Informel. In 1956 the circle was extended to include non-Germans such as the Belgian and Dutch artists Karel Appel and Corneille. While it remains unknown whether Glöckner attended the exhibitions himself or derived his information about them from the catalogues, documentation exists of him having made similar trips to Cologne and Hamburg.²⁴

In 1955, Glöckner did attend documenta I, an exhibition held in Kassel and conceived as a rehabilitation of artists who had been banned during the Nazi era. In addition to this primary mission, Werner Haftmann, the exhibition's artistic director, also displayed works from the contemporary art scene in order to illustrate the aesthetic continuation of pre-war abstraction in post-war painting. In doing so, Haftmann elevated abstract art to the position of an artistic *Weltsprache* or global language once and for all. The works of art exhibited familiarised visitors with the non-representational avant-garde and provided artists with ideas for their own artistic work.²⁵ For

Glöckner, documenta I offered both confirmation and stimulation. On exhibit were not only works by contemporary representatives of constructivism or neoplasticism such as Vordemberge-Gildewart, Josef Albers, or Piet Mondrian, but also of painters working in abstract expressionism, such as Soulage, Hartung, and even Fritz Winter, in whose works he found objectives similar to his own. The integration of younger artists among works by world-class figures such as Picasso, Matisse, and Kandinsky ennobled both their and Glöckner's stature.

Glöckner was not the only one of the Dresden artists who visited documenta; others included Helmut Schmidt-Kirstein, Hans Christoph, Herbert Kunze, and Wilhelm Müller, whose work all benefited from the ability to visit and exhibit their work in Western galleries.²⁶ Access to exhibitions featuring contemporary and abstract art became pivotal to living artists, who sought new ideas and methods from the works on display. In addition to documenta I, Müller also gathered information in West Berlin, most notably at the Berlin gallery Haus am Waldsee, and drew inspiration from the new avant-garde, such as Jackson Pollock.²⁷ Schmidt-Kirstein, whose exhibition in the city of Halle was closed on government order in 1952,²⁸ continued working nevertheless and later secured an opportunity to exhibit paintings in West Germany. In 1956 he became a member of the Verband Bildender Künstler Deutschlands (VBKD) while also exhibiting a work in Düsseldorf, namely his piece *Weiss auf Schwarz* (White on Black), an abstract monotype which relies fully on the contrast between light and dark to create tension between the confrontation of shapes with lines.

All these experiences came together in Dresden in a productive dialogue. The private circles that the artists organised were particularly beneficial in that they afforded opportunities for feedback. In addition, several important figures and institutions provided logistical support. Will Grohmann, who had been supporting practitioners of modern art since the 1920s, became director of the city's Kulturamt in 1945, a position that allowed him to set the artistic tone in Dresden.²⁹ Werner Schmidt, who directed the Kupferstich-Kabinett from 1959-89, also played a particularly important role. Fearless in his support of abstract artists, Schmidt compiled a vast collection of significant works during his directorship, and provided interested circles with the opportunity to engage with the international avant-garde. Most of

these works had to be smuggled into the collection, since an official commission monitored all purchases. Unsurprisingly, the authorities followed with mistrust and occasionally prohibited Schmidt's daring activities.³⁰ Other pivotal support to the network of Dresden artists was provided by private collectors. Ursula Baring, a gymnastics teacher and art collector, made her apartment in Dresden-Strehlen available for private get-togethers and organised private exhibitions, to which she invited musicians and poets as well as artists.³¹

Another peculiarity of the Dresden art scene was the Kunstaussstellung Kühl, the only private gallery in the GDR to survive the storms of formalism when other similar institutions were closed. The Kühl gallery had played an important role as an agent for modern art since its founding in 1924, offering debut opportunities, in particular, for a number of young artists from Dresden. Through its promotion of Die Brücke painters and its presentation of abstract artists such as Mondrian and El Lissitzky, the gallery had established itself as a trend-setting institution. After the war, Heinrich Kühl marked the reopening of the gallery in late August 1947 with an exhibition featuring Glöckner and the West German artists Götz and Nay. Götz had been in Dresden briefly during the war and had taken a spirited part in its cultural recovery. He made appearances not only at Kühl's gallery but also at the gatherings of 'der ruf' and 'Das Ufer'. Such pan-German visibility helped to characterise Götz as one of the driving forces of the Art Informel movement, and throughout the course of his career, he carefully maintained his Dresden contact with Kühl.³² The Kühl gallery thus offered a central location which counteracted state exclusionary policies and strongly bound together the non-conformist artists who gathered there. However, constant surveillance by the Stasi and the use of abusive interrogation in order to procure information about artists suggest Kühl paid a high price for this exceptional status.³³

Alternative Paintings: Dresden's Networks of Art Informel

Due to the unique public and private networks available to Dresden artists, the city developed a particularly vibrant version of Art Informel, defined here less as an artistic style and more as an artistic approach to abstraction. Dresden's Art Informel drew on a variety of different compositional techniques, motifs, and materials, and in its unconventional approach and creative incorporation of the unconscious, resulted in significant new types of paintings. The movement

merged national and international models for abstraction that can be traced back to the years before World War II, with creative innovations necessitated by local constraints on avant-garde GDR artists. The result is a distinctly East German style of abstraction that reveals productive dialogical networks at both local, pan-Germanic, and international levels, thus complicating portrayals of East German art as either isolated or dedicated primarily to socialist realism.

The work of Hermann Glöckner, considered one of the most important representatives of this alternative scene, demonstrates how Dresden's Art Informel continued the avant-garde currents of the pre-war period while exploring new methods and materials. Twice unsuccessful in his applications to study at the Akademie in Dresden, Glöckner began work as an independent artist in 1911 and developed a personal style dedicated to constructivist compositions, defined by colourful paint application and an avoidance of the overtly representational. These modes of expression became characteristic in his work and culminated in his 'Tafelwerk' series from the 1930s, the epitome of his artistic efforts from that period.³⁴ In the post-war period, Glöckner focused on shapes created by recurrent, circular movements of his wrist swinging freely above the paper, a means of translating body movement directly into artistic form. In *Helle Winkel über dunklen Kurven* harmonious swinging movements interfere with short staccato lines which seem to be executed spontaneously but are deliberately confined to the painting's margins. Vibrant actions and calculated movements are combined with free gestures, helping to define the artwork as an impulsive statement rather than a realisation of preceding sketches.

Considering that experimentation and the use of non-typical materials are central characteristics of Art Informel, Glöckner quickly emerges as one of the most creative and inventive artists in Dresden. There was hardly an object, technique, or material that he did not exploit in the name of artistic expression. He combined carbon and chalk with tempera painting, drew with candle wax, and creatively employed a tailor's tracing wheel to create patterns. Even a grease mark that chanced to turn up on a sheet of paper could be transformed into a work by the addition of a signature and a date. In the winter, ice and frozen snow on his balcony inspired him to make frottages, and cords lying under wet paper were used to form three-dimensional gravures.

Hermann Glöckner, *Gekreuzte Schleifspuren auf karminrotem Sandpapier* (1959). Chalk on abrasive paper. 15.1 x 21 cm. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2010.



Hermann Glöckner, *Blaue und weiße Schleifspuren auf gelbem Sandpapier* (1959). Chalk on abrasive paper. 13.2 x 22.2 cm. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2010.



Paper was folded and crumpled, then dipped into paint so that fine lines and structures of varying intensity appeared. Sometimes he mixed sand or mortar with oil paint, producing a surface that resembled a relief more than a painting. In one prominent series, illustrated on the opposite page, Glöckner used abrasive paper to sand down a surface until the paper became traced with steady lines and overlays. Glöckner then highlighted these lines with white chalk, giving more precision to the pattern. Several parts of the paper were ruptured in this process; the damage was incorporated as part of the composition. Glöckner's importance within the Dresden scene is easily seen in his influence on his students, including Wilhelm Müller (1928-99), who studied with him from 1964 to 1966. Müller's creations bear a considerable formal affinity to Glöckner's; both went through the same constructivist and abstract phases and arrived at similar artistic solutions. To consider Müller as an epigone, however, would not do justice to his individual aesthetic ingenuity. Indeed, Müller had already completed an extensive oeuvre of paintings and drawings before his close association with Glöckner.

In his artistic endeavours, Müller creatively found solutions to both formal aesthetic problems and the political restrictions that hindered his free acquisition of artistic materials. Müller began working in Dresden as a dentist in 1961, and his art shows a creative combination of his two professions. He often used medical tinctures like iodine and hydrogen peroxide in place of the usual artists' mediums, concentrating on chemical processes instead of using brushes. As a result, diverse chemical reactions take place according to the liquids he applied, resulting in artworks such as *Dunkle Spritzer auf hellem Grund* (1957), illustrated overleaf. In this example, oil paint dapples the surface, brushstrokes beat the paper, and chemical substances alter the canvas in successive applications. The surface gradually modifies, and although the result appears to be random, the painting is actually self-organised.³⁵

Because Müller was not a member of the VBKD he could not shop in the usual artistic supply stores. But his employment of medical tinctures in his works must not be misunderstood merely as a necessary alternative; the private collector Renate Glück, who supported many artists, supplied him with paints and brushes, acquisitions made possible through her trips to the West.³⁶ The decision to use tinctures is therefore more indicative of Müller's

fascination with chemical fluids, which he transformed into painting materials. In this respect, his innovative experimental attitude was quite comparable to that of Glöckner and other Art Informel artists.³⁷

Wilhelm Müller, *Dunkle Spritzer auf hellem Grund* (1957). Brush and medicinal drugs on paper. 29.7 x 41.7 cm. © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2010.



As with Glöckner's work, Müller's oeuvre includes diverse series which explore the range of possibilities in Art Informel. Several black-and-white monotypes from the mid-1960s recall the series of air-pump pictures by Götz created in 1945, in which black water-colours were sprayed onto paper with an air pump.³⁸ In the late 1960s, Müller moved on to monochrome paintings, in which pigment and different tinctures intermingle and penetrate softened paper. Hans-Ulrich Lehmann has given a precise account of this creative process, describing how in a continuous and complex process Müller washed the paper, added pigments, and then proceeded to brush, damage, and cut into the paper to 'unmake' its manifest materiality and transform it into an 'immaterial body of colour'.³⁹ Müller's concept may recall the work of Yves Klein, but the technical perfection and critical treatment of colour, materials, paper, and subject matter reveal his art to be a

confident, personal contribution to the emancipation of colour from content. The artist's subjectivity disappears behind the surface, which recalls a bas-relief. The painting obeys physical rules and seems to find its texture independently, thereby becoming autonomous. In a later variation on this series, however, Müller revokes precisely this autonomy. Through minimal but crucial interventions he retrieves the subjective design process, revealing the artist as the true author of the work. By covering monochrome fields with a rigid series of parallel stripes, he alludes to his constructivist oeuvre and embeds the coincidental into a firmly established system, allowing two conflicting principles to come into communication with one another.

In contrast to the aforementioned painters, whose works demonstrate a continuous development in the degree of abstraction, other artists moved abruptly to new methods of representation inspired by encounters with living experimental artists such as Jackson Pollock. The Pollock exhibition in West Berlin in 1958 was something of an epiphany for Hans Jüchser, who was electrified by the experience. Prior to 1958, he had preferred the depiction of human figures, but after his encounter with Pollock's work he began experimenting with abstract shapes, geometrical forms, and even abstract expressionism. Despite this early enthusiasm, this style remains restricted to a small portion of his work;⁴⁰ Art Informel was apparently not as important to Jüchser as it was to Glöckner or Müller. As Jüchser notes, it was difficult for him to avoid depiction of any subject at all, and he eventually returned completely to the depiction of human figures.⁴¹

Pollock provided further inspiration for an assortment of artists within the GDR, including Hans Christoph, who had long been familiar with modern paintings. In his autobiography *Erinnerungen*, he describes his journeys to the Rhineland and the Netherlands during the first two decades of the twentieth century, as well as his fascination with van Gogh, Matisse, Cézanne, and the French Impressionists.⁴² On a more local level, he often visited the famous state gallery in Dresden and became especially interested in the work of Max Beckmann, Lyonel Feininger, Franz Marc, and Oskar Kokoschka.⁴³ From the mid-1950s on, Christoph increasingly neglected the object in his paintings and preferring instead to play with overlapping and superimposition. Dense textures cover these paintings. The single line is of no importance; it is only the weaving of lines in their entirety that counts. As with Pollock, the process of emergence is

pivotal, and Christoph's works show Pollock-esque weavings as well as drippings but with a key distinction: whereas Pollock's method was impulsive and often characterised by enthusiasm, Christoph brought impetuous gestures under control.

A close friend of Christoph was Helmut Schmidt-Kirstein (1909-85). As with Christoph, still lifes, landscapes, and figurative depictions determined most of his themes, but his abstract models emerge clearly: Picasso, Braque, Rohlfs, and Schmidt-Rottluff. Over time, the details of objects and faces were reduced in his work: bodies began to be characterised only by outlines; faces were devoid of features; and no physiognomy was indicated. Instead, the artist concentrated on the interplay of shapes. Spatial aspects increasingly receded into the background, allowing the ordering of the surface to dominate. In 1956 he also produced multicoloured monotypes filled with abstract spatial illusions. By means of overlaying structures he achieved three-dimensional motifs, and in the late 1950s these culminated in a voluminous lithographic cycle, some of which show scratches that fill the whole surface and others which highlight the motif ostentatiously as a form in the centre.

Schmidt-Kirstein worked with gouache and oil paint simultaneously, prompting new artistic ideas that reflect his experiences of both materials. While his etchings make use of the autonomous line, his paintings experiment with the liberation of colour. Through multiple applications of colour and repeated drying processes he made the varying hues the actual theme of the paintings. In *Blumenstilleben* a rare large-format oil painting from 1969, he achieved qualities of Tachisme via this technique, but the link back to a perceivable object was not completely negated. No matter how much the picture owes its charm to the thick application of paint, recollections of floral motifs come to mind. Moreover, Schmidt-Kirstein sometimes gave his abstract lithographs titles that clearly name the object, such as *Weibliche Figure* (1969), suggesting that the visible world remained an important artistic source even during his abstract period. In this context, his break with Art Informel in the 1970s appears logical, in that his titles explicitly underline the object as the basis of his work. He subsequently dedicated himself mostly to watercolours, executing landscapes and floral still lifes that moved freely between abstraction and representation.

Conclusion

The artistic networks that fostered such artistic experimentation did not merely retain their crucial importance over the years but gained significance after 1961 when it became more difficult to maintain contacts with the West. Such connections were invaluable both as reassurance for artists and for exposure to original works. In addition to the Kupferstich-Kabinett, diverse private collections in the city assumed the task of supporting Art Informel. At the same time, contacts were fostered with artists' groups in other cities, such as the Erfurter Atelieregemeinschaft, which transformed a private studio in December 1963 into an exhibition space for local and visiting artists. Rudolf Franke, who taught free and applied graphics at the Pädagogische Hochschule Erfurt, assumed leadership of the Atelieregemeinschaft,⁴⁴ and played an instrumental role in putting together an extensive collection of modern graphics which he presented to an invited circle at regular gatherings.⁴⁵

In the visual arts, the measures that the GDR took to secure its borders in 1961 by no means led to a complete severance from international developments in art; as the history of Art Informel in Dresden proves, construction of the Wall did not mark a turning point in either artistic productivity or artistic creativity. Rather, private artistic circles developed into firm institutions in which aesthetic practices were passed on to a generation of followers. In Dresden, Herbert Kunze had a noteworthy impact on the second generation of abstract artists and is considered an important link between the two generations. Kunze had close, amicable contacts with the other Art Informel artists and passed this approach on to his pupils, including Eberhard Göschel (b. 1943) and Gerda Lepke (b. 1939).⁴⁶ During the 1970s, all of them developed their own forms within the realm. Göschel adapted Art Informel to his sculptures and was undeterred despite being subjected to continuous and vehement attacks by the Stasi.⁴⁷ Lepke – who only narrowly escaped expulsion from the Dresden Akademie because of her refusal to put socialist content into her works – earned her living for many years as a nurse,⁴⁸ while developing representations that persisted in allusions to the object, even if the object was no longer legible. Her landscapes express inner visions that emerge from the artist's experience in nature, always with a specific topographic situation in mind.

Since the 1950s, Art Informel has been interpreted as an expression of latent resistance. Yet, the notion of a public political position was alien to most of the artists working in Art Informel, whether of the first or second generation. They saw their work neither as a purposive commentary on cultural-political life nor as deliberate provocation. They were not active in subversive political circles; instead, they directed the focus of their actions primarily toward their aesthetic work.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, based as they were on principles that defied the proscribed regulations, their compositions confronted the mandated artistic repertoire. Thus, confrontation with the state was always a possibility.

This close interweaving of formal and political attitudes did not ease even after Erich Honecker's accession to power. He had promised a more liberal course for the GDR, coining the slogan 'Weite und Vielfalt' at the Fourth Conference of the Central Committee of the SED on 17 December 1971, and infamously proclaiming: 'wenn man von der festen Position des Sozialismus ausgeht, kann es meines Erachtens auf dem Gebiet von Kunst und Literatur keine Tabus geben.'⁵⁰ These words were understood by many artists and intellectuals as a clear concession to a greater artistic autonomy, and in fact new literary clubs and galleries did come into being immediately afterwards; literature that had previously been prohibited was printed and produced on stage.⁵¹ But the promised liberalising concessions lasted only a short time. A newly hardened course was already heralded by the expatriation of singer-songwriter Wolfgang Biermann in 1976. The circumstances under which art could be produced and presented had not changed; artistic self-assertion was as unwelcome as before. In retaliation, the state employed a variety of intimidation tactics against undesirable artists that ranged from co-option for state purposes to demoralisation, spying, and disruptive raids.

Despite such methods, the politically explosive force of Art Informel did not become obsolete. Retention of the Informel pictorial language was tantamount to a defence of personal and artistic self-assertion, and its immanent ideological connotations may be responsible for the fact that Art Informel was not replaced by new currents in the 1960s. Rather, it continuously kept its relevance alongside other trends. While in the FRG, artists such as Otto Greis, one of the early protagonists of Art Informel, complained in the late

1950s that the movement had degenerated into a fad,⁵² in the GDR it enjoyed a second and decidedly productive phase. Art Informel in Dresden thus followed its own independent line of development. Evolving as a logical continuation of the pre-war avant-garde and buoyed by engagement with contemporary international artistic trends, East German Informel was supported by a close network that connected artists, collectors, and representatives of relevant institutions. Under these circumstances it was possible for works to be produced that favoured subjective expression and formal experimentation but which nonetheless should not be read as being devoid of political energy. In this regard they differ fundamentally from Informel works in the West.

Notes

¹ Dieter Hoffmann, 'Kunst in Dresden. Die Anfänge nach 1945', in: Günter Feist, Eckhart Gillen and Beatrice Vierneisel, eds, *Kunstdokumentation SBZ/DDR 1945-1990. Aufsätze, Berichte, Materialien*, Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1996, pp. 252-8.

² The members of these associations played an important role in the development of Art Informel in particular.

³ The Deutsche Kunstausstellungen were organised in Dresden every four to five years until the end of the GDR.

⁴ Ulrike Rüdiger and Jutta Penndorf, 'Ich bin gebunden an Atmosphäre und abhängig vom Gegenstand', in: Ulrike Rüdiger and Jutta Penndorf, eds, *Gerda Lepke*, Exhibition Catalogue, Gera: Kunstsammlung Gera, 1999, p. 26; and Mühlhäuser Museen, GrafikArt e.V. Erfurt, ed., *Kunst im Gegenwind. Die Erfurter Ateliergemeinschaft 1963 bis 1974*, Mühlhausen and Erfurt, 1998, p. 14.

⁵ Mühlhäuser Museen, *Kunst im Gegenwind*, p. 14.

⁶ Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst Leipzig, ed., *Zweihundert Jahre Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst*, Leipzig: HGB, 1964.

⁷ On Weißensee see Samson Dietrich Sauerbier, ed., *Zwei Aufbrüche. Die ersten zehn Jahre. Sinn, Sinne, Lehre. Ansichten zu Aussichten*, Berlin: Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weißensee, 1997.

⁸ Julia Kluge-Fabényi, 'Malerei und Grafik', in: *75 Jahre Burg Giebichenstein 1915-1990. Beiträge zur Geschichte*, Halle: Burg Giebichenstein Hochschule für Kunst und Design Halle, 1990, p. 174.

⁹ See Sauerbier, *Zwei Aufbrüche*. The question as to why a major Art Informel movement did not become established in Berlin cannot yet be answered because of the lack of preliminary research.

¹⁰ Manfred Altner, ed., *Dresden. Von der Königlichen Kunstakademie für Bildende Künste, 1764–1989. Die Geschichte einer Institution*, Dresden: Verlag der Künste, 1990, p. 426.

¹¹ Altner, *Dresden*, pp. 394 and 398.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 402-10.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 422. In the meantime the Akademie der Bildenden Künste and the Hochschule für Werkkunst had merged institutionally into the Hochschule für Bildende Künste.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 428. Paul Michaelis was rector from 1959-63, Bergander again from 1964-5, and Gerhard Bonzin from 1965-70.

¹⁵ Fritz Loeffler, 'Hans Christoph. Eröffnungsrede zur Ausstellung in der Kunstausstellung Kühl im Juni 1976', *Hans Christoph. Gemälde. Farbige Blätter. Collagen*, Exhibition Catalogue, Cottbus: Brandenburgische Kunstsammlungen, 1991, p. 20. Mart Stam was appointed rector of the Akademie on 15 December 1948, but moved to the Kunsthochschule in Berlin-Weißensee on 1 May 1950. See Altner, *Dresden*, pp. 421-2.

¹⁶ See Hans Christoph, *Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben*, estate papers, unpublished typescript, 1987, p. 76.

¹⁷ Loeffler, 'Hans Christoph', p. 20. As difficult as it may have been for him to leave active teaching, he was able to support himself in the following years by doing applied graphics for the Leipzig fair. Moreover he was on close terms with his former student, Helga Knobloch, who was also employed as a fair designer and thus contributed to their livelihood.

¹⁸ From 1946-8 he was director of the photography and film workshop at the Staatliche Hochschule für Werkkunst in Dresden; he was employed from 1948-53 at the Hochschule für angewandte Kunst in Berlin-Weißensee; and from 1956 by the Deutsche Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen in Potsdam.

¹⁹ The Arbeitskreis zur Erforschung der Kunst in der DDR dedicated its first conference on 24-25 October 2008 to the artistic exchange between East and West Germany, investigating the contacts maintained on institutional as well as on private levels and examining the concrete effects of these contacts on paintings.

- ²⁰ Christoph, *Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben*, p. 72.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Ibid., p. 73.
- ²³ Ibid., p. 81.
- ²⁴ See *Hermann Glöckner zum 95. Geburtstag*, Exhibition Catalogue, Dresden: Kupferstich-Kabinett der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Dresden, 1984, pp. 4-6.
- ²⁵ There was no appreciation of abstract art by the general public even in the West. As the Darmstädter Gespräche show, there were keen discussions even among art critics and art historians.
- ²⁶ See Eugen Blume and Roland März, eds, *Kunst in der DDR. Eine Retrospektive der Nationalgalerie*, Exhibition Catalogue, Berlin: G+H Verlag, 2003, p. 135; and Hans-Ulrich Lehmann, 'Zwischen amorph und kristallin', in: *Wilhelm Müller. Arbeiten auf Papier*, Exhibition Catalogue, Dresden: Kupferstich-Kabinett der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Dresden, 1996, p. 10.
- ²⁷ Lehmann, 'Zwischen amorph und kristallin', p. 10.
- ²⁸ Anne Peters, 'Helmut Schmidt-Kirstein. Abstraktion und Figuration in Dresden', *Helmut Schmidt-Kirstein 1909-1985. Zeichnungen, Aquarelle, Druckgraphik*, Exhibition Catalogue, Albstadt: Städtische Galerie, 1994, p. 10.
- ²⁹ Altner, *Dresden*, p. 418.
- ³⁰ See the interview with Werner Schmidt in Sigrid Hofer, ed., *Gegenwelten. Informelle Malerei in der DDR: Das Beispiel Dresden*, Frankfurt am Main and Basel: Stroemfeld, 2006, pp. 37-53.
- ³¹ Unfortunately she destroyed all of her documentation of these exhibitions in 1961 when a house search by the Stasi was about to take place. See Hans-Ulrich Lehmann, *Aus der Sammlung Ursula Baring*, Exhibition Catalogue, Dresden: Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, 1997.
- ³² His correspondence can be found in the gallery's archive.
- ³³ See Sigrid Popp, 'Die künstlerische Avantgarde im Blickfeld der Staatssicherheit', in: Hofer, ed., *Gegenwelten. Informelle Malerei in der DDR*, pp. 65-84.
- ³⁴ Ernst-Gerhard Güse, *Hermann Glöckner. Werke 1909-1985*, Exhibition Catalogue, Stuttgart: Hatje, 1993, p. 11. Beginning in 1927 he exhibited in Berlin,

Leipzig, Hanover, Cologne, Stuttgart, Mannheim, Hagen and Dresden. See Güse, *Hermann Glöckner*, p. 4.

³⁵ See Lehmann, *Wilhelm Müller*, p. 61.

³⁶ A note on the backside of one work reads: 'We'll see what Renate has brought along.' See 'Untitled', 1963-64, coloured chalk and pencil on paper, private ownership; illustrated in Hofer, *Gegenwelten. Informelle Malerei in der DDR*, p. 213.

³⁷ Similar procedures were favoured, for instance, by the Dresden artist Edmund Kesting, the inventor of 'chemical painting', a technique which involves pouring photochemical liquids together. A precise exposure to light evoked different colour values, and the drawings he made on the paper while the chemical process was underway controlled and finished the subject. See Renate Bergerhoff, *Edmund Kesting*, Potsdam: Kulturhaus Hans Marchwitza, 1983.

³⁸ See Sigrid Hofer, ed., *Entfesselte Form. Fünfzig Jahre Frankfurter Quadriga*, Exhibition Catalogue, Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld, 2002, p. 56.

³⁹ Lehmann, 'Zwischen amorph und kristallin', p. 13.

⁴⁰ Information kindly provided by Helga Jüchser, Dresden, 15 September 2004.

⁴¹ Despite his precautionary measures, in the 1970s the Staatlicher Kunsthandel, a government agency whose mission was to export cultural goods in order to increase the GDR's foreign currency, became aware of Jüchser's Art Informel work. Its official statements notwithstanding, the Staatlicher Kunsthandel used banned artistic trends for its own purposes, thereby delivering obvious evidence of the Janus-headed cultural policies of the time. See *Hans Jüchser. Malerei, Grafik*. Exhibition Catalogue, Berlin, Görlitz: Staatlicher Kunsthandel der DDR, 1986.

⁴² Manuscript in the estate papers, Dresden.

⁴³ Christoph, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 27-30.

⁴⁴ See Paul Kaiser, 'Rudolf Franke und die Erfurter Atelieregemeinschaft 1963-1974', in: Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, *Abstraktion im Staatssozialismus: Feindsetzung und Freiräume im Kunstsystem der DDR*, Weimar: VDG, 2003.

⁴⁵ See Cornelia Nowak, 'ich mache kein Geheimnis daraus, moderne Kunst zu sammeln. Rudolf Franke's Grafiksammlung des 20. Jahrhunderts', in: *Dem Auge ein Fest. Die Schenkung Rudolf und Ilse Franke*, Exhibition Catalogue, Erfurt: Angermuseum, 2005, pp. 13-23.

⁴⁶ See Heinrich Schierz, *Herbert Kunze. Anreger und Freund*, Exhibition Catalogue, Dresden: Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Cottbus, 1988.

⁴⁷ See Popp, 'Die künstlerische Avantgarde', pp. 80-4.

⁴⁸ See Rüdiger and Penndorf, 'Ich bin gebunden an Atmosphäre und abhängig vom Gegenstand', pp. 119-21.

⁴⁹ Information kindly provided by Günther Hornig, Dresden, 21 February 2005.

⁵⁰ Cited in Manfred Jäger, *Kultur und Politik in der DDR. 1945-1990*, Cologne, Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1995, p. 140. The reasons for this new course cannot be explored here, but diplomatic considerations certainly played a role since the GDR was making an increased effort under Honecker to gain recognition as a nation.

⁵¹ See Rüdiger Thomas, 'Selbst-Behauptung', in: Gabriele Muschter and Rüdiger Thomas, eds, *Jenseits der Staatskultur. Traditionen autonomer Kunst in der DDR*, Cologne: Carl Hanser, 1992, pp. 23-30.

⁵² Information kindly provided by Margareta Bolza-Greis, Ockersheim, 7 March 2002.

Sara Lennox

**Reading Transnationally:
the GDR and American Black Writers**

As new transnational approaches to German history demonstrate, what happened outside the GDR's formal boundaries profoundly affected what took place within the state. Within the GDR, literature penned by black American writers particularly captured the imaginations of East German readers. Overall, two interpretive discourses directed the official reception of black writing: i) the equation of liberation narratives with Marxist-Leninist accounts of human oppression and freedom, and ii) the notion that black liberation movements in the United States demonstrated the reality of imperialistic threat and the need for socialist resistance. Thus, GDR literary scholars who commented on African-American literature insisted that the Civil Rights Movement could only be comprehended within a Marxist-Leninist framework.

Within German studies, new transnational approaches to history have amply demonstrated that what happens outside the nation profoundly affects that which takes place within it. The battle for hearts and minds, therefore, was not merely a domestic concern but an international one. Within the Cold War context, the Soviet Union, the United States, and their respective allies contended vigorously in the international arena to win friends among non-aligned nations and to court dissidents inside the countries of their political enemies. As part of that struggle, both countries endeavoured to interpret the actions of their enemy as further legitimisation of the specific brand of human development and happiness to which they pledged allegiance, communism and capitalism respectively. For the United States, the domestic situation of African-Americans remained problematic in their campaigns for democratic reform. As Penny Von Eschen, distinguished historian of American race relations during the Cold War, explains:

American officials pursued a self-conscious campaign against worldwide criticism of U.S. racism, striving to build cordial relations with new African and Asian states. The glaring contradiction in this strategy was that the United States promoted black artists as goodwill ambassadors – symbols of the triumph of American democracy – when America was still a Jim Crow nation.¹

As Von Eschen notes, live tours by American jazz musicians such as Dizzie Gillespie, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington were 'inten-

ded to promote a vision of colour-blind democracy' but ultimately projected an image of American nationhood and racial relations that 'were more inclusive than the reality'.²

At the same time, a number of influential African-American intellectuals had turned to communism with the hope that it would provide a political framework capable of liberating Black Americans from racial and class oppression. Such affiliations pleased communist leaders in that renewed attention to the miserable realities of African-Americans, which became a focal point for Black communist leaders, seemed optimally to meet communist propaganda purposes. As Horst Ihde contends somewhat gleefully in his 1975 study of African-American history and culture,

[es] besteht eine enge Verbindung zwischen der schwarzen Befreiungsbewegung und den außenpolitischen Fragen, denn eine Regierung, die das Freiheitsstreben ihrer Bürger im eigenen Land mit brutaler Gewalt unterdrückt, kann sich im Ausland schlecht als Freiheitsapostel ausgeben.³

Within the GDR, African-Americans became increasingly important for the state's legitimisation, and Black literature and performances were often appropriated into political narratives that promoted East German visions of society. One example appears in *Lied der Ströme*, a 1954 DEFA film designed around a 1954 Brecht poem of the same title. Directed by Joris Ivens, the film featured a soundtrack by Soviet composer Dmitri Shostakovich and vocal performances by the great African-American communist and singer Paul Robeson. *Lied der Ströme* is a hymn to human labour along the banks of six great rivers: the Nile, Ganges, Mississippi, Amazon, Volga, and Yangtze. Somewhat predictably, the film portrays workers on the shores of the first four rivers as still bowed and constrained by the yoke of capitalism, while those along the Volga and Yangtze, where socialism has already triumphed, have been liberated and their collective human productive powers harnessed for the good of the people. The depiction of human activity along the rivers conforms both to the Marxist narrative of global human development from human subordination to the classless Marxist society and, somewhat contradictorily, to German notions of race developed during the Enlightenment.

Paul Robeson, whose accomplishments, affiliations, and afflictions exemplarily model African-American masculinity as corresponding to that of the New Socialist Man, opens the film singing a song about

human freedom. About fifteen minutes into the film, which is itself a paean to human productivity, the viewer encounters the first world river depicted: the Mississippi. Recalling the 1927 American musical *Show Boat* – or perhaps the 1938 film version featuring Paul Robeson singing ‘Ol’ Man River’, a song that would soon become his signature ballad – Brecht begins his poem with the line ‘Old Man Mississippi rages,’ thereby situating his account of the proletariat’s struggle to tame great rivers within the context of African-American life and struggles of the period.⁴ Two possible reasons for this human suffering emerge in the course of the film. Perhaps African-Americans remain entirely oppressed because, as the film proposes using dramatic images of torch-lit Ku Klux Klan assemblies, they are victims of the Klan, which the film maintains is under the leadership of Joseph McCarthy, a peculiar association that rewrites white supremacy as a creature of Cold War anti-communism. Or, as the progression of the film suggests, the early appearance of the Mississippi workers posits them as primitive beings who have not yet developed the skills, technologies, purposefulness, and commitment that would enable them to take their destinies into their own hands. Indeed, the film ends at the opposite end of this socialist scale: the Volga. In these concluding scenes, the Soviet workers exert collective human effort to turn the powers of the river to their own human purposes. Such, the film suggests, might be the happy reconciliation of humanity and nature that Marx promised in his *1844 Manuscripts*, if only African Americans would unite in solidarity with other workers to realise socialist ends.

Two discourses emerge in the film that also surfaced in official reception of Black writing in the GDR. The first maintains that the official Marxist-Leninist account of the movement from human oppression to human freedom is correct, and must therefore suffice to explain what kinds of political actions are necessary to bring about Black liberation. The second views the emergence of national liberation movements in Africa – and the Black liberation movements that drew inspiration from them – as confirmation to the GDR that oppressed peoples continued to struggle against the imperialist, capitalist powers that held them in bondage, thereby validating the GDR’s decision to opt for socialism. One narrative strategy within GDR literary criticism of Black writing was the incorporation of African-American writers into a broader, undifferentiated vision of

humanity; such an approach argued that, unlike imperialist powers, the GDR considered Black people as human beings destined for the happy socialist future already achieved in the GDR. On the other hand, African-Americans who denied communism were generally subjected to a German racial discourse that had originated in the Enlightenment; in these accounts, they were portrayed either as hapless victims not yet able to seize control of their own lives or as primitive and barbarous savages who, for purely racial reasons, lacked the resources to do so. Thus, GDR literary scholars insisted that the Black liberation struggle in the United States could only be comprehended within a Marxist-Leninist framework as a response to class, and only secondarily as a response to racial domination. Commentators either situate Black literary production within the same ‘kämpferisch-demokratischen Tradition’⁵ as GDR writing or, conversely, condemn African-American writers for not properly understanding and representing the social context responsible for constraining their characters.

From a Trickle to a Stream: Black Writing in the GDR Press

Horst Ihde’s 1975 book *Von der Plantage zum schwarzen Ghetto: Geschichte und Kultur der Afroamerikaner in den USA* – possibly the first GDR book to focus on African-American history – represents the official narrative of Black American history as understood in the GDR.⁶ Ihde begins his book by gesturing towards Black political unrest in ‘das reichste und mächtigste Land des Imperialismus’ and noting its resonance within the GDR: ‘Wie unmittelbar und persönlich uns diese Ereignisse auf einem fernen Kontinent berühren, zeigte die Begeisterung, mit der Paul Robeson, der großartige farbige Künstler, bei seinen Besuchen in der DDR empfangen wurde.’⁷ Far from portraying people of African descent as primitive, he explicitly distances himself from racist notions of ‘rassische Minderwertigkeit’ and instead dwells on the ‘Zahl und Mannigfaltigkeit der frühen Kulturzentren auf dem schwarzen Kontinent’ and Africa’s rich cultural traditions.⁸ Ihde also provides an extensive overview of African-American cultural production in his book, albeit always packaged in the prerequisite ideologically correct language. The first Black poets of eighteenth-century North America, Phyllis Wheatly and Jupiter Hammon, are criticised for their lack of artistic solidarity in that they

protestieren mit ihren Dichtungen nicht gegen die Sklaverei: Sie begrüßen sogar dieses unmenschliche System und konnten folglich nicht zu Sprechern der Klasse der Sklaven werden. [...] Da sie ihrer eigenen Klasse völlig entfremdet waren und mit den echten Problemen des pulsierenden Lebens kaum in Berührung kamen, wirkt ihre Dichtung inhaltsleer, blutlos und oberflächlich.⁹

Narratives like Frederick Douglass's autobiography, republished in the GDR in 1965, 'halfen, das ideologische Bewußtsein der Bevölkerung für die unabwendbare Auseinandersetzung zwischen dem kapitalistischen Norden und dem halbfeudalen Süden vorzubereiten.'¹⁰ Thus, in Ihde's opinion, the heroes of the early twentieth-century Black struggle were those, 'die in vielen Fällen noch direct aus dem Proletariat hervorging und die trotz der Beeinflussung durch die herrschende Kultur auch weiterhin mit den Massen des Negervolks in Verbindung blieb.'¹¹

In contrast, the writers of the Harlem Renaissance 'waren zwar überzeugt von der bildenden Funktion ihrer Kunst, jedoch waren sie nicht in der Lage, von ihrer bürgerlichen begrenzten Ideologien aus wirksame, praktische Lösungsmöglichkeiten anzubieten.'¹² In a 1978 afterword to *Zwischenfall in Harlem*, an anthology of short stories by African-American authors, Ihde veers slightly in the direction of a discourse of primitivism when he proclaims that the distinguished Black writers of the Harlem Renaissance 'erschöpften sich in der Darstellung der physischen Schönheit der Afroamerikaner und dem Nachweis der Ebenbürtigkeit Schwarzer und Weißer.'¹³ Yet by 1978 Ihde had sufficiently heeded politico-rhetorical developments in the United States and began to substitute 'Afroamerikaner' or 'schwarz' for the earlier East German term 'Neger'.

In his 1975 book, the most celebrated Black writers are those who chose communism in the years between the wars. Claude McKay receives praise for his 'neue, aufbegehrende Töne, [die] besonders die Rassenpolitik der weißen herrschenden Klasse mit bisher unbekannter Schärfe anprangern', while Countee Cullen's writing demonstrates his 'gewachsenes persönliches Verantwortungsbewußtsein gegenüber politischen Fragen sowie seine Verbundenheit mit den progressiven Kräften des amerikanischen Volkes.'¹⁴ Other portrayals mobilise struggle – whether class-based or not – as a central conceit of Black writers. Langston Hughes emerges as a writer whose creative urges derive 'aus dem reichen, lebendigen Erbe der Neger in den USA und aus seinen persönlichen Erfahrungen als Mensch zweiter Klasse in

einer von Weißen beherrschten Ausbeutergesellschaft,' while Richard Wright's novels appear founded on the conviction 'daß eine Verbindung der Rassen nur auf der Basis des gemeinsamen Kampfes gegen die weißen Unterdrücker erreicht werden kann.'¹⁵ Robeson himself makes an appearance as one able to mobilise 'die geistigen und revolutionären Potenzen [afroamerikanischer] Folklore für die Klassenkämpfe des Proletariats.'¹⁶ Ihde concludes his section on African-American writing during the Great Depression by maintaining:

In fast allen während der dreißiger Jahre entstandenen Arbeiten wird jener revolutionärer Geist lebendig, der für die gesamten Literatur dieser 'roten Dekade' charakterisch war und aus dem die progressiven Kräfte bis in unsere Zeit immer wieder Hoffnung und neue Anregungen schöpfen.¹⁷

Such progressive writing, he argues, serves to inspire today's generation of writers, whether African-American or East German: 'Dieses seinem Wesen nach revolutionären Erbe ist weder tot noch vergessen. Die Anhänger der Befreiungsbewegung erinnern sich stärker denn je dieser großen kämpferischen Tradition und setzen sie in demselben kühnen Geiste fort.'¹⁸

Not all of these texts were immediately available to GDR readers; as Rainer Schnoor notes of the early years of the GDR:

Nur zögerlich entwickelte sich auf Grund der geringen Druckkapazitäten und der ideologischen Vorgaben der ansonsten fördernd-aktiven Sowjetischen Militäradministration (SMAD) die Produktion von Büchern der amerikanischen Literatur.¹⁹

In the immediate post-war period, it was primarily African-American poetry which was circulated throughout East Germany, and most editors tended to frame the verse as part of a larger narrative of suffering, one which could be connected to the GDR's own Marxist struggles for legitimacy and statehood. In 1948, East German poet Stephan Hermlin edited and translated a bilingual collection, *Auch ich bin Amerika*, which was published by the GDR's most esteemed foreign literature press, Volk und Welt. Though the volume contains selections from the full pantheon of African-American poets and not just those in left-wing favour, Hermlin's framing of the poetry provides a Marxist twist. At the conclusion of his introduction, he summarises, 'Der Adel des echten Leidens hat diese stolze Dichtung

geprägt, die Dichtung einer uralten Rasse, die ihrer selbst und ihres Sieges im Siege der ganzen Menschheit gewiss ist.’²⁰ Not surprisingly, the eight poems by self-identified communist Langston Hughes that were selected for publication in *Sinn und Form*, the GDR’s pre-eminent literary journal, in 1949 also stress African-American victimhood. The poem ‘Vagabonds,’ for instance, details painfully the narrator’s suffering:

We are the desperate
 Who do not care,
 The hungry
 Who have nowhere
 To eat,
 No place to sleep.
 The tearless
 Who cannot
 Weep.²¹

The situation improved only marginally in the 1950s, during which the most prominent publication was Paul Robeson’s autobiography, its English title *Here I Stand* given a more polemical turn in the 1958 version by Kongress-Verlag, *Mein Lied – Meine Waffe*. The few other Black American texts that appeared in the GDR during this period were limited to those also written by African-American communists.²²

Possibly in response to the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement, what had been in the GDR only a trickle of African-American publications in the 1950s became a stream in the 1960s. From 1960 to 1965, four volumes by Langston Hughes were published, and in 1964 the English division of Volk und Welt (Seven Seas) printed a collection of English-language texts based on a 1963 issue of *Freedomways*, the Black American journal edited by John Henrik Clarke, an African-American scholar with ties to the Communist Party. W.E.B. Du Bois’s *ABC of Color* was published by Seven Seas in 1963 followed by his autobiography in 1965, complete with a foreword by the respected GDR historian Jürgen Kuczynski. Even Richard Wright, who had earlier been branded a renegade because of his public repudiation of communism in the 1950s, became available to GDR audiences in 1967 with the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Children*. Volk und Welt followed on this success by releasing two other Wright classics in translation, *Native Son* in 1968 and *Black Boy* in 1970. The works of James Baldwin, who had also received negative press earlier, were

also rehabilitated, beginning with the release of his first semi-autobiographical novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, in 1968. Thereafter, many of his major texts of prose fiction and essays were made available to GDR readers. His play, *Blues for Mister Charlie*, was performed to great acclaim in Leipzig and Rostock in 1969,²³ and in the early 1970s *Sinn und Form* republished hefty excerpts from his *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968) and 'Letter to Angela Davis', his appearance in the GDR's premier literary journal a sure sign of GDR approval. Conversely, Ralph Ellison was blacklisted from GDR publication in the 1960s, presumably because of what was perceived as a caricature of the Communist Party in *Invisible Man*.

Marginal Critiques: Literary Afterwords

While it remains nearly impossible to know how ordinary GDR readers responded to these texts, one can glean from scholarly articles – mostly published in the *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* – as well as from numerous commentaries to GDR editions of African-American texts what GDR scholars of *Amerikanistik* proscribed as appropriate reactions. As Rainer Schnoor, himself a GDR Americanist, wrote in 1999:

Am Bildungs und Erziehungsauftrag von Partei und Staat an die Gesellschaftswissenschaften und Philologien (und damit auch an die Amerikanistik) hatte sich in den 60er Jahren nichts geändert. Weiterhin sollten sie den Imperialismus 'entlarven', vor seiner Menschenfeindlichkeit warnen und die DDR-Bürger vor seinen verderblichen materiellen, ideologischen und kulturellen Einflüssen beschützen.²⁴

Schnoor later questions, with some irony, whether such an arrangement was indicative of a 'protective dictatorship' or an 'educational dictatorship'.²⁵ He does note, however, an important shift in the 1960s, during which GDR *Amerikanistik* addressed themes that had previously been taboo, albeit with a still-requisite caution.²⁶

This thematic commentary mostly appeared in forewords and afterwords appended to GDR editions of African-American texts, in which scholars proposed readings that corresponded to the GDR's ideological imperatives. Several examples illustrate this glossing well. In a 1968 afterword to Wright's *Black Boy*, Karl-Heinz Schönfelder finds it necessary to emphasise that African-American authors portray Black figures as human beings: 'Ihre literarischen Gestalten sind weder minderwertige, dem Tier nahestehende Geschöpfe noch

unschuldige, makellose Onkel Toms, sondern lebensnahe Menschen und abgerundete Persönlichkeiten.²⁷ Nonetheless, he underscores the impoverished conditions of Wright's childhood and insinuates that, in the absence of the embrace of communism, Black Mississippians remain helplessly enmired in primitivism:

Mit realistischer, stellenweise naturalistischer Detailtreue entwirft der Autor ein deprimierendes Bild von den Stätten seiner Kindheit: von der ärmlichen Wohnung, den schmutzigen Straßen, dem häßlichen Negerviertel, den stinkenden Bedürfnisanstalten sowie von den verräucherten, von Alkoholdunst erfüllten Kneipen und vermittelt auf diese Weise dem Leser einen nachhaltigen Eindruck von dem Milieu, in dem die farbige Bevölkerung Mississippis dahin vegetiert.²⁸

For these reasons, Schönfelder argues, Wright chose communism; he recognised that 'die Zugehörigkeit zu dieser Partei [...] würde ihn aus seiner bisherigen Isolierung befreien, ihm ein Gefühl der Geborgenheit geben und es ihm ermöglichen, noch wirkungsvoller für die Gleichberechtigung der Neger zu kämpfen.'²⁹

The equality enabled by communism became central to GDR interpretations of African-American authors and their texts, most often deployed by commentators to confirm the Marxist-Leninist principles they purported to find there. In a lengthy 1972 afterword to a collection of Black plays, Eberhard Brüning insists that it was white slaveholders who insisted on African-American inferiority: 'Die schwarzen Amerikaner wurden als Menschen zweiter Klasse abgestempelt, die noch nicht reif waren, an den sogenannten Segnungen der weißen abendländischen Zivilisation teilzuhaben.'³⁰ Within the context of the GDR, Brüning interprets African-American literature as a challenge to such examples of Western capitalism, arguing that 'die neuere ebenso wie die älteren afroamerikanische Dramatik [...] ist Vertiefung und Weiterführung des demokratisch-humanistischen und proletarisch-revolutionären Erbes.'³¹ Conversely, those texts that failed to adhere to Marxist principles guaranteed a negative scholarly response. John Killens's later rejection of communism caused GDR scholars to revise their notions of his writings, often painting the author as radically anti-integrationist. In 1971 Schönfelder remarked that Killens's 1954 novel *And Then We Heard the Thunder* 'verdeutlicht, wie weit sich der Autor mit der Bürgerrechtsbewegung und der militanten "Black-Power-Movement" identifiziert.'³² In 1978, Karla El-Hassan could maintain of a subsequent Killens novel, *The Cotillion*: 'In *Der Debütantenball* spricht sich der Autor uneinge-

schränkt gegen jegliche Integration von farbigen und weißen Amerikanern aus und nimmt eine undifferenzierte Antiweißhaltung ein.³³

GDR scholarly responses to James Baldwin's work over the course of two decades simultaneously reveal steps towards liberalisation and continued reliance on the Marxist-Leninist explanatory paradigm. The first scholarly treatment of Baldwin, published in 1965 by Heinz Wüstenhagen, displays marked prudery, homophobia, and racism in its conclusions. In the essay, Wüstenhagen determines: 'Wir haben es bei James Baldwin mit einem Mann zu tun, der sich weder eindeutig als Modeschriftsteller noch als konsequenter Kämpfer gegen die Rassendiskriminierung klassifizieren läßt.'³⁴ By manifesting 'Theoriefeindlichkeit und Prinzipienlosigkeit', Wüstenhagen argues that Baldwin reduces the human being to 'den Leidenden, den Dulder. Die kämpferische Seite des Menschen ist eliminiert worden';³⁵ indeed he replaces 'das soziale Menschenbild durch ein *biologisches*.'³⁶

In Baldwin's literary texts *Go Tell It On the Mountain*, *Giovanni's Room*, and *Another Country*, none of which had yet appeared in the GDR, Wüstenhagen finds 'die vorherrschende Akzentuierung sexualpathologischer Vorgänge' abhorrent, proclaiming: 'Die Sexualität einschließlich ihrer perversen Abarten ist in der spätbürgerlichen Gesellschaft jedoch eher Ausdruck sozial-sittlichen Zerfalls.'³⁷ Particularly objectionable is Baldwin's focus on 'widernatürlichen' homosexuality in *Giovanni's Room* and *Another Country*;³⁸ indeed, Wüstenhagen declares: 'Die Homosexualität ist aber typisches Merkmal der Dekadenzphase der Gesellschaftsordnung, in diesem Fall der spätbürgerlichen Ordnung.'³⁹ But perhaps, Wüstenhagen speculates, it is simply the case that Black people are naturally more inclined to sexual excess than Europeans. He muses:

Es ist dabei immerhin denkbar, daß einer solchen Haltung seelische Reaktionen zugrunde liegen, die dem Europäer – oder auch dem weißen Amerikaner [...] – verschlossen bleiben. Dahinter würde sich im Keim das gleiche Bewußtsein nicht etwa sozialer, sondern physischer, d.h. auch biologisch-rassischer Andersartigkeit andeuten, wie es im Falle des Malcolm X. oder des Elijah Muhammad zu religiös-politischer Extremen geführt hat.⁴⁰

Within three years of Wüstenhagen's negative critique, however, the perception of Baldwin's changed politics prompted the GDR to publish *Go Tell It On the Mountain*. As Brüning observes, 'Baldwins Popularität in der DDR hat seit dem Ende der sechziger Jahre ständig zugenommen. Dazu hat nicht zuletzt seine immer eindeutiger arti-

kulierte Parteinahme für die Ziele der “Black Liberation Movement” beigetragen.⁴¹ In fact, Baldwin’s popularity increased because GDR authorities decided his politics were acceptable enough to make his books available to the GDR populace. Such circulation required nimble repackaging of Wüstenhagen’s assessments; in his 1968 afterword, Karl-Heinz Schönfelder advances criticism that makes claims similar to those of Wüstenhagen, albeit cast in a more tentative language that dodges the question of homosexuality altogether. By 1975, Jutta Friedrich could praise Baldwin’s play, *Amen Corner*, for its illumination of ‘die psychologischen, kulturellen, soziologischen, ökonomischen, und politischen Aspekte des Rassenproblems,’ declaring that Baldwin’s politics had changed entirely since his first novel of 1953, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*.⁴²

In 1985, Brüning observed that GDR Americanists’ responses to Baldwin had become more differentiated since Wüstenhagen’s 1965 critique, although even as late as 1977, younger Americanists such as Hans-Jochen Sander still criticised Baldwin’s ‘komplizierte Vermengung erkannter sozialer Gesetzmäßigkeiten und psychologischer, individualisierender Konzeptionen.’⁴³ The afterwords to Baldwin’s works written in the latter days of the GDR tell a different story. Volk und Welt published *Another Country* in 1977 and Reclam issued *Giovanni’s Room* in 1981; both were republished in several editions at a time of chronic paper shortage, and Friederike Hayek reports that the second edition of *Giovanni’s Room* numbered 40,000 copies that were sold out in a matter of weeks.⁴⁴ In a lengthy and quite sensitive afterword, Bernhard Scheller, a much younger GDR Americanist, praised Baldwin precisely for his treatment of sexuality and subjectivity:

Sexualität existiert für Baldwin nicht als etwas Separates oder gar als Tabu; vielmehr wird die Beziehung zwischen Individuum und Umwelt in sehr hohem Maße subjektiviert, verinnerlicht und, der Dialektik von Form und Inhalt im Kunstwerk entsprechend, takvoll auch in die Beschreibung intimster Erlebnisse umgesetzt.⁴⁵

Nonetheless, the framework into which Scheller continues to insert Baldwin remains one of international class struggle; by 1981, Baldwin was reinvented in light of this framework – as an ‘entschiedener Repräsentant der afroamerikanischen Emanzipation’ who had published a ‘wesentlicher Beitrag zu den Rassen- und Klassenkämpfen’ as early as 1961.⁴⁶ Now elucidated via quotations from the *Communist*

Manifesto and *Das Kapital*, conceived to demand ‘Veränderung, Veränderung nicht nur der Symptome, sondern des Systems’, Baldwin became exemplary of everything the GDR wanted Black writers to be.⁴⁷

‘The Beginning of the End’: Criticism in the 1980s

The 1980s, as Schnoor observes, marked the ‘Anfang vom Ende’.⁴⁸ New approaches made their appearance in Americanist scholarship, and although a party line was still officially in place, it was more often circumvented or simply ignored. Despite new opportunities, however, GDR Americanists’ views of Black writing did not change substantively. In a 1980 essay, Eberhard Brüning begins a section on African-American writing by proclaiming:

Das Leben der schwarzen Bevölkerung in den USA, sein Ringen und menschliche Anerkennung und völlige Gleichberechtigung in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart haben stets ein großes Interesse und bemerkenswerte Solidaritätsbekundungen bei der DDR-Bevölkerung.⁴⁹

He concludes with the observation that African-American writing must be read as a humanitarian protest, as a political act, and cites Lorraine Hansberry as evidence of his claim:

‘Jeder Teil unseres Lebens ist – ein Protest’ hat einmal Lorraine Hansberry in bezug auf die gesellschaftliche Situation der schwarzen Bevölkerung in den USA – und unter diesem Aspekt kann auch der überwiegende Teil der in der DDR bekanntgewordenen Literatur afroamerikanischer Autoren gesehen werden.⁵⁰

But that is of course because it was only such texts that the GDR made available to GDR readers. In a 1984 essay, Schönfelder undertakes a literature review of recent scholarship, maintaining: ‘Eine differenzierte Bewertung des Phänomens der innovativen, experimentellen US-Erzählprosa stand ebenso aus wie eine marxistisch fundierte Einschätzung der zumeist ideologieträchtigen Massenbelletristik,’ in part because GDR scholars had hitherto concentrated on texts that contributed to what Lenin called the ‘Second Culture’ opposing the dominant reactionary culture.⁵¹ In his article, however, the only Black author who finds mention is Baldwin, and then only in passing. Given his other contributions to scholarship on Black writers, Schönfelder can scarcely be accused of ignoring Black literature. More likely, it was, because of the ideological purposes they served, impossible for

Schönfelder to situate Black writers within the ranks of mainstream American authors who were incapable of finding solutions to the social problems inherent in American society, regardless of how unsatisfactorily (from a GDR perspective) Black writers themselves might address such problems.

Horst Ihde's 1985 essay on African-Americans and the anti-imperialist struggle at the turn of the century correspondingly draws on both Lenin's ideas about the 'Second Culture' and the Gramscian notion of hegemony to explain what he calls African-American 'Counter Culture'.⁵² Yet even this new, somewhat more sophisticated Marxist framework nonetheless continued to rely on the same familiar categories to comprehend the Black American experience. Ihde contends that migration to the North allowed African-Americans to escape what Marx called 'Idiotismus des Landlebens' and properly develop themselves socially and culturally in the directions that communism demanded. He argues: 'Gleichzeitig mit der massenhaften Eingliederung der vormaligen Landarbeiter in das städtische Proletariat und das Industrieproletariat waren die Voraussetzungen geschaffen für ihre politische Organisierung und gezielte Bewußtseinsbildung.'⁵³ Only as a consequence of these classically Marxist transformations were Black Americans authorised to assume the role of historical subjects. Ihde stresses, 'Als Subjekte der Geschichte strebten sie nach ihrer Selbstverwirklichung als menschliche Wesen,' and therefore contributed to the fulfilment of communism's historical promise like other members of the proletariat.⁵⁴ Indeed, Ihde suggests that at the turn of the twentieth century something like Lenin's vanguard party emerged among African-Americans and 'Diese Elite war notwendig, um die schwarze Bevölkerung zu organisieren und die günstigen Bedingungen für die weitere Entfaltung der schwarzen Minderheit zu schaffen.'⁵⁵ He concludes: 'Dieser erbittert geführte Kampf der schwarzen Minorität um ihre Menschen – und Bürgerrechte kann als Auseinandersetzung der zweiten Kultur mit der reaktionären herrschenden Kultur charakterisiert werden.'⁵⁶ Ihde's article is notable for the wider range of sources newly available to East German scholars in the waning years of the GDR, no longer drawing upon just familiar CP-USA authorities like Herbert Aptheker, Philip Foner, and William Z. Foster, but now including American scholarship published by university presses such as Duke, Yale, Illinois, Michigan, and Massachusetts. But despite its increased

sophistication, his Marxist reading of African-American history and culture remains the same in its basic fundamentals.

Conclusion

What is enabled by transnational imaginings of the sort East Germans pursued when they read Black literature, and what do we gain by exploring this topic now? Examination of this aspect of literary reception in the GDR from a transnational perspective reveals the limitations of the GDR's discourse of international solidarity. Solidarity was extended to those whose experience could be contained within the GDR's predetermined categories. GDR Americanists were correspondingly only prepared to interpret Black literature in terms of Marxist paradigms of oppression and struggle. They constructed an understanding of Black writing that could not accommodate difference, sanctioning only those accounts of African-American life that resonated with their own Marxist categories of class struggle. And that brings us back to Paul Robeson again.

As composed by Oscar Hammerstein, the lyrics of Robeson's signature ballad 'Ol' Man River' represented Black Americans in a particular way: unproductive, shiftless, outside of history.

Dere's an ol' man called de Mississippi
 Dat's de ol' man dat I'd like to be,
 What does he care if de world's got troubles?
 What does he care if de land ain't free?

Ol' Man river, dat Ol' Man River,
 He mus' know somethin', but don't say nothin';
 He jes' keeps rollin',
 He keeps on rollin' along.

He don't plant taters, he don't plant cotton,
 An' dem dat plants 'em is soon forgotten,
 But Ol' Man River, he jes' keeps rollin' along.

You an' me, we sweat an' strain,
 Body all achin' and racked with pain.
 'Tote dat barge! Lift dat bale!
 Git a little drunk, an' you lands in jail!

Ah gits weary, an' sick o' tryin',
 Ah'm tired o' livin', and skeered o' dyin',
 But Ol' Man River, he jes' keeps rollin' along!

This was how Robeson sang the song in the film and in several stage productions. But after 1938 Robeson himself changed the words to correspond to his own understanding as a Black American communist about how Black Americans should figure in their own struggle for freedom and would henceforth only sing the song with his new lyrics:

Dere's an ol' man called de Mississippi
Dat's de ol' man I don't like to be,
 What does he care if de world's got troubles?
 What does he care if de land ain't free?
 [...]
 You an' me, we sweat an' strain,
 Body all achin' and racked with pain.
 'Tote dat barge! Lift dat bale!
You show a little grit, an' you lands in jail!

But I keeps laffin', instead of cryin',
I must keep fightin' until I'm dyin',
 And Ol' Man River, he jes' keeps rollin' along!

Such a stance ennobled Robeson in the eyes of the GDR, who elevated him to the iconic status of a socialist paragon – a Black ideal for the GDR. Of his participation in *Lied der Ströme*, Robeson wrote the following in the version of his autobiography published in the GDR: 'Es war ein Song von der brüderlichen Verbundenheit der arbeitenden Menschen aller Länder [...] wie sollte ich da nicht mitmachen?'⁵⁷ And because he embraced and disseminated the beliefs that the GDR avowed, confirming their own self-understanding, the GDR in turn honoured and loved Paul Robeson.

Notes

¹ Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004, p. 4.

² Ibid.

³ Horst Ihde, *Von der Plantage zum schwarzen Ghetto: Geschichte und Kultur der Afroamerikaner in den USA*, Leipzig: Urania Verlag, 1975, p. 7.

⁴ Bertolt Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 10, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967, p. 1024.

- ⁵ Bernhard Scheller, '13 Stichwörter statt eines Nachworts', in: James Baldwin, trans. Axel Kaum and Hans-Heinrich Wellmann, *Giovannis Zimmer*, Leipzig: Reclam, 1981, p. 165.
- ⁶ Leipzig: Urania-Verlag.
- ⁷ Ihde, *Von der Plantage zum schwarzen Ghetto*, p. 7.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 13.
- ⁹ Ibid. p. 55.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 73.
- ¹¹ Ibid., p. 116.
- ¹² Ibid., p. 119.
- ¹³ Ihde, ed., *Zwischenfall in Harlem*, Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1978, p. 337.
- ¹⁴ Ihde, *Von der Plantage zum schwarzen Ghetto*, pp. 120 and 123.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 124 and 145.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., p. 138.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., p. 146.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 157.
- ¹⁹ Rainer Schnoor, 'Amerikanistik in 40 Jahren DDR: Eine wissenschaftliche Skizze', in: Rainer Schnoor, ed., *Amerikanistik in der DDR: Geschichte – Analysen – Zeitzeugenberichte*, Berlin: trafo verlag, 1999, pp. 31-2.
- ²⁰ Stephan Hermlin, ed., *Auch ich bin Amerika: Dichtungen amerikanischer Neger*, Berlin: Verlag Volk und Welt, 1948, p. 7.
- ²¹ Langston Hughes, 'Gedichte', *Sinn und Form*, 1:3 (1949), 115-17 (here: p. 116). Poem translated by Herbert Roch.
- ²² This includes two novelists who are almost entirely forgotten today: Lloyd Brown (*Die eiserne Stadt* or *Iron City*, published in 1954) and John Killens (*Stadt am Kreuzweg* or *Youngblood*, published in 1956). Somewhat surprisingly, Dietz-Verlag also published Alice Childress's *Sie gehört nicht ganz zur Familie* or *Like One of the Family* in 1958.

²³ Eberhard Brüning, 'US-amerikanische Literatur in der DDR seit 1965', *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 28:4 (1980), 293-319 (here: p. 317). Other Black dramas also received performances in the GDR but were not published as widely. For example, Lorraine Hansberry was widely praised for her play *A Raisin in the Sun*, performed in 1963 by Berlin's Maxim Gorky Theater, but apparently only a mimeographed theatre script was actually published. See Brüning, 'US-amerikanische Literatur in der DDR seit 1965', p. 309.

²⁴ Schnoor, 'Amerikanistik in 40 Jahren DDR', p. 38.

²⁵ Ibid. A similar question was raised in a personal email exchange I had with Almut Nitzsche, a kind research assistant in Germany who helped me collect old GDR editions of African-American texts. An East German herself, Nitzsche put it this way: 'The GDR presses mostly added afterwords or forewords to the books so that we would *understand* them all.'

²⁶ Schnoor, 'Amerikanistik in 40 Jahren DDR', p. 35.

²⁷ Karl-Heinz Schönfelder, 'Nachwort', in: Richard Wright, trans. Gottfried Graustein, *Blackboy*, Leipzig: Reclam, 1970, p. 327.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 337-8.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 330.

³⁰ Eberhard Brüning, 'Nachwort', in Brüning, ed., *Amerikanische Protestdramen*, Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1972, p. 423.

³¹ Ibid., p. 456.

³² Karl-Heinz Schönfelder, 'Nachwort', in: John O. Killens, trans. Wolfgang Strauß, *Und dann hörten wir den Donner*, Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1971, p. 622.

³³ Brüning, 'US-amerikanische Literatur in der DDR seit 1965', p. 309.

³⁴ Heinz Wüstenhagen, 'James Baldwins Essays und Romane: Versuch einer ersten Einschätzung', *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 13:2 (1965), 117-57 (here: p. 119).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 126.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 138 and 157.

- ³⁸ Ibid., p. 152.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 151.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 153-4.
- ⁴¹ Brüning, 'US-amerikanische Literatur in der DDR seit 1965', p. 308.
- ⁴² Jutta Friedrich, 'Nachbemerkung to *Amen Corner*', in: Joachim Seyppel and Irene Ohelndorf, trans., *Keinen Namen auf der Gasse*, Berlin: Verlag Volk und Welt, 1975, p. 297.
- ⁴³ Brüning, 'US-amerikanische Literatur in der DDR seit 1965', p. 308.
- ⁴⁴ Friederike Hayek, 'Multiculturalism in Germany', in: Klaus Millich and Jeffrey Peck, eds, *Multiculturalism in Transit*, Providence: Berghahn, 1998.
- ⁴⁵ Bernhard Scheller, '13 Stichwörter statt eines Nachworts', p. 180.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 164-5.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 187.
- ⁴⁸ Schnoor, 'Amerikanistik in 40 Jahren DDR', p. 44.
- ⁴⁹ Brüning, 'US-amerikanische Literatur in der DDR seit 1965', p. 307.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 310.
- ⁵¹ Karl-Heinz Schönfelder, 'Strömungen der neueren US-amerikanischen Literatur im Urteil von Amerikanisten der DDR', *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 32 (1984), 247-56 (here: p. 247).
- ⁵² Horst Ihde, 'Die zweite Kultur der Afroamerikaner und der antiimperialistische Kampf um die Jahrhundertwende', *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 33:4 (1985), 310-23 (here: p. 311). Schnoor notes that the Gramscian notion of hegemony was belatedly received by GDR Americanists only in the eighties. See Schnoor, 'Amerikanistik in 40 Jahren DDR', p. 44.
- ⁵³ Ihde, 'Die zweite Kultur der Afroamerikaner und der antiimperialistische Kampf um die Jahrhundertwende', p. 311.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 312.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 320.

⁵⁷ Paul Robeson, *Here I Stand*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1991.

Joy H. Calico

The Legacy of GDR Directors on the Post-*Wende* Opera Stage

Although the most influential opera directors of the late twentieth century were German, the prominence of *East* German directors in that group is largely overlooked. This chapter examines two strands of GDR stage production, Walter Felsenstein's hyper-realism and Bertolt Brecht's defamiliarisation, as essential contributions to current trends of *Regieoper*, which dominate opera production today. The author reasserts the importance of the GDR's opera legacy along two evidentiary lines. First, the innovative nature of these stagings disproves generalisations of East German culture as monolithic, backwards, and isolationist. Second, situating East German directors at the centre of *Regieoper* history reveals that GDR culture was internationally relevant even in its own time.

It is widely acknowledged that many of the most influential opera directors of the late twentieth century were German, but the prominence of *East* German directors in that group is both significant and unstudied. After Wieland Wagner at Bayreuth, the most famous – and infamous – among them hailed from the GDR, including Walter Felsenstein, Harry Kupfer, Götz Friedrich, Joachim Herz, Ruth Berghaus, and Peter Konwitschny. They represent schools of directorial thought that emanated from two prominent institutions in East Berlin, Felsenstein's Komische Oper and Brecht's Berliner Ensemble. Their styles were cultivated in the GDR and exported to the West where they fed into the aesthetic of *Regieoper*, which is the dominant production trend on international opera stages in the early twenty-first century. This chapter examines the two strands of East German stage production, argues that their convergence is essential to *Regieoper*; and posits their influences in the work of current directors associated with the phenomenon (Catalan Calixto Bieito, and Germans Katharina Wagner and Christoph Schlingensiefel). Ultimately this study makes three claims. First, the innovative, often radical nature of these stagings disproves spurious generalisations of GDR culture as monolithic, backwards, and isolationist. Second, situating East German directors in their rightful position at the centre of *Regieoper* history reveals that GDR culture was internationally relevant even in its own time. Finally, familiarity with the work of these East German

directors makes it clear that they have had enormous influence on opera production in the early twenty-first century.

***Regieoper* Definition**

Regieoper may be defined as a radical staging of a canonical opera, typically either non-literal or extremely literal in interpretation.¹ These productions arise from the conventional wisdom that an opera's stage directions and scene descriptions are not nearly as sacrosanct as its score and literary text.² Even among the most conventional directors the general consensus is that *the production* – costumes, stage direction, sets; the concept, as it were – is not limited to or by the instructions the composer and librettist originally provided.³ Constrained by immutable music and lyrics, stage directors may see the visual field as a point of entry for creative intervention, or, through careful study of the score and libretto, find unexpected contemporary significance that can be exploited visually. The common denominator among non-literal productions of canonical operas is that the staging aims to create an unexpected or incongruous experience for the audience. The premise is akin to Bertolt Brecht's principle of estrangement, a two-step process whereby 'dis-illusion (*Verfremdung*) constitutes a return from alienation (*Entfremdung*) to understanding.'⁴ The objective is to take a familiar opera and render it unfamiliar. The resulting disorientation, surprise, or outrage is not the endgame of estrangement, however; once expectations have been thwarted, the new perspective should trigger cognition, or *re*-cognition. Without this second phase the effect is merely one of alienation. (Needless to say, this is a highly subjective experience, unique to each audience member.)

Canonical opera is de-familiarised via the unexpected, be it some sort of anachronism, reflexivity, or intertextuality, and the operas which lend themselves best to this treatment are those in the canon (operas from Handel to Puccini). This is not just because they are the best known; it is also because this repertoire spans the common practice period, which is defined by use of tonality. One need not know the opera in question to have general, reasonable expectations as to how its music will behave. Pursuant to that is the notion that the visual and the aural should be consistent not only unto themselves but also to one another, in a kind of synchronised synesthesia: if it *sounds* like the eighteenth century, it will *look* like the eighteenth century.

Regieoper synchronises diatonic operatic music (predictable within certain broad parameters) with a non-literal staging (unpredictable because it is conceived as a counterpoint to that familiar soundscape), or a staging that takes the libretto so literally that its meanings play against those of the diatonic music. Its efficacy depends upon the brain's inclination to integrate simultaneous visual and auditory stimuli,⁵ because if the two seem incongruous, the rupture between what one *sees* and what one *hears* can produce estrangement. This is the essence of *Regieoper*.

Realistic Music Theatre and the *Komische Oper*

The production aesthetic of *Regieoper* is heavily indebted to two styles of East German opera direction. The first is the 'hyper-realism' of Walter Felsenstein's *Komische Oper*, as evident in his own opera productions as well as those of Joachim Herz, Götz Friedrich, and Harry Kupfer. The second is the tradition of defamiliarisation at Bertolt Brecht's Berliner Ensemble, primarily in the form of the abstract, dense, often playful work of Ruth Berghaus and her protégée Peter Konwitschny, who are its most prolific practitioners in opera.⁶ Despite their radically different manifestations onstage, and the fact that they were often arrayed in opposition to one another in cultural political debates, it is worth noting that the two schools of thought shared a fundamental philosophy: each rejected complacency and facile convention in the opera theatre in favour of a new, more meaningful audience experience.⁷ Jost Hermand identifies four common features that link the stagecraft and theory of Felsenstein with that of Brecht:

[1.] the disgust for any form of a purely culinary theatre; 2. the strong emphasis on 'realism', albeit understood differently; 3. the critical adaptation of the classics; 4. the attempts to make even the higher forms of culture, be it opera or drama, accessible to an ever wider audience.⁸

This common ground between Felsenstein and the *Komische Oper*, and Brecht and the Berliner Ensemble, allows their artistic descendants to partake of both traditions.

Walter Felsenstein (1901-75) founded the *Komische Oper* in East Berlin in 1947 and remained at its helm until his death. The house subsequently became synonymous with Felsenstein's philosophy of opera production known as *realistische Musiktheater* or 'realistic

music theatre'.⁹ This purports to 'treat an opera as a real drama in which "the first and most important stage director is the composer"', and 'it is the antithesis of treating operas as "concerts in costume"'.¹⁰ He referred to singers as 'singing-actors' and demanded extensive rehearsal time to allow the cast and the action to gel; if a singer fell ill, the performance would be cancelled because an understudy who merely knew the music and the blocking could not achieve or sustain the level of relationship he demanded. His goal was two-way communication with the audience: 'We act together: thereby my existence as the spectator ends, and his as the actor; my consciousness that it is a play has disappeared, and I perceive the happening as more truthful than any reality.'¹¹ To that end he maintained that the action onstage must be as accessible and believable to the general audience as possible. House policy was that all operas were sung in German, and the Komische Oper uses many of Felsenstein's translations of French and Italian operas to this day. (His model in terms of audience accessibility and use of the vernacular was the Opéra-Comique in Paris.) True to that vision, in 2009 the company also became the first house in Germany to install a seatback title system that allows each audience member to select simultaneous translation in German or English, or to turn off his or her device entirely. Among Felsenstein's iconic productions were stagings of *Die Zauberflöte* (1954), *Das schlaue Fuchslein* (1956), *Hoffmanns Erzählungen* (1958), *Otello* (1959), Offenbach's *Ritter Blaubart* (1961), and a film version of *Fidelio* (1955).¹²

Felsenstein's realistic music theatre was defined by painstaking attention to detail, realistic emotional relationships, and an effort to reach a non-specialist audience through the canonical repertoire with respect for the author's intention therein. In the abstract, these are also hallmarks of the state-mandated aesthetic of socialist realism, 'a realist (mimetic) theory of representation and a belief that art can promote human emancipation by offering a truthful yet affirmative vision.'¹³ Although the SED's brand of realism was too artificially optimistic and didactic to be Felsenstein's, a superficial interpretation of his work would see it as consistent with the SED's agenda in this period.¹⁴ His commitment to the standard canon also marked him as a 'bourgeois humanist bound to the working class',¹⁵ and that was perfectly in line with socialist realist claims that GDR culture should have its roots in the greatest masterpieces of the past. While some may

have interpreted his style as an attempt to curry favour with the regime, it is noteworthy that he never staged a Soviet opera at the Komische Oper, despite pressure to do so. The first East German opera appeared there only in 1967 (Siegfried Matthus's *Der letzte Schuß*).

It is not hard to understand why officials favoured Felsenstein's version of resistance to theatrical complacency over Brecht's. In its formative years, the East German state defined itself quite consciously in opposition to West Germany. Party functionaries such as Karl Laux and Karl Schönewolf touted Felsenstein as the true progressive – the socialist realist alternative to the abstract, timeless, 'neu-Bayreuth' style of Wieland Wagner that was sweeping Western Europe in the 1950s. Writing for SED organs such as *Neues Deutschland* and *Musik und Gesellschaft*, they hammered home the contrast between Felsenstein, whose style could be construed as representative of socialist realism even if he did not claim it as such, and the gadfly Brecht, who rejected that doctrine outright. Even so, Brecht wrote admiringly of his supposed rival just down the street that 'Felsenstein hat gezeigt, wie man die Oper säubern kann – von der Tradition, wo sie Denkfaulheit, und von der Routine, wo sie Faulheit des Gefühls bedeutet.'¹⁶ Acting singers could not just go through the motions, mindlessly replicating conventional interpretations and movements; instead, Felsenstein and Brecht both required an intense commitment to character development and ensemble interaction onstage, driven by the libretto and score. This common ground is noteworthy, particularly as its manifestations onstage could be radically different. If Felsenstein used this approach to coax wrenchingly realistic performances from his singing actors, the school of opera direction that emanated from Brecht's Berliner Ensemble used the same approach to remind audiences that what they were witnessing was *not* reality, but rather theatre.

The next generation of directors within the tradition of realistic musical theatre, Joachim Herz and Götz Friedrich, began working with Felsenstein in 1953. Joachim Herz (1924-2010) stayed just four years before becoming director at the Leipzig Oper, and then returned intermittently before taking the helm of the Komische Oper after Felsenstein's death. His work is clearly recognizable as the next generation of Felsenstein's aesthetic, a style Herz himself describes as 'theatrical realism'.¹⁷ Herz was heavily engaged in the Wagner debate

that got underway in the GDR in the late 1950s and 1960s. He maintained that Wagner's operas had to be interpreted as products of their particular socio-historical contexts, and this resulted in a production style that offered a viable alternative to 'neu-Bayreuth' as well as to the naturalism showcased at the Richard-Wagner-Festwoche in Dessau, the GDR's response to Bayreuth.¹⁸ Reading Wagner's operas within their socio-historical contexts allowed Herz to safeguard that repertoire even while he criticised the society that gave rise to it. Felsenstein invited him to stage *Der fliegende Holländer* at the Komische Oper in 1962, and it was so successful that he went on to direct an extraordinary film version for DEFA in 1964.¹⁹ Herz's production revolves around Senta. She fantasises about the Dutchman as a distraction from the oppression of her bourgeois existence, and in the end she escapes both the dream world and reality by walking away from all the men who would control her: the Dutchman, her father, and Eric. Herz also staged the *Ring* as 'a metaphor for the social implications of nineteenth-century capitalism' at Leipzig between 1973 and 1976,²⁰ although Chéreau's similarly-themed centennial production at Bayreuth in 1976 is usually credited with beginning that phenomenon.

Götz Friedrich (1930-2000) remained at the Komische Oper for two decades and was chief director from 1968 to 1972. A number of his productions are available on DVD, including films produced by Unitel (*Salome* 1974, *Falstaff* 1979, and *Elektra* 1981), and his classic Bayreuth production of *Lohengrin* (1982). His work has been described as having been even more realistic than that of Felsenstein, Herz or Kupfer.²¹ Friedrich's target audience was one that wanted to see 'hervorragenden Sängern-Darstellern gelingt [...] wenigstens für ihren Teil die Intentionen der Autoren zu verwirklichen, indem sie Menschen gestalten, deren Gesang aus einer glaubhaften dramatischen Emotion erwächst.'²² The believability of the entire production depended upon credibility in small things. His dedication to stage rehearsal was legendary because, like Felsenstein, he required that his singers also be actors: 'Das heißt, daß sich der Sänger, einem Grundgesetz des Theaters gehorchend, in die Rolle verwandeln muß. Diese schöpferische Verwandlung ist daher ein entscheidender Probenvorgang im Musiktheater.'²³ He also emphasised the importance of genuine relationships and listening among performers onstage, believing that the audience will understand the singing as an

‘unmittelbare menschliche Äußerung’ because the partner onstage experiences it that way.²⁴ He insisted that a performer question everything, meaning s/he must know the motivation for each gesture, word, and tone in order to make it authentic, because ‘schön ist, was wahr ist’.²⁵ His search for the real meant that in his production of *Tosca* (1961) Cavaradossi’s role as political revolutionary was the central orientation for the entire production, supplanting the love story that typically drives the action. In his effort to draw in the audience from the very beginning he developed a habit of beginning the staging during the overture to provide useful back story and a visual transitional space akin to the aural transition provided by the prelude. For example, in his *Tannhäuser* at Bayreuth (1972) the title character wandered the stage during the overture before running into the Venusburg just as the curtain went up.²⁶

Harry Kupfer (b. 1935) was director of the storied Semperoper in Dresden before coming to the Komische Oper in 1981. He retired from that post in 2002 with some thirty productions in the repertoire. They are staged frequently elsewhere, as well, and some of his best work, such as the Bayreuth *Ring* cycle with Barenboim, is now available on DVD. Kupfer approaches each piece with the intent of discovering its relevance for a contemporary audience and plumbing the emotions of the characters to that end; ‘Oper als Museum ist für ihn undenkbar.’²⁷ In interviews Kupfer emphasises artistic collaboration with the dramaturge, conductor, and set designer, and describes a lengthy process of discussion before he even begins to sketch ideas. He then works out the staging at his desk, planning and organising the remotest detail on paper before rehearsals begin, planning each minute of rehearsal time in advance.²⁸ He is particularly admired for his use of the chorus onstage, since chorus staging and choreography is a standard weakness in opera productions. Kupfer’s choruses are distinctive because they are never presented as masses of undifferentiated stereotypes, and he works with them on character development and movement just as he works with the soloists.²⁹ Felsenstein had referred to the chorus as ‘Chorsoloisten’,³⁰ and in Kupfer’s work the result was a stage populated by individuated characters with distinct personalities and purposeful action, rather than aimless mobs or configurations of costumed sopranos, altos, tenors and basses grouped according to voice part.

Defamiliarisation and the Berliner Ensemble

The other East German tributary to *Regieoper* was the Berliner Ensemble (BE), Brecht's theatre company in East Berlin. The BE is significant not because it produced opera – it didn't – but because it trained two stage directors who went on to have enormously influential careers staging opera. Ruth Berghaus (1927-96) was a choreographer who trained under Gret Palucca in Dresden. When she moved to Berlin she completed her practicum simultaneously at the BE and at the Deutsches Theater from 1951 to 1953. At the Deutsches Theater she was a master student of Intendant Wolfgang Langhoff and continued to pursue choreography with Palucca, while her course of study at the BE appears to have consisted of immersion in rehearsals and artistic discussions.³¹ In addition to their aesthetic differences the two institutions cultivated entirely different theatre cultures: the Deutsches Theater was essentially a repertory theatre and worked on short rehearsal schedules, while the BE functioned (for better or for worse) as a large family, spending up to a year in rehearsal for a single show and discussing each artistic decision at great length.³² Berghaus married composer Paul Dessau in 1954 and her first opera staging, a co-production with Erhard Fischer, was Dessau and Brecht's *Die Verurteilung des Lukullus* (1960). She staged operas regularly at the East Berlin Staatsoper after that, including three more operas by Dessau and several interpretations of canonical works. Her choreography for the fight sequences in Brecht's version of *Coriolanus* in 1964 brought her international acclaim.³³ In 1968 she directed her first play on her own (Peter Weiss's *Viet-Nam-Diskurs* at the BE) as well as her first Italian opera (Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* at the Staatsoper), and she became a member of the GDR's Akademie der Künste in 1970.

When Helene Weigel died she bequeathed the artistic directorship of the BE to Berghaus, who held that post from 1971 to 1977. During her tenure she supervised numerous productions that rankled conservative party functionaries as well as some powerful figures within the BE. Berghaus's defenders would say that she carried out Brecht's mission by propagating his method if not his style, expanding the company's repertoire to include pieces by other playwrights such as Heiner Müller, whose *Zement* she premiered in 1973, and reworking Brecht's own plays to better suit contemporary needs, while detractors were offended by her deviations from the master's model books and

other official texts.³⁴ She resigned under duress, and from that point forward dedicated herself mostly to opera.

Her style is abstract and unconventional, and the signature gestural quality of her stage movements is derived from her background in choreography. Berghaus's operatic stagings are a synthesis of her training in free dance, improvisation, and Brecht's working method, which allowed her to disregard the then-standard distinctions between staging and choreography.³⁵

Die Körperlichkeit, ihre Ab- und Verwandlung macht sichtbar, was Ruth Berghaus im Zentrum ihres Theaterschaffens stellt: soziale Beziehungen zu zeigen und domestizierte Gefühle aufzudecken, die immer auch die Tradition von Herrschaftsverhältnissen spiegeln.³⁶

Her own resistance to theatrical complacency and convention took the form of defamiliarisation, and intimate knowledge of the libretto and music lends credibility to her iconoclastic interpretations. Berghaus's work was always controversial and, as David Levin points out, that reputation followed her from the BE to the opera stage in both East and West.³⁷ Most opera lovers on both sides of the Wall preferred to consume their canonical repertoire in conventional stagings, and the overtly Marxist tone of her interpretations added fuel to the fire in the West. Detractors accused her of being abstruse and irreverent; admirers marvelled at the new interpretative possibilities she opened for them.

Berghaus's deliberate disassociation of the stage action from the composer's own intentions was central to her production philosophy. For her there would have been no point in a reading of the score and text that did not question those intentions in order to attack preconceptions generated by more than a hundred years of performances good and bad. [...] Theatrical value, for Berghaus, lay precisely in the tension that could be set up between the intrinsic, even over-explicit theatricality of Wagner's music and a new theatricality that was free to question and comment on it. This was an essential feature in all her productions, no matter who the composer.³⁸

Berghaus in turn mentored Peter Konwitschny (b. 1945), who worked as her assistant at the Berliner Ensemble. He is younger than the directors discussed thus far, and worked almost exclusively in the GDR before the *Wende*. He assisted Berghaus on several significant productions at the BE and after her departure he freelanced, staging opera throughout East Germany and beyond. Musically he was

heavily influenced by his father, the eminent GDR conductor Franz Konwitschny, and his mother, who was a singer. In a 2009 interview with Per-Erik Skramstad he stated:

I grew up with music, and I believe that from this upbringing I have learned to understand the nature of music from childhood. To understand that music not only consists of tones, but rather reflects on the human existence. This, I believe to be a central prerequisite for the work of an opera director.³⁹

Comparing his work to that of Berghaus David Levin notes that ‘where Berghaus productions tended to be marked by a gestural inscrutability, Konwitschny’s productions have always been entirely approachable on the level of character and gesture.’ Levin goes on to distinguish between their types of defamiliarisation:

The defamiliarisation that [his productions] propose has much more to do with what we might term their idiomatic unpredictability [...] Konwitschny’s productions widen the parameters of stagecraft, suggesting opera’s proximity to other theatrical forms that traffic in the same sort of wide emotional sweep, including the fairground and melodrama, children’s theatre, the theatre of the fantastic, satire, and parody. What is so surprising, or indeed so impressive, in Konwitschny’s work, is the ease, fluency, and unpredictability with which these ancillary forms are deployed (including, I should point out, conventional modes of staging). His productions, which are characterised by a noteworthy dramaturgical cogency and conceptual transparency, tend to employ multiple idioms marked first and foremost by stylistic eclecticism.⁴⁰

His 2004 production of Mozart’s *Così fan tutte* for the Komische Oper is a representative example (also staged to great acclaim at Graz in 2009). Each of the four lovers is dressed in period costume and carries a rag doll that stands in for his/her beloved. This device highlights just how little genuine contact the original couples had had with one another prior to the ruse, preferring instead the company of the dolls as idealised lovers. In the finale Konwitschny stopped the action (a device he had also used in a production of *Meistersinger*) so that the two male leads could reveal that they are no longer interested in the sisters because they are in fact in love with one another. One of them quoted the 2001 coming-out speech of Berlin mayor Klaus Wowereit: ‘ich bin schwul, und das ist auch gut so.’ The interjection of a recent event, with decidedly modern social, sexual, and political implications, into a canonical opera, whose plot has long been maligned as sexist and trivial, is vintage Konwitschny. This clever anachronism

elicited surprised laughter as the audience could suddenly consider the preceding events of the often ridiculous plot in an entirely new light: if the suitors seemed all too willing to subject their true loves to a test of fidelity they were virtually guaranteed to fail – well, perhaps this is one plausible explanation.⁴¹ As living proof that the two strains of GDR opera direction shared common ground, the director traces his artistic roots to both Felsenstein and Berghaus.⁴² A bit of that blend can be seen in the Komische Oper's *Così*, although the overall effect – thanks to tableaux such as the well-dressed patrons nonchalantly passing the time in a café while wearing moose heads – is more Berghaus than Felsenstein. Konwitschny has enjoyed sensational international success, and he became the first director to win the Theaterpreis Berlin for opera production rather than for spoken theatre (2005).

GDR Directors Abroad

It is important to note that, with the exception of Felsenstein, these directors did not work solely in the Eastern Bloc. In the 1970s and 80s Herz staged productions for English National Opera, Welsh National Opera, and Hamburg. Kupfer worked in Graz, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Cardiff, London, Vienna, Salzburg, Barcelona, San Francisco, Zürich, Frankfurt and Hamburg and landed coveted invitations to produce Wagner at Bayreuth. Bayreuth was just forty miles across the border, and Wolfgang Wagner regularly imported East German directors to invigorate and challenge festival audiences. Like Friedrich and Kupfer, Berghaus also worked in the West, beginning in the 1970s in Munich, then most famously in Frankfurt and Hamburg. Of this group Friedrich was the only East German to defect, and he did so in 1972 while working on a production of Janáček's *Jenůfa* in Stockholm. He then settled in West Germany, where he had already worked in Bremen and at Bayreuth. Friedrich was principal director at Hamburg 1972-81, worked at London's Covent Garden, and from 1981 until his death was Generalintendant of the Deutsche Oper in West Berlin.⁴³

With regard to the phenomenon of GDR stage directors working in the FRG and elsewhere in the West Berghaus's example is instructive. In 1980 she undertook her most important artistic collaboration, which was with Oper Frankfurt. Working with the now legendary artistic team of conductor Michael Gielen, set and costume designer Axel Manthey, and chief dramaturge Klaus Zehelein, she produced a series

of landmarks in the history of director's opera. Their joint ventures included stagings of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* (1980) and *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (1981), an iconic *Parsifal* (1982), Janáček's *Makropoulos Case* (1982), Berlioz's *Les Troyens* (1986), and many other Wagner operas that have since become legendary.⁴⁴ Carnegie credits the novelty of her West German Wagnerian productions in particular to 'an analytic inquisition whose severity was matched by what sometimes came across as an almost comical subversion of the high seriousness of the Wagnerian oeuvre.'⁴⁵

The timing of her partnership with Oper Frankfurt is significant. Dessau had died in 1979, and with his passing she lost not only a spouse but also a powerful ally who had interceded on her behalf with disgruntled party leadership. After his death, state support for her work stopped; her *Ring* production at the Staatsoper in East Berlin was shelved before completion. Nevertheless the SED did not prevent the 'East German Marxist (and disciple of Brecht) [from] directing in Frankfurt, financial powerhouse of West Germany's capitalist economy,'⁴⁶ and there is no small irony in that, although the leftist proclivities of the Oper Frankfurt production team (as opposed to the relative right-wing leanings of its city government) should not be overlooked.

Exporting radical opera directors had quantifiable benefits for the GDR. From a cultural, public-relations perspective, the state could boast several internationally acclaimed opera directors. This proved not only that East German culture was thriving, but that it was a commodity in high demand on the western market. From a pragmatic perspective, these directors also returned from their prestigious international engagements bearing valuable foreign currency. When Erich Honecker ousted Walter Ulbricht to become First Secretary of the SED Central Committee in 1971, he embarked upon a new economic path that was financed by massive loans from the West, particularly the FRG. These debts were difficult to repay because the Ostmark was nonconvertible, which meant that Western loans could not be paid with domestic currency and the SED had to purchase other currency at a loss in order to repay the loans. Furthermore, nations tended to negotiate trade agreements with the GDR that favoured barter instead of cash because the Ostmark was not integrated into the international monetary structure. This had devastating consequences. When Honecker took office the GDR was \$1 billion in debt to the

West; a decade later that debt had ballooned to a staggering \$11 billion, and the GDR was operating a trade deficit of nearly DM8.9 billion.⁴⁷ In 1982 the GDR faced a near catastrophic liquidity crisis. Günter Mittag, Secretary for the Economy of the Central Committee of the SED 'persuaded Honecker to exploit the GDR's special relationship with the FRG and link politics with money. In return for relaxing restrictions on contact between the two Germanys, the FRG agreed to loan the GDR nearly DM2 billion.'⁴⁸ This 'relaxation' made it easier for East Germans with internationally marketable skills to work in West Germany. It is no accident that the number of opera directors working in the FRG and the frequency with which they did so increased exponentially at the moment the GDR was in most desperate need of hard, convertible currency. Unlike the Ostmark, the West German DM was an official exchange medium and highly coveted in the GDR. Anecdotes about its well nigh magical properties are a staple of East German lore. 'Western currency conveyed many advantages,' and institutions and individuals alike developed strategies for its acquisition. 'At home, its possession created a social divide between the fortunate few and the unfortunate rest. Abroad, its humiliating lack spurred much resentment and a sense of GDR inferiority.'⁴⁹

The casual western observer may wonder how this arrangement benefited jet-setting artists who surely must have had ample opportunity to defect, and yet, with the exception of Friedrich, chose to remain in the GDR. Family ties and genuine political conviction are among the common explanations for maintaining East German citizenship, but it is also worth noting that the GDR cultivated a star system in which citizens who achieved international celebrity enjoyed extraordinary perks at home that almost certainly could not be guaranteed elsewhere. In many respects, Berghaus, Herz, and Kupfer had the best of both worlds. After the *Wende* such arrangements carried a whiff of hypocrisy, however. In 1990 *Der Spiegel* ran a disparaging story about Berghaus that dubbed her 'die Luxus-Dissidentin', and her reputation suffered in the 1990s.⁵⁰ Swiss critic Georg-Friedrich Kühn, an important advocate for both Berghaus and Konwitschny since the *Wende*, noted that the apparent contradiction of '[d]ie Arbeiterklasse im Kopf und der Daimler in der Garage' was not irreconcilable for Berghaus. Kühn conducted several interviews with her and reminded the 'politische Tugendwächter (West)' in the post-

Wende era that she had often been out of favour at home, recounting her acrimonious split with the Berliner Ensemble (an institution West Germans tended to view as an obsequious instrument of SED propaganda) and noting, ‘dass sie immer weiter aneckte mit ihren Arbeiten’.⁵¹ Tremendous loyalty to the GDR and her status as a true believer did not protect her unconventional work from official criticism, but it did keep her coming home. And what to make of Felsenstein, the regime’s favourite son who, like Eisler and Brecht, always retained his Austrian passport, but unlike them resided in West Berlin during his entire reign at the Komische Oper?⁵² In an interview published after his death he stated: ‘als Sozialist, bin ich zutiefst traurig, daß die Komische Oper nicht wäre, wenn ich Parteigenosse und DDR-Bürger wäre,’ and asserted that: ‘ich habe die Komische Oper entwickelt als illegales Institut.’⁵³ Whether this reveals long-term cynicism or revisionism is unclear, but there is no doubt that he considered his unique status – a West Berlin resident with Austrian citizenship and self-proclaimed socialist working in East Berlin as the pride of East German opera culture – was a crucial component of his work.

Realistic Music theatre + Defamiliarisation = *Regieoper*

Felsenstein’s narrow repertoire and requirements for two months of intensive rehearsal could not be replicated even by other directors in the GDR, for whom he was held up as the model, but other features of his working methods did filter down and abroad. The high artistic standards of his productions and his ‘unübliche Sorgfalt der dramaturgischen Vorbereitung und theoretischen Reflexion’ have become the ideal, and were disseminated in the West through Herz, Friedrich, and Kupfer.⁵⁴ It is now generally expected that a singer must also be an actor, and many directors have adopted his methods for working with a chorus, in which each chorus member must have his or her own back story and act as an individual.⁵⁵ Where *Regieoper* is concerned, the hyper reality and vernacular accessibility of realistic music theatre feeds the work of directors who attempt to make two-hundred-year-old operas relevant to contemporary audiences in one of two ways: by staging it in present-day settings and acknowledging the intervening reception history of the opera, or by interpolating explicit sex and violence not described in the original stage directions.⁵⁶ Their extraordinary attention to one kind of realistic detail has morphed into

extraordinary attention to another kind of realistic detail which may be graphic and explicit – a kind of production verismo, if you will. When synchronised with diatonic music from the standard repertoire this creates the de-familiarisation that is *de rigueur* in *Regieoper* productions. That de-familiarisation, or estrangement, is indebted to Berghaus's radical disassociation of the stage action from the composer's apparent intentions. Braunmüller also sees the ubiquitous use of film, projections, and placards in opera stagings as descendants of the Brechtian aesthetic.⁵⁷ Many directors make use of this, including several of those listed in the second generation of realistic music theatre directors above, which is yet more evidence of the shared ground between the two schools.

Film in opera is nowhere more evident than in the productions of Christoph Schlingensief (1960-2010), who was primarily a film director, and his preference for a super-saturated visual field frequently includes multiple projections running simultaneously. His notorious Bayreuth *Parsifal* (2004-7) is perhaps the most famous example of this.⁵⁸ The notoriety derived essentially from two directorial choices: the politicisation of the opera via his decision to situate the action in Namibia with a cast of extras that featured little people as well as obese performers, and the style of the overwhelmingly busy set rife with multiple symbolisms, which many found unattractive and difficult to decipher. The action took place on a large, rotating circular set that frequently presented multiple live tableaux simultaneously, while black-and-white film clips of Namibian scenes or cellular division were superimposed over the live action. Schlingensief briefly blurred the line between cinematic and theatrical audience experience when a giant screen was lowered to cover the entire set, and he showed a film clip that continued the action the audience had just witnessed. The film featured the same performers who were performing live on stage, continuing to sing and act, but presented them at enormously outsized Cineplex close-up range. When the screen was lifted and the action picked up where the film had left off as if nothing had happened, the effect was quite disorienting. The visual image that garnered the most attention was the large projection of a dead rabbit and its decay through time-lapse photography during the last four minutes of the opera. It was projected on a scrim, which allowed the audience to see the completely bare, dark stage behind (an extraordinary moment of focus and clarity after

so much visual stimulation) and Parsifal walking alone into a bright light.⁵⁹

Katharina Wagner's Bayreuth production of *Meistersinger* (2007) was the first staging at the Festspielhaus to acknowledge that opera's problematic association with the Nazi party, and as such it continues the realistic music theatre tradition of attempting to make the opera relevant to a contemporary audience by daring to say what everyone knows but no one dares to mention. The relatively benign caricature of high German culture in the form of oversized bobble-headed Liszt, Wagner, Schiller, and the like announced that no *Erbe* was sacred, but when Sachs strode on stage carrying a Hugo Boss shopping bag (the company's history of making Nazi uniforms had come to light only in 1997), and began his transformation into the Führer, the tone changed. Katharina Wagner had inverted the conventional associations of characters with good and evil so that when the staged audience loved Stolzing in the final song contest it was apparent that they should not have preferred him; he appeared as a Eurovision Song Contest winner, while Beckmesser was the true, unappreciated artist. Equally clear was the fact that the staged audience was meant to be a reflection of the actual Bayreuth audience – one that was too complacent to think for itself. Katharina Wagner worked as an assistant to Kupfer and has acknowledged Konwitschny as an influential director for Wagner's operas in particular,⁶⁰ so that her work is indebted not only to the family tradition but to both strands emanating from the GDR as well.

A prime example of the ways in which hyper-realism and estrangement come together can be seen in the work of Calixto Bieito, who has enjoyed a profitable partnership with the Komische Oper since midway through the first decade of the new century. His production of Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (2004) took the seraglio setting literally, replete with the real-life horrors of human trafficking and prostitution. Its sadism made it almost unwatchable at times; the fact that it was staged without an intermission created an oppressive atmosphere that was relentlessly claustrophobic. The extreme disjuncture between the staged violence and the exquisite, harmless music was quite disorienting. Some audience members found their attention riveted to the stage in anxious anticipation of what might happen next; others stormed out, slamming doors and yelling insults during the performance, particularly after the aria 'Martern aller Arten', when the malicious Osmin maims a prostitute.

‘All I wanted to do was to cut off the girl’s ear in this scene,’ Larsen [the actor who played Osmin] said. ‘But the women in Hydra [Berlin’s prostitution trade union] said it was much more realistic and true to brothel life to slice off the nipple; that is the reality that we had to show. Unfortunately.’⁶¹ Some have dismissed Bieito as a shameless scandal-monger, while others defend his radical approach because it sheds new light on a well-worn work. Calling attention to the libretto, Clemens Risi notes that the violence in the virtuosic ‘*Martern aller Arten*’ is not completely unmotivated. The title means ‘Tortures of every kind’, and in the hyperbolic lyrics Konstanze declares that she will remain faithful to her beloved no matter what pain and torment are inflicted upon her.⁶² This staging privileges a literal reading of a violent libretto over conventional readings – usually fidelity and feigned courage in Konstanze’s case – so that the visual field is synchronised literally with the text but is in complete disjuncture from the concurrent music. Reinterpreting the libretto literally results in enacting violence to the sound of beautiful, diatonic music in the major mode, and the complete de-familiarisation of a canonical aria.

Bieito’s work may be an extreme example, but he is hardly alone in synthesising excessive realism with de-familiarisation in the staging of canonical operas. Two major tributaries to *Regieoper* as we now know it flowed from the GDR: the Komische Oper tradition of realistic music theatre, and the Berliner Ensemble tradition of de-familiarisation. Given its ubiquitous presence on opera stages around the world today *Regieoper* merits consideration as East Germany’s most influential cultural bequest – not as *Ostalgie*, but as a dynamic, creative force that animates, and *re-animates*, canonical operatic repertoire.

Notes

¹ This concept is discussed in great detail in chapter five of Calico, *Brecht at the Opera*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008, pp. 140-63. That work is indebted to David J. Levin, especially *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007; Clemens Risi, ‘Shedding Light on the Audience: Hans Neuenfels and Peter Konwitschny Stage Verdi (and Verdians)’, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 14:1-2 (2002), 201-10; and Gundula Kreuzer, ‘Voices from Beyond: *Don Carlos* and the Modern Stage’, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 18:2 (2006), 151-79. See also a sociological analysis of this phenomenon in Alexandra Garaventa, *Regietheater in der Oper: eine*

musiksoziologische Untersuchung am Beispiel der Stuttgarter Inszenierung von Wagners Ring des Nibelungen, Munich: Martin Meidenbauer, 2006.

² While musicians today may hesitate to interfere with what has come to be known as the standard musical text, this was not always the case. Many operas once had several perfectly legitimate versions, and there was a time when singers routinely substituted arias at will. Regarding the practice of aria substitution see Hilary Poriss, *Changing the Score: Arias, Prima Donnas, and the Authority of Performance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. One notorious case study demonstrates how much this has changed. In a 1998 production of *Le nozze di Figaro* at the Metropolitan Opera in New York Cecilia Bartoli decided to use arias Mozart had written for a 1789 revival of *Figaro* in lieu of arias from the original version. A veritable firestorm of criticism ensued. Roger Parker has written about this episode in chapter three of *Remaking the Song: Operatic Visions and Revisions from Handel to Berio*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, pp. 42-66.

³ It is worth noting that, as controversial as *Regieoper* productions may be, audiences remain far more willing to accept radical *stagings* of opera than to accept radical alterations to the music or libretto.

⁴ Loren Kruger, *Post-Imperial Brecht: Politics and Performance, East and South*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 43.

⁵ Durk Talsma, Tracy J. Doty, and Marty G. Woldorff, 'Selective Attention and Audiovisual Integration: Is Attending to Both Modalities a Prerequisite for Early Integration?', *Cerebral Cortex*, 17:3 (2007), 679-90 (here: p. 679).

⁶ Manuel Brug groups all of the following East German directors under the rubric of 'Der ostdeutsche Regie-Realismus – ein Sonderweg mit Folgen': Felsenstein, Herz, Friedrich, Kupfer, Kurt Horres, Adolf Dresen, and Berghaus. This appears to be an expedient organisational tool but it also reinforces stereotypes of GDR culture as monolithic and blurs the important distinctions among their work, particularly since Berghaus, in particular, could hardly be described as realistic. Brug, *Opernregisseure heute*, Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 2006. It is worth noting that the two styles of stage direction were influential in spoken theatre, as well, and that they were the best options, if not the only ones: 'Sagen wir jetzt mal: das Brecht-System, das Felsenstein-System. Und dann gab es damals doch auch idealistisches, langweiliges und banales Theater.' As descendants of Brecht and Felsenstein Berghaus and Kupfer were also set in opposition to one another: 'Aber Kupfer und Berghaus sind für viele Leute schon wie Feuer und Wasser.' Roundtable discussion with Hans-Rainer John, Manfred Haedler, Dieter Kranz, Dieter Görne, Christoph Schroth, and Peter Waschinsky, 'Wo liegen unsere Maßstäbe', in: Helmut Kreuzer and Karl-Wilhelm Schmidt, eds, *Dramaturgie in der DDR (1945-1990)*, vol. 1, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1998, p. 402. This two-volume set is very valuable for context but unfortunately does not treat opera direction as one of its focal points.

⁷ Hans Mayer, 'Theaterarbeit und Neue Zuschaukunst: Zur Erinnerung an Bertolt Brecht und Walter Felsenstein', foreword to: Michael Lewin, *Harry Kupfer*, Vienna: Europaverlag, 1988, pp. 11-15.

⁸ Jost Hermand, 'Das Gemeinsame im Trennenden: Brecht und Felsenstein', *Brecht Yearbook*, 21 (1996), 190-203 (here: p. 190). Their theatre aesthetics are discussed within the larger context of post-war Berlin in Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin, ed., '... daß die Musik nicht ohne Wahrheit leben kann': *Theater in Berlin nach 1945 – Musiktheater*, Berlin: Henschel, 2001. This is the catalogue from an exhibition of the same name, and it features numerous high-quality photographs and photographs.

⁹ The best source for English-language readers is Felsenstein, trans., ed., and annotated Peter Paul Fuchs, *The Music Theater of Walter Felsenstein: Collected Articles, Speeches, and Interviews*, New York: Norton, 1975. Primary documents in the original German include Felsenstein, *Musiktheater*, Bremen: C. Schünemann, 1961; and *Schriften zum Musiktheater*, Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1976. See also Robert Braunmüller, *Oper als Drama: das 'realistische Musiktheater' Walter Felsensteins*, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002, and studies written by Felsenstein's protégée Götz Friedrich.

¹⁰ Fuchs, *The Music Theater of Walter Felsenstein*, pp. xxii and xxvi; cited in Patrick Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, p. 314.

¹¹ Fuchs, *The Music Theater of Walter Felsenstein*, p. 30. The importance Felsenstein placed on the collaborative nature of the relationship between performer and spectator in creating live performance anticipates the work of Willmar Sauter, Erika Fischer-Lichte, and others, regarding theatre as an event. Sauter, *The Theatrical Event: Dynamics of Performance and Perception*, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000; Fischer-Lichte, Clemens Risi, and Jens Roselt, eds., *Kunst der Aufführung – Aufführung der Kunst*, Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2004.

¹² In February 2008 Arthaus Musik released a boxed DVD set of seven Felsenstein productions, the *Fidelio* film and bonus features, including rare rehearsal footage. See the review by *New York Times* critic Peter G. Davis at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/18/arts/music/18davi.html> (accessed 27 April 2009).

¹³ Christopher Norris. 'Socialist realism', in: *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, at: <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/45326> (accessed 1 September 2009).

¹⁴ For a discussion of the ways in which Felsenstein's approach was appropriated and spun by the state and its apparatchiks in the 1950s see Braunmüller, *Oper als Drama*, pp. 58-76. This included linking him to the Stanislavsky Method, which was

heavily promoted at a conference in 1953, and then presenting Felsenstein as the operatic equivalent thereof at the music theatre conference in 1954.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁶ Bertolt Brecht, 'Neue Technik der Schauspielkunst', *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 16, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967, p. 770.

¹⁷ See especially Joachim Herz, 'Wagner and Theatrical Realism', *Wagner*, 19 (1998), 3-33.

¹⁸ Elaine Kelly, 'Imagining Richard Wagner: the Janus Head of a Divided Nation', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 9:4 (2008), 799-829 (here: p. 828-9). Carnegie's account of Herz as Wagner's savior in the GDR borders on hagiography but is also useful, and includes photographs of stagings. See Carnegie, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre*, pp. 319-29.

¹⁹ Regarding the staging at the Komische Oper see Carnegie, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre*, pp. 315 and 323; and Stephan Stompor, ed., *Walter Felsenstein, Joachim Herz: Musiktheater*, Leipzig: Verlag Philipp Reclam, 1976, pp. 404-10. Regarding the DEFA film see Calico, 'Wagner in East Germany: Joachim Herz's *Der fliegende Holländer* (1964)', in: Jeongwon Joe and Sander Gilman, eds, *Wagner and Cinema*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010, pp. 376-400.

²⁰ Kelly, 'Imagining Richard Wagner', p. 828.

²¹ Brug, *Opernregisseure heute*, p. 42.

²² Götz Friedrich, 'Das Singen auf der Bühne', in: *Musiktheater: Ansichten, Einsichten*, Frankfurt am Main: Propyläen, 1986, p. 15.

²³ Ibid., p. 18.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

²⁵ Ibid., 'Die Handlung als Kriterium', p. 28.

²⁶ Braunmüller, *Oper als Drama*, pp. 184-5. See also Dieter Kranz, *Der Regisseur Götz Friedrich*, Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1972, pp. 33-4.

²⁷ Michael Lewin, *Harry Kupfer*, Vienna: Europaverlag, 1988, p. 19.

²⁸ Dieter Kranz, *Der Regisseur Harry Kupfer: 'Ich muss Oper machen': Kritiken, Beschreibungen, Gesprächen*, Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1988, pp. 22-3; also Lewin, *Harry Kupfer*, pp. 18-19.

- ²⁹ Kranz, *Der Regisseur Harry Kupfer*, pp. 27.
- ³⁰ Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre*, p. 315.
- ³¹ Corinne Holtz, *Ruth Berghaus: Ein Porträt*, Hamburg: EVA Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 2005, pp. 143-4.
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 144.
- ³³ See Sigrid Neef, *Das Theater der Ruth Berghaus*, Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1989, pp. 17-25 for extraordinary photographs of these fight sequences as well as many of her other stagings, taken by leading theatre photographers of the day. In the summer of 2002 the Akademie der Künste in Berlin hosted an exhibition entitled 'Maria Steinfeldt fotografiert Ruth Berghaus'.
- ³⁴ Holtz, an unabashed advocate for Berghaus, gives a lively account of the director's conflicts over the 'Bertolt-Brecht-Erben' within the BE and with Barbara Brecht in particular. Holtz asserts that Berghaus was subjected to what would be described today as 'mobbing', both in the theatre and in the East German press. Holtz, *Ruth Berghaus*, pp. 161-201. A 1974 *Die Mutter* appears to have been the flashpoint; in addition to Holtz see chapters 2 and 3 in Laura J.R. Bradley, *Brecht and Political Theatre: The Mother on Stage*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. The controversy over the best ways to preserve and perpetuate the master's vision is reminiscent of the recurring power struggles over the Wagner legacy at Bayreuth.
- ³⁵ Holtz, *Ruth Berghaus*, pp. 205-6.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 205. Holtz asserts that Berghaus remains unique among opera directors because she spawned no school of followers, although Konwitschny (more of which below) and Martin Kušej exhibit her influence. According to Holtz, Berghaus's 'renewal of the operatic aesthetic through scene composition' is continued by other choreographers-turned-opera-directors such as Reinhild Hoffmann, Joachim Schlömer, and Arila Siegert.
- ³⁷ David J. Levin, 'Notes from the Stage: *Parsifal*: An Introduction', *Opera Quarterly*, 22:2 (2006), 345-8 (here: p. 346). Similarly Ronald Taylor notes that Berghaus moved freely between opera and spoken theatre, 'arousing controversy wherever she went.' Taylor, *Berlin and its Culture: An historic Portrait*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997, p. 383.
- ³⁸ Carnegy, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre*, p. 369.
- ³⁹ 'Peter Konwitschny: I do not consider myself a representative of *Regietheater*', at: <http://www.wagneropera.net/Interviews/Peter-Konwitschny-Interview-2009.htm> (accessed 28 August 2009).

⁴⁰ Levin, 'Notes from the Stage: *Parsifal*', pp. 347-8.

⁴¹ In this regard Konwitschny's treatment is part of a trend among scholars and performers alike to take seriously *Così fan tutte* as a legitimate work rather than an unfortunate mismatch of exquisite music with insipid text. See Julian Rushton's entry for *Così* in: Stanley Sadie, ed., *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, at:

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O003389> (accessed 8 September 2009).

⁴² The interview appears in Barbara Beyer, ed., *Warum Oper? Gespräche mit Opernregisseuren*, Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 2005, p. 21.

⁴³ For a comparative study of opera in the Germanys in the first decade after the Wall see Heike Sauer, *Traum, Wirklichkeit, Utopie: das deutsche Musiktheater 1961 – 1971 als Spiegel politischer und gesellschaftlicher Aspekte seiner Zeit*, Münster: Waxmann, 1994. She is primarily concerned with stagings of new works by East and West German composers but includes some discussion of directors from both sides.

⁴⁴ Carnegie's discussion of Berghaus's Wagner productions is very useful, and is also one of the few assessments in English. Carnegie, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre*, pp. 364-76 and 395-6. The most comprehensive study is Neef's *Das Theater der Ruth Berghaus*, although its publication date (1989) means that it lacks the post-*Wende* perspective on her legacy. See also Brug, *Opernregisseure heute*, pp. 46-8; and 'Parsifal: A Workshop Conversation with Ruth Berghaus, Michael Gielen, Klaus Zehelein, and Axel Manthey', *The Opera Quarterly*, 22:2 (2006), 345-60.

⁴⁵ Carnegie, *Wagner and the Art of the Theatre*, p. 364.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Data from Jonathan R. Zatlín, *The Currency of Socialism: Money and Political Culture in East Germany*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 70. The desperate need for convertible cash can hardly be exaggerated, and the SED undertook a variety of initiatives to get it. For example, the GDR sold political prisoners for hard currency. It received nearly DM3.5 billion in exchange for freeing nearly 34,000 political prisoners and 220,000 people 'who wanted to emigrate to the Federal Republic by exploiting the one-sided permeability of the Berlin Wall' (p. 94, n. 79).

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 105.

⁴⁹ Konrad Hugo Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 140.

⁵⁰ ‘Die Luxus-Dissidentin: Über die Regisseurin Ruth Berghaus’, *Der Spiegel*, 28 (1990), 162-72.

⁵¹ See <http://www.gf-kuehn.de/oper/bergh/berghess.htm> and <http://www.gf-kuehn.de/oper/bergh/bergh.htm> (accessed 25 April 2009). Kühn has republished much of his earlier criticism on his website. The article ‘Kraftwerk, Theatertier, sterbender Schwan: Die Regisseurin Ruth Berghaus’, was first published in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* on 15 October 1996.

⁵² American critics took note of this as early as December 1961, shortly after the appearance of the Berlin Wall made it all the more conspicuous. See Trudy Goth’s review of Komische Oper performances entitled ‘Felsenstein’s Quandary’, *Musical America*, (December 1961), 21-2. Evidently it worried the SED, too; by January 1962 a translation of Goth’s article had been sent to Alfred Kurella of the SED Central Committee: Bundesarchiv-SAPMO 30-IV/2/2.026/107. Nor was the irony lost on the editors of *TIME*, who, in 1963, published a withering indictment of his dual identity as a committed socialist with an annual budget of \$2.5 million to stage opera in East Berlin. ‘He yo-yos back and forth across Berlin, a social vegetable, a moral acrobat, an idiot-savant – and a genius of the opera.’ ‘Opera: Midas across the Wall’, *TIME*, 18 October 1963, at: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,873777-1,00.html> (accessed 30 August 2009). Wolf-Dietrich Tillner uses the Komische Oper as an exemplar of East German state support for music theatre in *Die öffentliche Förderung des Musiktheaters Deutschland*, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1999, pp. 291-6.

⁵³ Ilse Kobán, ed., *Walter Felsenstein: Theater. Gespräche, Briefe, Dokumente*, Berlin: Hentrich, 1991, p. 43.

⁵⁴ Braunmüller, *Oper als Drama*, p. 74.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

⁵⁶ Clemens Risi proposed something similar in a lecture at Vanderbilt University, 25 February 2008.

⁵⁷ Braunmüller, *Oper als Drama*, 185.

⁵⁸ Photos of the production can be seen on the Schlingensief website. His *Parsifal* remains one of the most controversial stagings at Bayreuth. When he was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2008, he linked the Bayreuth *Parsifal* experience to his illness. See <http://www.schlingensief.com/projekt.php?id=t044> (accessed 22 April 2009).

⁵⁹ The rabbit was an important recurring symbol throughout. In its premiere season Schlingensief’s *Parsifal* elicited apoplectic responses from professional critics and the

blogosphere, even from the normally even-keeled Alex Ross; see ‘Nausea: A new “Parsifal” at Bayreuth’, *The New Yorker*, 9 August 2004, at: http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2004/08/09/040809crmu_music1 (accessed 30 August 2009). Subsequent performances lost some of their shock value, and some bloggers were ultimately quite enthusiastic.

⁶⁰ ‘Katharina Wagner will das Bayreuther Publikum “fordern”’, *Hamburger Morgenpost*, 26 June 2007, at: http://archiv.mopo.de/archiv/2007/20070626/deutschland-welt/panorama/katharina_wagner_will_das_bayreuther_publikum_fordern.html (accessed 30 August 2009). The most thoughtful review of her *Meistersinger* is ‘Barry Millington assesses Katharina Wagner’s debut on the Green Hill (Letter from Bayreuth)’, *Opera Canada*, 1 September 2007. Her dramaturg, Robert Sollich, has published an article comparing this production to Konwitschny’s *Meistersinger*: ‘Staging Wagner – and its History’, *The Wagner Journal*, 3:1 (2009).

⁶¹ Quoted in Roger Boyes, ‘Opera so lewd it makes Berlin blush’, *Times Online*, 26 June 2004, at: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/article450198.ece> (accessed 20 April 2009).

⁶² Risi lecture at Vanderbilt University, 25 February 2008. In this regard Bieito’s interpretation recalls Peter Sellar’s version of ‘Batti, batti’ in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, another instance in which the action is derived from a literal reading of the libretto.

Alternative Musical Voices

Matthias Tischer

Music and Discourse

Studies of music in the GDR tend to adhere to certain paradigms: composition is viewed either in terms of propaganda or repression, and the focus is very much on the socio-political aspects of music. This chapter reasserts the importance of the artwork as a site of memory and criticism, and proposes a theoretical framework to describe and interpret the complex interdependency between the various aspects of musical life and culture in the GDR. Drawing on Foucault's discourse theory and his concept of power as a productive rather than repressive force, the author explores the ambiguities of composing simultaneously *for* and *against* the regime, reasserting the importance of the artwork as a site of memory and criticism.

Following the nineteenth-century ideal of artistic autonomy, we tend to investigate music independently of its political and social contexts. Our criteria of music analysis are derived from the basic assumption that art and its contexts are separate entities. These criteria enable us to demonstrate in a fascinating variety of ways how musical works of art form worlds of their own. Yet the epistemological road to the everyday world seems to be blocked. For music scholarship of the GDR it is imperative not only that this block be removed, but that consideration be given to the role the concurrent strategies of music research in the East and in the West during the Cold War played in confirming such aesthetics of autonomy.

When faced with the phenomenon of music in dictatorships,¹ in our case in the former GDR, we have to rethink the interdependency of music and politics. The answers to this challenge in recent scholarship have not always been satisfying. Two main trends can be observed. On the one hand, there is a tendency to demonstrate that compositions contributing to the official party image of the East German state amounted more or less to propaganda, following the party doctrine in their poetics and aesthetics. The most prominent examples are representative cantatas and oratorios from the 1950s, notably, Ernst Hermann Meyer's *Mahnsfelder Oratorium* and Ottmar Gerster's *Eisenhüttenkombinat Ost*. On the other hand, there is another trend of scholarship that is heavily indebted to the theory of totalitarianism, with a strong emphasis on repression and censorship. This is particularly apparent in the orientation of recent musicological studies of *Das*

Verhör des Lukullus or *Die Verurteilung des Lukullus* by Bertolt Brecht and Paul Dessau: no one has examined the opera purely from the perspective of its structure or its qualities as a work of art.² Yet Brecht's artistic Marxism was of enormous importance for the directors, dramaturges, actors and composers in his circle (especially for Rudolf Wagner-Régeny, Hanns Eisler, Paul Dessau, Friedrich Schenker and Reiner Bredemeyer). The changes he and Dessau made to the opera were a product not only of political pressure; certain changes were also inspired by artistic dialogue. In the original version the opera is open-ended both musically and in terms of its dramaturgy: the last line is: 'Das Gericht zieht sich zur Beratung zurück [...]'. Party officials were strictly opposed to this version, which left the judgement concerning the warmonger Lukullus to the audience. Brecht and Dessau gave in and changed the last scene into a *Damnation des Lukullus*. Over an orgiastic orchestral score the choir declaims 'ins Nichts mit ihm' while the General goes to hell. In contrast to this drastic change brought about by external pressures, is the heroic tenor-aria 'Lasus, mein Koch Lasus', which was inserted after Brecht succeeded in convincing Dessau that a real opera featuring a heroic tenor was in need of a real aria in a pseudo bel-canto style.

Both of these research perspectives are problematic. It is pointless to prove that music was commissioned and written to function as a tool of propaganda, or to put it more neutrally, to affirm a certain national and cultural identity. The assumption that the SED's control was 'total' is even more precarious. This point of view simply reflects the self image of the GDR's ruling class. In reality, musical life in the GDR was much more complicated, and does not fit satisfactorily into the top-down model of repression and submission. Preferable is the dialectic of composing for *and* against the regime,³ a model which could allow for far more differentiation in future GDR music scholarship. Works of art that seem, on the basis of the title, dedication or occasion of the performance, to be propagandistic on the surface, can simultaneously contain a critical potential in their structure. It is much more interesting to examine this potential than to focus on the obvious fact that a restrictive policy generates affirmative art and uses various forms of repression, including censorship, to implement its intentions. Vice versa, compositions that interest us for their critical potential inevitably had to compromise in one way or

another in order to be performed in the relatively closed society of the GDR. In many cases, compromise and dissent can be found side by side in a single piece of music. Hard-core attempts to realise the vague doctrine of socialist realism such as the *Neue deutsche Volkslieder* by Johannes R. Becher and Hanns Eisler,⁴ and more ambiguous fields of music without text, exemplified by the early symphonies by Johann Cilenšek, both touched on taboos and questioned the non-confrontational aesthetics of the early GDR. Moreover, overtly propagandistic projects were subject to the vagaries of the rapidly shifting political climate. Ernst Hermann Meyer's *Des Sieges Gewißheit* of 1954, for example, a Handelian-style cantata set to text by Johannes R. Becher conveying pseudo-socialist messages – 'Herrliches Heute, herrliches Jetzt' or 'Straße sein Monument! Straße, stolze, stolze Stalin-allee' – was rendered obsolete almost as soon as it had been completed. After the Twentieth Party Conference in the USSR, pieces that carried Stalin's name in the title or even in the libretto were either banned or subjected to a change of lyrics.⁵

We are clearly in need of a theoretical framework to describe and interpret the highly complex interdependency between composition, education, reception, interpretation, administration and publication of music in the GDR. Due to the difficulty of bringing together all of these heterogeneous aspects, GDR music scholarship has tended to date to investigate the non-sounding side of music. We have eminent contributions focusing on state censorship, musical institutions and administration,⁶ music education,⁷ publishing,⁸ remigration,⁹ re-education, de-nazification,¹⁰ and popular music.¹¹ Now, it is time to reintroduce music as a sounding phenomenon to the music historiography of the GDR.¹² Doing so implies the conviction that played and written music has an epistemological potential in its own right to serve as a basis for a cultural history of the GDR. As a historiographic framework, I would like to introduce Michel Foucault's discourse analysis.

What is a 'Discourse'?

In recent decades, discourse has become a fashionable term, one applied to all sorts of forms of communication.¹³ In the following I want to adopt the term specifically as defined by Michel Foucault. The French philosopher and historian introduces the term with three motivations. First, he is interested in the interrelations between knowledge

and power. In opposition to a history of ideas with its tendency towards standardisation, Foucault establishes the idea of a discontinuous practice. The result is a radical historicisation of the concept of 'truth'. According to Paul Veyne, history becomes the history of what people called truth and their struggle for this truth.¹⁴ Foucault defines discourse as 'the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation.'¹⁵ What he calls a 'statement' is different from a 'Satz' or 'proposition'. This distinction makes particular sense if we talk about musical discourse. Every piece of music, each compositional technique or actual performance can be considered a 'statement'.

Foucault is sceptical of traditional perceptions of 'the author' and 'the work'. In his eyes, the description of a statement as a work is not only based on its relation to the author. It is not relevant to analyse what the author said, what he wanted to say, or even what he said without wanting to do so. It seems more important to describe the position of an individual that enables the work to be the subject of certain assertions.¹⁶ This kind of historical research is not so much concerned with reconstructing a past reality in order to find out how things truly were. Rather, it searches for the conditions that made something possible. As Busse explains:

Das Diskurskonzept versucht nun darauf einzugehen, in welcher Weise Bedingungen der Möglichkeit des Hervortretens bestimmter Aussagen in ihrer jeweiligen kognitiven Funktion geschaffen und beeinflusst werden durch einen diskursive Formation, die von vorne herein das zu denken bzw. zu sagen Mögliche einschränkt. Es betrifft also die intersubjektive Gültigkeit von Sinn und seine Produktionsbedingungen im Rahmen der sozialen Praxis.¹⁷

The discourse does not interpret a pre-existing object; it generates this object, making it accessible for experience and observation. The powerful effect of the discourse lies in its specific production of knowledge, allowing a certain form of experience and thus creating social reality.¹⁸ Looking at a discourse, we can analyse the reciprocal relationships between power and knowledge. The discourse is not only the verbal expression of the struggle for power, but is, according to Foucault, 'the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized.'¹⁹ Foucault's studies in the humanities and the history of sexuality are substantially guided by the question of the interrelation of truth/knowledge and power: 'Welche Regeln wendet die Macht an, um Diskurse der Wahrheit zu produzieren?'²⁰ In other words: what sort of power does the discourse

of truth produce? The point is not to find ‘the truth’; it is more important to describe how truth is constructed and how societies generate and circulate power. The untruthfulness of social circumstances is not the main problem. More problematic is the fact that these circumstances are considered to be true. From this point of view, truth becomes a historical and a political phenomenon.²¹

Power and Knowledge

In Foucault’s historical thought, the world of the discourse is not divided in two. There is no division between inclusion and exclusion, between domination and being dominated. Any description of the discourse must consider how its various branches interlock:

It is this distribution that we must reconstruct, with the things said and those concealed, the enunciations required and those forbidden, that it comprises; with the variants and different effects – according to who is speaking, his position of power, the institutional context in which he happens to be situated – that it implies; and with the shifts and reutilisations of identical formulas for contrary objectives that it also includes.²²

This perception fundamentally challenges the repression paradigm and the different forms of totalitarianism theory. An alleged totalitarian power would have an entirely negative impact; it would be incapable of creating anything and instead would only be able to restrict. This totalitarian power would be the same in all sections of society, and based on this concept of power, man could only be imagined as subordinated. Consequently, such a power would be trapped in a paradoxical situation; its only effect would be to keep the subordinated in their powerless role.²³ Since the 1970s Foucault has subsequently emphasised the productive rather than the repressive dimension of power:

Entgegen der Konzeption von Macht primär als Verbot, Repression und Herrschaft, d.h. als ein rein Negatives, das (dualistisch) ein Positives als das voraussetzt, was unterdrückt wird, erscheint Macht nunmehr als ein produktiver Integrationszusammenhang, der die gesamte Gesellschaft durchdringt und dem nichts äußerlich ist.²⁴

By demonstrating the complex strategies of domestication, as Schöbeler observes, Foucault sharpens our attention to the processes of cultural power and strategies of subordination.²⁵ Moreover, he makes clear, that in the game that one could call the policy of truth, critique

is a means of ‘de-submission’.²⁶ This de-submission is confronted with three systems of exclusion inside the discourse: the forbidden word, the exclusion of madness, and the will to truth.

To give just one example comparable to taboos in ethnology, the name Adorno was a forbidden word in the musical discourse of the GDR and other countries of the Soviet Block. Western artistic and intellectual positions that had the potential to resonate with scholars and artists in the GDR were typically banned. Adorno’s Marxist-based critical theory posed a threat to the oversimplified ‘Marxist-Leninist’ theoretical approaches of the GDR. When the East Berlin composer and conductor Friedrich Goldmann cited Adorno’s musical philosophy in his final exam, his adviser Ernst Hermann Meyer castigated the young critical musician with the order that Adorno is not to be quoted.²⁷

In Russia the phenomenon of ‘God’s fool’ played a certain role in the musical discourse.²⁸ Shostakovich’s ‘foolish’ strategies to avoid deportation in the freezing climate of high-Stalinism have parallels in the less dangerous cultural life of the GDR. Paul Dessau’s notorious eruptions at meetings of the Akademie der Künste or the Verband Deutscher Komponisten und Musikwissenschaftler (VDK) and even in the Ministry of Culture represent an impressive example of how effective unconventional behaviour bordering on madness could be in an over-regulated society. Dessau’s antics included walking in unannounced to the Ministry of Culture when faced with party problems, shouting at those who tried to prevent him, and smashing a glass at the start of a furious speech in defence of the state’s younger modernist composers in the Akademie der Künste.²⁹

Finally, the will to truth can produce different truths. For the historian this leads to the question of what happens if the discourse of socialist historiography and the discourse of contemporary music produce different truths. The will to truth, like the other systems of exclusion, is based on a network of practices. It is re-enforced and permanently renewed by the systems of education, books, scholarly societies and laboratories, including artistic ones.³⁰ The practice of censorship in the GDR in the 1950s was smoothly replaced by a systematic non-mentioning. Both contributed to a popularisation if not mystification of marginalised composers such as Bredemeyer or Goldmann. Modern music, particularly when it was denied the chance to be performed in countries under Soviet influence, took on a spectral

presence. Paul Thilman reported from the *Warsaw Autumn* festival in 1956 that all the young musicians were talking about Karlheinz Stockhausen without knowing a single piece or text by him.³¹ The same phenomenon can be observed in the GDR's contemporary music scene. Audiences were aware that the younger composers from the circles of Eisler, Dessau and Wagner-Régeny were seldom successful in obtaining public performance opportunities at home. This imbued modern music with the aura of an oppositional articulation; audiences expected to find hidden messages in the works of modernist composers *because* they were potential victims of censorship or suppression.

These are the spaces of the discourse where, via a variety of mechanisms of exclusion, decisions are made about who is allowed to enter the discourse and who is not: 'It is always possible that one might speak the truth in the space of a wild exteriority, but one is "in the true" only by obeying the rules of a discursive "policing" which one has to reactivate in each of one's discourses.'³² There is a anecdote from the early 1950s, which, even if apocryphal, throws light on the mechanisms of self-censorship practised by the irritated 'victors of history', and in particular by Jewish remigrants as anti-Semitism resurfaced in the Soviet Block:³³ according to legend, when Paul Dessau pulled the score of a quartet by Béla Bartók out of his bag in a session of the Akademie der Künste, he was urged immediately by his colleague Hanns Eisler to 'Put it away, Paul!' The Akademie was a paradigmatic 'society of discourse'. It produced truth on the basis of discursive rules. These rules changed as did what was considered to be true. Entering the discourse depends on a number of pre-conditions. It is the task of the 'societies of discourse', 'to preserve or produce discourses, but in order to make them circulate in a closed space, distributing them only according to strict rules, and without the holders being dispossessed by this distribution.'³⁴ It is extremely fruitful in this context to compare the two main societies of the musical discourse in the GDR: the Akademie der Künste and the VDK. While the latter offered a vehicle for composers and musicologists to organise day-to-day musical life in the state, the Akademie was a powerful tool for the production of truth, both from the perspectives of the SED, and artists such as Brecht, Helene Weigel, Wolfgang Langhoff, Hans Pischner, Eisler and Dessau.

Criticising Conceptual History and the History of Ideas

Foucault makes his concept of discourse distinct by rejecting a traditional history of ideas: ‘Rather than wishing to replace concepts in a virtual deductive edifice, one would have to describe the organisation of the field of statements where they appeared and circulated.’³⁵ It is not the coherence of concepts that should be researched. (Such a coherency in musical discourse would be, for example, the continuous line of musical modernity, which excludes, among other things, polystylistic tendencies.) It is the rules of distribution and development that form what Foucault calls discursive formation.³⁶ This kind of description stands in opposition to formal structural linguistics that examine a statement mainly in terms of its rules of construction. Foucault is sceptical of the tendency in the history of ideas to credit ‘the discourse that it analyses with coherence.’³⁷ He explains: ‘coherence discovered in this way always plays the same role: it shows that immediately visible contradictions are merely surface reflections.’³⁸ In contrast to a history of ideas, Foucault is not trying to find a unifying idea behind the discourse (progress in the case of musical discourse). Instead he wants to research the discourse as a regulated sequence of events. The focus on small shifts enables us ‘to introduce chance, the discontinuous, and materiality at the very roots of thought.’³⁹

There is a striking parallel between Foucault’s concept of historiography and the work of some East German composers. To simplify it for heuristic reasons: the new compositional style that emerged in Darmstadt of the 1950s was a development of the nineteenth-century preoccupation with organic art; for composers in the GDR, in contrast, the avoidance of a single homogeneous style represented an effective strategy for circumventing the officially supported style of socialist realism, essentially nineteenth-century academic classicism with few ‘strange’ notes interjected. Works by Paul Dessau and his followers Reiner Bredemeyer and Friedrich Schenker are characterised by the employment of multiple styles in a single composition. Polystylism and other intertextual strategies such as an elaborated technique of quotation played an important role in East Germany long before ideas of postmodernity began to impact on musical thought in the Federal Republic. Dessau’s sound epitaph for Brecht, *In memoriam Bertolt Brecht*, for example, uses a different style for each of its movements. Indeed Dessau’s orchestral scores and operas from the 1950s until the

end of his life often seem like a patchwork of references to other works. As well as serving as personal tributes to living or dead colleagues, his compositions are an example of how a sounding concept of music history can be designed. Given that Anton Webern and the traditions of serialism inspired by him were not well accepted among the cultural bureaucrats of the GDR, the act of exposing or hiding use of and references to these techniques in a score represented a critical contribution to the musical discourse.⁴⁰ The idiosyncratic form of polystylism that emerged from the musical discourse of the early GDR serves as a form of historiography and was thus the exact contrary of the ‘postmodern arbitrariness’ discussed in the West in the 1960s. While some developments of twentieth-century music were almost taboo in the early years of the GDR, composers like Wagner-Régeny and Dessau tried to preserve the memory of aspects of avant-garde music in their compositions. Dodecaphonic or aleatoric passages can be found like stylistic islands in their compositions. A crucial question thus arises: was there a specifically ‘Eastern’ brand of postmodernism in music?

Schößler describes Foucault’s project as highlighting the cracks, the unexpected, and the chaos as distinct negation (bestimmte Negation):

[Foucault] kehrt die aufklärerisch-hermeneutischen Prinzipien wie Ganzheit, Identität, Kontinuität und Tiefe der Wahrheit um und setzt an ihre Stelle die Diskontinuität (die Diskurse überschneiden sich nur manchmal), die Spezifität (es gibt keine vorgängigen Bedeutungen), die Äußerlichkeit (untersucht werden die ‘äußeren Möglichkeitsbedingungen’ des Diskurses) und die Verknappung (der Anschein von Fülle, von Kommunikation und Austausch ist der Effekt diskursiver Kontrollen).⁴¹

Foucault calls this approach the ‘historiography of borders’ or ‘archaeology’. Contradictions should not be eliminated, nor do secret principles have to be extracted: ‘They are objects to be described for themselves, without any attempt being made to discover from what point of view they can be dissipated, or at what level they can be radicalised and effects become causes.’⁴² In Foucault’s critique of the history of ideas, it is not only traditional categories such as ‘tradition’, ‘influence’ and ‘Geist’ that are scrutinised, but also such concepts as ‘the work’ or ‘the book’ and ‘the author’:

The author is asked to account for the unity of the texts which are placed under his name. He is asked to reveal or at least carry authentication of the hidden meaning which traverses them. He is asked to connect them to his lived experiences, to the real history which saw their birth. The author is what gives the disturbing language of fiction its unities, its nodes of coherence, its insertion in the real.⁴³

The book and the author are, in Foucault's historical thought, overestimated institutions. He is less interested in the unifying powers of a single work than in the interdependency of aesthetic articulation with other forms of statements that follow similar discursive rules.⁴⁴

For many artists in the GDR Brecht's verses were highly important. Poems such as *Über die Bauart langdauernder Werke* (1929) had particular resonance:

Wie lange dauern die Werke?
So lange
Als bis sie fertig sind.
So lange sie nämlich Mühe machen
Verfallen sie nicht.⁴⁵

An excellent example is the already mentioned *In Memoriam Bertolt Brecht*. The open end of the work, which exposes for a final time a unison statement of the final movement's twelve-tone row, is based on an underlying drum beat, which can be interpreted as a symbol for the complicity between composer and listener that was so significant in the GDR. The funeral cortege disappears in the distance and the action of everyday struggle is put back in the hands of the audience. Dessau noted in his diary the day Brecht died: 'Es ist ein unersetzlicher, ganz entsetzlicher Verlust. Jetzt aber: An die Arbeit!'⁴⁶

Foucault knew that historians would dislike his fundamental critique of the mutual affirmation of the subject's foundational function and the associated emphasis on continuity:

The cry goes up that one is murdering history whenever, in a historical analysis – and especially if it is concerned with thought, ideas, or knowledge – one is seen to be using in too obvious a way the categories of discontinuity and difference, the notions of threshold, rupture and transformation, the description of series and limits.⁴⁷

Historiography has long made its peace with Foucault and acknowledged him as 'a historian of the purist sort: everything is historical, history is entirely explicable, and *all words ending in -ism have to be*

*rooted out.*⁴⁸ Foucault's kind of historiography meets all the demands of traditional historiography: it considers culture, society, and economics. But instead of structuring its subject in terms of centuries, cultures or nations, it turns to man's struggle for truth and the practices that made him believe that he had found this truth as its main unit of analysis.⁴⁹ The more it becomes clear that Foucault is the arch-historian among philosophers, the more Foucault's refusal of the subject and semantics emerges as intrinsic to the sharpening of his research programme. He does not deny the subject; he only highlights the dependencies of its statements:⁵⁰ "Anyone who speaks", but what he says is not said from anywhere. It is necessarily caught up in the play of an exteriority.⁵¹

Beyond Ideology: New Research Directions

Discourse analysis is concerned with Nietzsche's 'truth and lies in an extra-moral sense' and their historical, regional and social determination. Why can something be true in a certain place, at a certain time, and among a certain group of individuals when other statements are neither spoken nor heard? In an approach like this, which is not interested in uncovering hidden meanings behind statements, there is no place for ideology. Foucault wants ideology to be seen as a part of the practices among which the truth is negotiated. 'Ideology is not exclusive of scientificity.' Therefore 'the role of ideology does not diminish as rigour increases and error is dissipated.'⁵² Ideology cannot be defined as a system of erroneous thought processes and prejudices that exists outside the sphere of science and scholarship. Ideology is present as soon as the search for knowledge is practised in the context of society. Paul Veyne wants to go as far as abolishing the term: 'In short, there is no such thing as ideology, the sacred texts notwithstanding, and we may as well resolve never to use the word again.'⁵³

The word ideology itself, certainly in the way it has been used since the second half of the twentieth century, is very much a product of the Cold War. Ideology was often simply a catch-all term used to denigrate that which was uttered on the other side of the Iron Curtain. To contextualise this, what Westerners called 'ideas' when speaking of themselves, they called 'ideology' when referring to their Eastern neighbours, and vice versa. While Western art was dominated by an ideology of freedom, the meaning of which changed according to historical shifts in society, in the East the ideology of mass-

compatibility played an important role. In its tendency to historicise truth, discourse analysis is related to cultural studies in general and to cultural anthropology in particular; like the discourse analyst, the ethnographer's focus is not directed towards ascertaining whether a tradition, a ritual or a religion is true or false. Moreover, the ethnographer seeks to understand why certain phenomena were important for the stability of a particular community at a certain time and place, and therefore what they mean. As Clifford Geertz, whose perception of culture is based on Max Weber's concept of culture or *Kulturbegriff*, stated:

believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning.⁵⁴

Geertz wants to explain and interpret forms of expression that seem mysterious at first sight. In this effort he not only integrates hermeneutic strategies from the arts but also sharpens the focus on works of art as objects of cultural self interpretation.⁵⁵ This research strategy opens the way to approaches of controlled interpretation and new meanings: 'Im Sinne einer Ethnologie der westlichen Zivilisation sollte die Diskurssemantik das Wissen und Denken, die Bedingungen der sprachlich-diskursiven Konstitution von Wissen zu ihrem Thema machen.'⁵⁶

This research programme does not stop at the borders of language; it aims at all phenomena that have meaning in a society. From this perspective, forms of articulation that are not based on language such as music without words are of particular interest. In the process of speaking and writing about abstract sounds (a process comparable to describing non-figurative painting), meaning is generated and negotiated.

Branches of the Musical Discourse

Foucault's theory of historiography, which never claims to be a closed system, has a very practical aspect. He describes his programme of discourse analysis as a toolbox; which tool should be drawn from the box depends on the object or topic. If we are to speak of the musical discourse of the GDR, we must decide first about what exactly we are talking. What were the inter-dependant forces, if we put aside the

over-simplified models of suppression and resistance, if we stop considering ideology merely as a system of universal manipulation and delusion (*Verblendungszusammenhang*), and give up the analytical framework of totalitarianism? What else was negotiated in the complex balance of power in the field of music? In what ways were questions of high, low, and middle-brow culture negotiated? How were issues related to gender, morality, Germandom, and so on, involved.

After almost two decades of fruitful research into musical institutions in the GDR, it is time to bring together the seemingly heterogeneous branches of the musical discourse. Music from all genres should be considered simultaneously: conservative *and* avant-garde, propagandistic *and* sacred, so-called trivial *and* esoteric music. The same should be the case with written documents; programme notes, concert books, and letters to editors, for example, help to outline aspects of music history that have been hitherto considered unimportant and differentiate previous ‘top-down’ models. Discourse analysis is always a history and theory of historiography. What were the structures of the discourse societies such as the Akademie der Künste, the VDK, and academic musicology? What implications does discourse analysis have for our own roles as music historians? The permeation of scholarship by socio-political perspectives, conscious or otherwise, is a phenomenon that was by no means unique to German music historians during the Cold War. Language itself also has to be a special field of research. How did the societies in the East and West manage to describe music as ‘free’ or widely accessible or ‘useful’ in order to integrate what was often the same body of music into the different mechanisms of national and cultural identity? The core questions should be: what rules and criteria structured the musical discourse in East Germany against the backdrop of the Cold War? And how were decisions made as to what the ‘right’ music for the ‘only socialist state on German soil’ should be.

Notes

¹ Roberto Illiano und Massimiliano Sala, eds, *Music and Dictatorship in Europe and Latin America*, Brepols: Turnhout, 2010.

² See for example Joachim Lucchesi, ed., *Das Verhör in der Oper: die Debatte um die Aufführung 'Das Verhör des Lukullus' von Bertolt Brecht und Paul Dessau*, Berlin: BasisDruck Verlag, 1993; and Joy Haslam Calico, 'The trial, the condemnation, the cover-up: behind the scenes of Brecht/Dessau's *Lukullus*', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 14:3 (2002), 313-42.

³ Matthias Tischer, *Komponieren für und wider den Staat. Paul Dessau in der DDR*, Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau 2009.

⁴ The *Volkslieder* were first published in 1950 (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag) in a version for voice and simple piano accompaniment. Eisler also wrote arrangements for choir, and for orchestra, choir and soloists.

⁵ Louis Fürnberg, for example, had to change the text of his extremely popular song *Die Partei hat immer recht* from 'So aus leninschem Geist wächst, von Stalin geschweißt, die Partei, die Partei, die Partei' to 'So aus leninschen Geist wächst zusammengeschweißt, die Partei, die Partei, die Partei.'

⁶ Lars Klingberg, 'Politisch fest in unseren Händen'. *Musikalische und musikwissenschaftliche Gesellschaften in der DDR*, Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1997; Daniel Zur Weihen, *Komponieren in der DDR. Institutionen, Organisationen und die erste Komponistengeneration bis 1961: Analysen*, Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau, 1999.

⁷ Rudolf-Dieter Krämer, *Musikpädagogik in der ehemaligen DDR. Eine Textdokumentation*, Essen: Blaue Eule, 1992; Siegfried Bimberg, *Nachhall. 44 Jahre Schulmusik nach Marx und Lenin*, Essen: Blaue Eule, 1996; Sieglinde Siedentop, *Musikunterricht in der DDR*, Augsburg: Wißner-Verlag, 2000.

⁸ Bettina Hinterthür, *Noten nach Plan. Die Musikverlage in der SBZ/DDR – Zensursystem, zentrale Planwirtschaft und deutsch-deutsche Beziehungen bis Anfang der 1960er Jahre*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006.

⁹ Frank Schneider, 'Remigration in die DDR', in: Horst Weber, ed., *Musik in der Emigration 1933–1945: Verfolgung Vertreibung, Rückwirkung*, Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler Verlag, 1994, pp. 249-59; Karin Hartewig, *Zurückgekehrt. Die Geschichte der jüdischen Kommunisten in der DDR*, Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau, 2000; Maren Köster and Dörte Schmidt, 'Man kehrt nie zurück, man geht immer nur fort'. *Remigration und Musikkultur*, Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 2005.

¹⁰ See Toby Thacker, *Music After Hitler, 1945-1955*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007, pp. 39-75; and David Monod, *Settling Scores. German Music, Denazification, & the Americans, 1945-1953*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005, which is much more precise but focuses exclusively on the American zone in occupied Germany.

- ¹¹ Michael Rauhut, *Rock in der DDR*, Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2002; and *Bye Bye, Lübben City. Bluesfreaks, Tramps und Hippies in der DDR*, Berlin: Schwarzkopf und Schwarzkopf, 2004.
- ¹² Nina Noeske, *Musikalische Dekonstruktion. Neue Instrumentalmusik in der DDR*, Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau, 2007.
- ¹³ Peter Schöttler, 'Wer hat Angst vor dem "linguistic turn"?', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 23 (1997), 134-51 (here: p. 141).
- ¹⁴ Paul Veyne, 'Foucault revolutionizes history', in: Arnold I. Davidson, ed., *Foucault and His Interlocutors*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997, pp. 146-82 (here: p. 171).
- ¹⁵ Michel Foucault, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 83.
- ¹⁶ Foucault, *Archäologie des Wissens*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981, p. 139.
- ¹⁷ Dietrich Busse, *Historische Semantik. Analyse eines Programms*, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987, p. 222.
- ¹⁸ Andrea Seier, 'Kategorien der Entzifferung: Macht und Diskurs als Analyseraster', in: Hannelore Bublitz, Andrea Bührmann, Christine Hanke, and Andrea Seier, eds, *Das Wuchern der Diskurse. Perspektiven der Diskursanalyse Foucaults*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999, pp. 75-86 (here: p. 77).
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- ²⁰ *Dispositive der Macht*, Berlin: Merve, 1978, p. 75.
- ²¹ See for example, Urs Marti, *Michel Foucault*, Munich: Beck, 1988, p. 75.
- ²² Foucault, trans. R. Hurley, *The History of Sexuality. Volume One: An Introduction*, New York: Vintage, 1980, p. 100.
- ²³ See, for example, Isabell Lorey, 'Macht und Diskurs bei Foucault', in: *Das Wuchern der Diskurse. Perspektiven der Diskursanalyse Foucaults*, pp. 87-96 (here: p. 91).
- ²⁴ Andrea Seier, 'Kategorien der Entzifferung', p. 80.

- ²⁵ See, for example, Franziska Schöblier, *Literaturwissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft*, Tübingen and Basel: Narr Francke Atempo, 2006, p. 46.
- ²⁶ Foucault, *Was ist Kritik?*, Berlin: Merve, 1992, p. 15.
- ²⁷ Goldman in an interview with the author. Matthias Tischer, *Das Zeuthener Haus. Oral History Project*, unpublished, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.
- ²⁸ See Solomon Volkov, *Shostakovich and Stalin: The Extraordinary Relationship Between the Great Composer and the Brutal Dictator*, New York: Knopf, 2004.
- ²⁹ Matthias Tischer, 'Ästhetische, poetische und politische Diskurse in der Akademie der Künste. "Warum ist das so, daß wir innerhalb der Republik eine Kulturinsel sind?"', die 50er und 60er Jahre', in: Matthias Tischer, ed., *Musik in der DDR. Beiträge zu den Musikverhältnissen eines verschwundenen Staates*, Berlin: Kuhn, 2005, pp. 105-26.
- ³⁰ Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', p. 55.
- ³¹ Paul Thilman 'Eindrücke vom "Warschauer Herbst"', *Musik und Gesellschaft*, 6 (1956), 467-8.
- ³² Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', p. 61.
- ³³ The Jewish remigrants to the GDR were not only expected to accept the German unwillingness to come to terms with the past, they were also terrified by the new wave of anti-Semitism emanating from the USSR in the late Stalin era.
- ³⁴ Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', pp. 62-3.
- ³⁵ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 82.
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- ³⁷ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 114.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 115.
- ³⁹ Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', p. 69.
- ⁴⁰ Concerning the works of the younger generation of composers in the GDR see Nina Noeske, *Musikalische Dekonstruktion. Neue Instrumentalmusik in der DDR*.
- ⁴¹ Franziska Schöblier, *Literaturwissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft*, p. 40.

- ⁴² Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 116.
- ⁴³ Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', p. 58.
- ⁴⁴ Andreas W. Daum, *Kennedy in Berlin*, Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003.
- ⁴⁵ Bertolt Brecht, *Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, vol. 14, Gedichte und Gedichtfragmente 1928-1939, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988, p. 34.
- ⁴⁶ Paul Dessau, ed. Daniela Reinhold, *'Let's Hope for the Best': Briefe und Notizbücher aus den Jahren 1948 bis 1978*, Hofheim: Wolke, 2000, p. 69.
- ⁴⁷ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 12.
- ⁴⁸ Veyne, 'Foucault revolutionizes history', p. 48.
- ⁴⁹ Foucault's own political activism, his engagement against war, injustice and suppression show that he was by no means politically indifferent.
- ⁵⁰ See, for example, Dietrich Busse, *Historische Semantik*, p. 247.
- ⁵¹ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 96.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 143.
- ⁵³ Veyne, 'Foucault revolutionizes history', p. 165.
- ⁵⁴ Clifford Geertz, 'Thick description: toward an interpretive theory of culture', in: *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, pp. 3-30 (here: p. 5).
- ⁵⁵ See, for example, Schöblier, *Literaturwissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft*, p. 176.
- ⁵⁶ Dietrich Busse, *Historische Semantik*, p. 271.

Nina Noeske

Gender Discourse and Musical Life in the GDR

This chapter draws on recent developments in gender studies and examines the implications and consequences of gender sensitive approaches for the construction of a music history of the GDR. The chapter begins with a discussion of practical gender relations in the GDR, exploring the marginalisation of the female in a society that prided itself on gender equality but was deeply patriarchal. It then considers the impact of these gendered social constructs on the aesthetics of socialist realism.

Recent developments in gender studies have served as a prominent stimulus for musicologists to rethink fundamental approaches to historiography.¹ Most notably, the traditional concept of the cultural canon as a set of masterworks has been challenged. Questions have been asked about the value choices inherent in the canon: why are certain works deemed worthy of continued performance and reflection when others are neglected or lost? What does this reveal about a culture and its self-conception? Which concepts of marginalisation and exclusion are at work and how can alternative cultural memories be constructed? The consequence of this ‘rethinking’ has been an intensified focus on what is apparently marginal, placed at the periphery of culture. (Similarities can be observed between this approach and postmodern tenets of historiography.) Beginning with the question of why female composers and performers are largely absent from cultural memory, musicologists since the 1970s have begun to explore the relevance of a ‘female music history’. There has been a move away from the reified composition and an increased interest in cultural practices, drawing attention to the roles of women as patrons, concert organisers, writers on music and salon hosts. This change of focus has resulted in a new understanding that music as a cultural and social practice can only be analysed in the wider context of human society. In the following essay I want to examine the implications and consequences of gender-sensitive approaches for the construction of a music history of the GDR. I will begin with a discussion of practical gender relations within the state and will then explore the impact of these social constructs on the aesthetics of

socialist realism. Central to this approach is the realisation that there are multiple interrelated gender discourses at play.

Female Composers in the GDR

In stark contrast to official claims and despite the gender equality that was nominally enshrined in GDR laws, the state was a male-dominated one.² Of course, women were integrated into and accepted within the working world. They were employed in industry and were celebrated by state officials, not least in numerous speeches by Walter Ulbricht.³ Decisions, however, were made almost completely by men; telling in this regard was the notable absence of women in the upper echelons of the GDR's political machine. While women could become crane drivers and technical assistants, men seldom engaged with domestic work or child care. The resulting inequalities have been well documented.⁴ Similar conditions can be observed in the structures of GDR musical life, where Ruth Zechlin (1926-2007) was the only female composer to enjoy genuine success at both domestic and international levels.⁵ Professor of composition at the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler Berlin and teacher of a master class in composition at the Akademie der Künste, she was inevitably hailed both as a female figurehead and as an alibi for socialist culture. Zechlin was well aware of the role she had to play in confirming the narratives of equality associated with socialism, but it is telling that she believed she had inherited her mathematical combinatorial approach to composition from her father. Her skills, according to Zechlin, were inherently masculine.⁶ Accordingly, she ascribed the shortage of female composers in the GDR to a 'physiologisches Phänomen',⁷ maintaining that if women had the faculty to compose, they would have long played a prominent part in musical life. Emancipation, she claimed, was not the issue: 'Das Frauenproblem ist in der DDR weitgehend gelöst. Wer und was aufgeführt wird, ist keine Frage der Emanzipation, sondern allein der Qualität.'⁸ In a 1988 survey of female musicians in the GDR, published in the journal *Musik und Gesellschaft*, Zechlin explained:

Ich denke, ich bin der lebendige Beweis dafür, daß man als Frau in unserem Lande alles tun kann – vorausgesetzt, daß man mit größter Verantwortung, mit Phantasie und Kühnheit sowie mit echtem handwerklichen Können unverwechselbare und persönliche neue Musik schreibt.⁹

Zechlin vehemently refuted the existence of a 'weibliche Ästhetik', demanding that differentiation be made only between 'good' and 'bad' music.¹⁰ Key here of course, is her self-identification as a masculine composer, and her tendency to ascribe her entrance into a normally forbidden realm to a caprice of nature, namely the bestowal on her of an inherently 'masculine' gift. She explains: 'Es wäre mir suspekt, als "weiblicher" Komponist zu schreiben, als "weiblicher" Komponist Vorträge zu halten, als "weiblicher" Komponist Verantwortungen zu übernehmen und kulturpolitisch zu arbeiten.'¹¹ This antipathy towards gendered ghettoisation is perhaps inevitable given her fundamentally masculine construct of composition.

Other experiences and perceptions of female musicians emerge in the *Musik und Gesellschaft* survey. An alternative model for defining the female self within the musical life of the late GDR was provided by the East German conductor Romely Pfundt. Pfundt perceives the specifically 'female' nature not, as is the case with Zechlin, as an artistic hindrance, but as a source of positive qualities. The unique individuality of a female artist lies, according to Pfundt, in her 'femininity' and its rich emotional world, a topos by no means unique to Eastern Germany. This femininity provides female interpreters with artistic opportunities that are unique to their sex.¹² On the contrary, Traude Ebert-Obermeier, the only woman within the GDR to hold a professorship in musicology, was very sceptical about the opportunities available to women in her country. In the *Musik und Gesellschaft* survey she recalls a conference at which she was introduced as 'Herr Prof. Ebert'. As she was making her way to the podium, the organisers declared that since 'Herr Prof. Ebert' was obviously absent they should move on to the next speaker. Ebert-Obermeier recounts that: 'Erst mein Protest und der Hinweis, daß es gelegentlich, wenn auch selten, Professorinnen gibt und sogar solche, die den Mut aufbringen, bei Konferenzen zu referieren, ermöglichte es mir, mein Referat vorzutragen.' She concludes by asking: 'Wie sollen sich Frauen unter solchen Voraussetzungen entwickeln können?'¹³ Conversely, Ellen Hünigen, a twenty-three-year-old composition student at the time of the survey, did not perceive any disadvantages for women. She recalls that in her childhood composition class, there were many girls and that she herself enjoyed the best education available. In contrast to Zechlin, she observes that a 'geschlechtsspezifische Teilung sowohl des Empfindungsaufbaus als auch des Erkenntnisprozesses in

weibliche und männliche Aspekte scheint mir bloße Gedankenkonstruktion zu sein.’¹⁴

These different views can be seen as prototypical experiences of gender relations within the musical life of the GDR, with Hünigen reflecting the changing climate that preceded the dissolution of the state. The perceptions of Hünigen and Pfundt are most optimistic (albeit somewhat naïve in the latter case); the sceptical comments of Ebert-Obermeier reflect a more problematic circumstance. Ultimately, however, it is Ruth Zechlin who personifies the most typical experience, mirroring the expectations and presumptions of the socialist society in which she lived. Zechlin’s validation as a composer in this society necessitated her constructing herself in the image of a masculine artistic.¹⁵ By doing so, she positioned herself firmly in the accepted discourse with its specific practices of exclusion. This was necessary for artistic survival; as Frank Kämpfer suggests: ‘Als Überlebensform gab es für die DDR-Musikerin kaum eine Alternative zur Kooperation mit dem männlichen Geschlecht.’¹⁶

These observations expose the extent to which the field of composition has been constructed to exclude the female and the feminine. Composition since the nineteenth century has been defined in terms of an aesthetic of genius, one that is difficult to reconcile with the compositional activities of women.¹⁷ Similarities can be drawn here to the chasm that existed between official rhetoric and reality in terms of gender equality in East Germany. The much vaunted separation of socialist realism from the bourgeois aesthetics of the nineteenth century was something of a chimera; despite claims to the contrary, socialist realist art was firmly grounded in these aesthetics, and rooted in the established canon of male composers. Thus Kämpfer notes, unsurprisingly ‘[d]ie “Musikpäpste” der kleinen DDR waren bis zuletzt Männer, Vaterfiguren, Überväter.’¹⁸ Given the accepted narrative that socialism was synonymous with equality – an effective solution for both the ‘class question’ and the ‘question of women’ – it was necessary to deflect attention from the actual state of affairs. Those efforts succeeded; as Kämpfer observed in 1991:

Die Unterpräsenz der künstlerisch tätigen oder vermittelnd tätigen Frau als ein geschichtlich gewachsenes und aktuell unbewältigtes Phänomen findet in der [DDR-] Gesellschaft keinerlei Raum für Nachdenken und öffentliche Diskussion. Den Betroffenen selbst sind die Fragestellungen bis heute zudem kaum selbst bewußt. [...] Gegen die Frauenrechtsbewegung in Westeuropa und den USA,

gegen alternatives, auch feministisches Denken schottete die DDR ihre Gesellschaft weitgehend ab.¹⁹

In everyday speech, the term feminism, as was the case in many other Eastern Bloc states, was laden with negative connotations.²⁰

The interplay of official claims, proclamations, realities, and the perceptions of self and other is complex and often contradictory. Problems associated with gender equality were perceived as non-existent in the GDR, largely because of the effective assimilation of women into a masculine world, as exemplified by Ruth Zechlin. Hauser observes, '[i]n der DDR verschwand das zweite Geschlecht als werktätiger Mensch in der Ideologie.'²¹ The same process can be observed in musical life; one can speak of a pervasive and all-encompassing social repression. The question arises as to whether this process is similarly manifest in East German musical aesthetics (both official and nonofficial); whether and to what extent connections can be drawn to other social and historical dichotomies in the wider field of aesthetics, and whether those 'epistemes', to use Foucault's terminology, influenced musical production, interpretation and reception. Central here is the impact of gendered discourse on music historiography. The following discussion will be restricted to two points. The first concerns the gender coding implicit in the official state-sanctioned aesthetics of socialist realism. The self image of the socialist state can be viewed in this context from an alternative perspective; in particular, an exploration of these gendered aesthetics can reveal information about the mechanisms of exclusion that operated in GDR society. The second point examines concrete engagement with and responses to gender issues in compositional practice and its reception. To conclude, I will offer some insights on issues which should be considered in the context of a gender-sensitive music history of the GDR.

Gender and Socialist Realism

National self image in the early and middle years of the GDR drew heavily on 'jene klassisch-humanistische deutsche Kultur am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts, mit der sich Gesellschaftsaufbruch, bürgerlich-männliche Subjektwerdung und zugleich politischer Regreß verband.'²² Such rhetoric is clearly visible in the official celebrations for Beethoven's 200th birthday in 1970.²³ The event promoted the belief that the GDR represented the political continuation of ideals anti-

pated artistically in Beethoven's music.²⁴ In the proceedings of the East Berlin Beethoven Conference that year, Heinz Alfred Brockhaus and Konrad Niemann promoted a strong image of Beethoven using terms such as 'kämpferisch', 'kampferfüllt', 'entbehrungsreich', and, ultimately, 'humanistisch-revolutionär' to describe him. The official image of Beethoven in the GDR was notably one-dimensional and restricted to the ideal of the 'heroic' Beethoven, a prototype of the bourgeois, autonomous subject, who had total control over his compositional content. By installing such heroic genius on an imaginary pedestal, Eastern Germany implicitly decided in favour of a 'masculine' Beethoven.

East Germany's claim as heir to the masculine Beethoven required that West Germany be recontextualised as an artistic other in publications. Musicologists and functionaries argued that the 'imperialistic state of Bonn' had contaminated Beethoven's heritage by allowing, and even encouraging works such as Mauricio Kagel's *Ludwig van* or Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Opus 1970*. Ernst Hermann Meyer notably denigrated Stockhausen's tribute to Beethoven as 'pornographic'.²⁵ Overall, western 'decadence' and its perceived association with 'nihilism'²⁶ stood in opposition to the heroic, revolutionary, forward-looking, 'brüderlich vereinten Welt' epitomised in the eastern self.²⁷ Western interest in Beethoven's late style, as evinced by Adorno and composers such as Stockhausen and Kagel, was also viewed as symptomatic of western decadence. The neglect of late Beethoven within the GDR resulted in some problems; notably, those aspects of music which are conventionally imbued with feminine connotations – lyrical qualities for example – were disregarded. This was an issue that perturbed the East German musicologist Harry Goldschmidt, who observed in the midst of the 1970 Beethoven festivities: '[W]as nicht in das revolutionäre Beethoven-Bild hineinzupassen schien, wurde beiseite gelassen; der lyrische Beethoven blieb unbewältigt, das Spätwerk – mit einer Ausnahme, natürlich der Neunten – einfach beschwiegen.'²⁸ The withdrawal of a spirit or *Geist* traditionally perceived as masculine in Beethoven's late style,²⁹ rendered this body of music incompatible with state rhetoric. Images of weakness had no place in a historical narrative that was shaped, in both German states, by the demands of the Cold War.

The large-scale proclamations of a masculine Beethoven were symptomatic of wider phenomena in the 1950s; similar patterns can be

found throughout the body of socialist realist music criticism. The installation of the masculine as a cultural norm is not overtly explicit. Instead, writers draw on specific semantic fields, in which maleness and masculinity is implicitly encoded. Composers, for example, are discussed predominantly in terms of their ‘strength’ and powerful ‘visions’.³⁰ Thus, in Ernst Hermann Meyer’s musicological manifesto *Musik im Zeitgeschehen* (1952) one reads that ‘realistic’ art has to ‘progress’ (*vorwärtsführen*):

Das Prophetische, das heroische Vorstoßen zu immer höheren Höhen der gesellschaftlichen Einheit und der Naturüberwindung, [...] das ist eine notwendige Forderung an jedes echte Kunstwerk. [...] So ist realistische Kunst vorwärtsgewandt, prophetisch und kämpferisch.³¹

Characteristic here, is Meyer’s reference to nature. Max Horkheimer and Adorno in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* notably questioned the traditional feminine connotations of nature,³² and the related implications of the concept that nature must be overcome by mankind in order to achieve progress.³³

According to Czech author Antonín Sychra, the socialist composer ‘fights’ at different ‘fronts’ for ‘seine persönlichen Beziehungen zum sozialistischen Morgen und kämpft gleichzeitig in der Familie um ein neues Verhältnis zur Frau und zu den Kindern.’³⁴ (Notable in this statement is the implicit male gendering of the composer.) The antithesis to this, for Meyer as well as Sychra is music that represents the neurotic, hysteric, nervous, morbid, and the sentimental. So, according to Meyer, one has to fight not only against ‘atonal’ music but also against some forms of (‘western’) light music, against ‘flache[n], süßliche[n], abgestandene[n] Kitsch,’ and against ‘schmalzige, schmachtende Salonmusik niedrigsten Niveaus’ which circulated among people ‘wie schlechte Limonaden oder ordinäres Parfüm.’³⁵ There are some composers who have to be ‘rescued’ from such associations; Sychra, for example, emphasises the ‘Revolutionäre, die Volkstümlichkeit, eine gesunde, unsentimentale Lyrik’ of Frédéric Chopin’s compositions, and argues that it is ‘nur verständlich, daß der sozialistische Künstler gerade diese fortschrittlichen Züge des revolutionären demokratischen Komponisten hervorhebt.’³⁶ The combination of perfume, sweet lemonade, and sentimental parlour-music clearly conjures up the sphere of the feminine – and, to some extent, the effeminate. The deep-rooted suspicion of this sphere lies in

the fact that socialist realism was an implicitly masculine programme; indeed Ernst Hermann Meyer's postulation that each composer must 'harden and purify' himself by writing *Massenlieder* has distinct resonances with male initiation ceremonies, and not just those associated with National Socialism.³⁷ This comparison is not that far-fetched given that the battle for 'correct art' was fought within the framework of the Cold War; in this context, aggression in musical aesthetics acts as a symbolic weapon. Anyone entering a war must, to use Sychra's terminology, be 'sound' and 'unsentimental', and must conversely be in no way 'effete'. Although the ideal of peace was one of the most prominent topoi in the GDR, one not refined to political rhetoric,³⁸ the friend-foe mentality underlying aesthetic semantics points to the simultaneous preoccupation with war, be it political or cultural. Indeed the vocabulary favoured on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War recalls concerns prevalent during the First World War: a pervasive antipathy to decadent phenomena such as hysteria and nervousness, which have since the nineteenth century had specific feminine connotations. As a consequence, the desire to disassociate from weakness can be understood as part of a wider drive to strengthen the invulnerability of the national self. From this perspective, the music of socialist realism can be characterised in terms of its military qualities.³⁹

Last but not least in this context is the suspicion in which both the spheres of erotically charged dancing (most notably that prompted by American jazz music of the 1950s) and pure intellectual music (Schoenberg's dodecaphony and the integral serialism of the 1950s) were held.⁴⁰ Neither sensualism nor intellectualism is conducive for dictatorships: human subordination is undermined by both the overwhelming emotions aroused by so-called erotic music and the critical faculties awakened by intellectual music. The final stigmatisation of music lay in the associations that were drawn between prostitution and the popular light music of western societies, one last link between dubious music and dubious (female) sexuality.⁴¹ The rhetorics of the Cold War, which are barely concealed in socialist-realist orientated musical criticism, are situated firmly in the world of Klaus Theweleit's 'Männerphantasien'.⁴²

Norms and Reality

The impact of this male-orientated vision of society was by no means restricted to musical aesthetics; the gendered narratives established in the early years of the GDR exerted a significant force on composition, even in the late 1980s when their relevance appeared questionable.⁴³ The discourse of aesthetic norms and ideals operated at many levels within music, affecting not only authorial intent but also the public, critical and scholarly reception of composition. These discourses are particularly apparent in the field of opera. Sigrid Neef, for example, detects ‘heroines’ that embody a near-utopian format in the operas of Paul Dessau. Especially within his first opera, *Die Verurteilung des Lukullus*, which received its premiere in 1953 in East Berlin, Dessau, according to Neef, integrated female figures that function as a political protest against a lack of important and essential things.⁴⁴

Dessau schuf mit kommentierender Frauenstimme, Fischweib und Kurtisane, nicht nur bergend-schützende oder mütterliche Gestalten, vor allem entwarf er mit ihnen einen Typus Mensch, der sich in konflikthaften Situationen immer für das einzelne und sei es noch so unbedeutende Leben entscheidet; der dafür eintritt, so zum Antipoden jener wird, für die ein abstraktes Prinzip mehr ist als der konkrete Mensch.⁴⁵

As Neef notes, the female in Dessau’s operas functions as a kind of anti-principle, as an anti-hero and as a fool at the same time:⁴⁶ ‘Shakespeare und andere haben für die Gestaltung ihrer Perspektive Narren – Kunstfiguren – geschaffen. Bei Dessau erhalten Frauen diese Funktion.’⁴⁷ The historical tendency to employ women as a perceived blank space, as an undefined or contradictory ‘Non-A’ and therefore as a kind of projection screen has been well documented.⁴⁸ This is not the place to determine the coherence of Neef’s interpretation; it is more important to acknowledge that this possible reading of the opera was important to her and many others. Against the background of the aesthetic conditions discussed above, it seems certainly possible that Dessau explores ‘die traditionellen Heldenbilder’ within his works, but, as Neef observes, he does this in a way that is ‘nicht abstrakt, sondern er zielt ganz konkret auf die Antinomie: der Mensch als Instrument fremder Zwecke und der Mensch als sein eigener Endzweck.’⁴⁹ It is notable that Kunigunde, the female protagonist of Reiner Bredemeyer’s opera *Candide* (1981-2), was subjected to a virtually identical musicological reading. The Voltarian figure, like Christa Wolf’s *Kassandra* (1983), was interpreted as a kind of

visionary and as a representative of a truly humane society.⁵⁰ There are many more examples which could be mentioned within this context, the most prominent of which are Siegfried Matthus's *Judith* (1985) and Friedrich Schenker's *Bettina* (1984).⁵¹ Clear parallels can be drawn here to currents in GDR literature of the 1970s.⁵² The 'female' represents a viable alternative to the bureaucratic world of socialism, personified in the male gerontocracy of the state's political hierarchy.⁵³

Exploration of gender was not restricted to opera. Friedrich Schenker's chamber piece *Missa Nigra* (1978), a harrowing musical simulation of the atomic war, subtly undermines traditional concepts of masculine identity in its thematic portrayals of nuclear war, destruction and military virtues. The satirical tone is compounded by a parody of the 'Prussian March', something Schenker also does in his Concerto for Flute and Orchestra (1977). In a similar vein Bredemeyer parodied the 'heroic' Beethoven in his *Bagatellen für B.* (1970), and in doing so undermined the official narrative that heralded the GDR as the 'true' successor to the composer's heritage.⁵⁴ Again, these are only representative examples; composition clearly provided a forum for exploring the disparities between actual power structures and those implicit in the official one-sided political aesthetics of socialist realism. Thus, it seems that composition acted as a venue for the airing of social grievances that could not be addressed openly and directly. Remarkable in this context is the fact that Ruth Zechlin alone abstained from engaging in the aesthetics of parody, keeping her compositions as separate as possible from the political realm, and maintaining their status as 'pure' and 'absolute' art; in doing so, she notably compounded her own position as a masculine East German composer.

Conclusion

Aesthetical thought, like music, is inherently political: both are concerned with power and with validating accepted norms. This is particularly the case where gender is concerned; as Joan Wallach Scott observes: 'gender is a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated.'⁵⁵ Thus, for music historiography there is a particular need to read documents multi-dimensionally, to acknowledge these sources as 'monuments' in the Foucauldian sense in the battle for power. An engagement with gender narratives in this context

allows potential interconnections between (aesthetic) norms and 'real' power structures within society to emerge. Foucault's concept of constructed realities plays a central role here. It is essential to acknowledge the constructedness of aesthetic standards, and to be sensitive to that which is absent from such discourses, to be aware of that which is not said, not thought, and not composed. Voices and events that fail to adhere to the rules of the discourse, which, to quote Foucault, are not 'in the true',⁵⁶ are no less part of reality than those at the centre of hegemonic narratives. They emerge if one is attentive to mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion that operate, in this context, on musical aesthetics, sociology, composition, and interpretation.

Thus, it is essential not to take the GDR's internal master narratives at face value, even those originating from a critical perspective such as Frank Schneider's *Momentaufnahme. Notate zu Musik und Musikern in der DDR*.⁵⁷ Ultimately it would be useful to dispense with diachronic historiography, with its implicit concepts of success and autonomy, in favour of synchronic history, which allows each event to be explored in terms of its interaction with others. Musical life in the GDR was not confined to Berlin or Leipzig, nor did it consist only of male protagonists. In order to construct the most comprehensive picture of the GDR's musical life, one which includes the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion associated with politics and gender, it is necessary to look beyond the beaten track, and to stray into musical territories that were considered irrelevant prior to 1989. Potential areas include semi-private meetings of musicians and intellectuals, such as those that took place in the house of Paul Dessau in Zeuthen, and music in everyday life, for example in schools and festivals.

Perhaps the most productive way to construct a music historiography of the GDR is by conceiving of it as a social biotope. Central institutions such as the Akademie der Künste and the Verband Deutscher Komponisten und Musikwissenschaftler, for example, could be usefully examined as 'places' on an imaginary map, a map which contextualises their location and significance within the musical life of the GDR. Such a map could illuminate the actual status of these institutions, examining their reception in other spheres of society, and determining how, and the extent to which, they related to other groups. On a broader level, a 'map' (or several of them) of the different temporal stages of the GDR's musical life, would allow for a more focused analysis of the music-historiographical discourse, of

which gender represents an important, but by no means the only category. Interconnected thought process are crucial for music historiography; only by considering individual historical threads as part of a wider connected sphere, can the full dimensions of a musical society emerge. Such an approach allows for an examination not only of that which is 'in the true' in any given discourse, but also of that which is not.

Notes

¹ 'Gender history is at the forefront of discussion about methods, periodisation, the role of metanarratives, and the epistemological foundations of the discipline – in short, just about every general issue of concern to historians today.' Lynn Hunt, 'The Challenge of Gender. Deconstruction of Categories and Reconstruction of Narratives in Gender History', in: Hans Medick and Anne-Charlott Trepp, eds, *Geschlechtergeschichte und Allgemeine Geschichte. Herausforderungen und Perspektiven*, Göttingen: Wallstein, 1998, pp. 59-97 (here: p. 59).

² See for example Herta Kuhrig, *Die Gleichberechtigung der Frauen in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Schriften des DDR-Komitees für Menschenrechte 5*, Berlin: Druckerei Fortschritt, 1973.

³ Walter Ulbricht, *Frauen – Miterbauerinnen des Sozialismus. Aus Reden und Aufsätzen*, Leipzig: Verlag für die Frau, 1968.

⁴ 'A new work world has opened up to them but women have not gotten rid of the old world in the kitchen and in the children's rooms.' Christel Sudau, 'Women in the GDR', *New German Critique*, 13, Special Feminist Issue (1978), 69-81 (here: p. 72).

⁵ A younger generation of female composers born in the 1960s, including Annette Schlünz and Ellen Hünigen, came to prominence only as the state was disintegrating.

⁶ Ruth Zechlin, in: Ursula Stürzbecher, *Komponisten in der DDR. 17 Gespräche*, Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1979, p. 154.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 152. She continues: 'Wenn eine Frau etwas zu sagen hatte, dann durfte sie es auch sagen, und es wurden ihr niemals Schwierigkeiten gemacht. Und wenn Clara Schumann oder Alma Mahler-Werfel sich ihrem Mann unterwarfen und sich selbst in den Schatten stellten, so war das allein ihre persönliche Entscheidung [...].' (p. 153)

⁹ Zechlin, 'Qualität der Werke zählt', *Musik und Gesellschaft* (hereafter *MuG*), 38:3 (1988), 116-7 (here: p. 117).

¹⁰ Zechlin, *Komponisten in der DDR*, p. 155, and Zechlin, 'Qualität der Werke zählt', p. 116.

¹¹ Zechlin, 'Qualität der Werke zählt', p. 116.

¹² Romely Pfundt, 'Leistung und berufliches Ethos', *MuG*, 38:3 (1988), 117-8.

¹³ Traude Ebert-Obermeier, 'Bewährungschancen eröffnen', *MuG*, 38:3 (1988), 115-6.

¹⁴ Ellen Hünigen, 'Wege der Selbsterprobung', *MuG*, 38:3 (1988), 120.

¹⁵ Susan E. Reid describes similar issues with regard to the arts of the Soviet Union in the 1930s: 'The official precepts that women were already equal and that "there is no such thing as masculine and feminine art" meant that their success and very survival as artists depended on proving their capacity to conform to masculine norms.' Susan E. Reid, 'All Stalin's Women: Gender and Power in Soviet Art of the 1930s', *Slavic Review*, 57:1 (1998), 133-73 (here: p. 171).

¹⁶ Frank Kämpfer, 'Sozialer Freiraum, ästhetische Nische: Frauen und Musik in der ehemaligen DDR', *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, 152:10 (1991), 25-8 (here: p. 26). See also Pierre Bourdieu, trans. Richard Nice, *Masculine Domination*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001, pp. 27-8. This was obviously not the case in the field of literature in which authors such as Christa Wolf, Monika Maron, and Irmtraud Morgner explicitly cultivated a specifically 'female' genre of writing.

¹⁷ Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 143.

¹⁸ Frank Kämpfer, 'Sozialer Freiraum, ästhetische Nische', p. 26.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Dorothee Schmitz-Köster, *Trobadora und Cassandra und ... Weibliches Schreiben in der DDR*, Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1989, p. 22. See also Nina Noeske and Melanie Unseld, eds, *Jahrbuch Musik und Gender*, vol. 2, Hildesheim: Olms Verlag, 2009.

²¹ Kornelia Hauser, *Patriarchat als Sozialismus. Soziologische Studien zu Literatur aus der DDR*, Hamburg: Argument, 1994, p. 24.

²² Kämpfer, 'Sozialer Freiraum, ästhetische Nische', p. 26.

²³ For a detailed discussion see Matthias Tischer, 'Ulbrichts Beethoven? Die Konzeption des Beethovenjubiläums in der DDR 1970', *Deutschland Archiv*, 41:3 (2008), 473-80.

²⁴ Ernst Hermann Meyer announced that: '[W]as für Beethoven geniale Antizipation und Zukunftsvision war, vollendet der wissenschaftliche Sozialismus und Kommunismus unseres Jahrhunderts in der Wirklichkeit.' See 'Das Werk Ludwig van Beethovens und seine Bedeutung für das sozialistisch-realistische Gegenwartsschaffen', in: Heinz Alfred Brockhaus and Konrad Niemann, eds, *Bericht über den Internationalen Beethoven-Kongress 10.-12. Dezember 1970 in Berlin*, Berlin: Verlag Neue Musik, 1970, pp. 581-92 (here: p. 586).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 583.

²⁶ Werner Rackwitz, 'Die Bedeutung Ludwig van Beethovens für die sozialistische Nationalkultur der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik', in: *Bericht über den Internationalen Beethoven-Kongress*, pp. 9-20 (here: p. 16).

²⁷ Willi Stoph, 'Festsprache auf dem Festakt zur Beethoven-Ehrung der DDR am 16.12.1970', in: *Bericht über den Internationalen Beethoven-Kongress*, pp. 1-8 (here: p. 1).

²⁸ Harry Goldschmidt, 'Der späte Beethoven – Versuch einer Standortbestimmung', in: *Bericht über den Internationalen Beethoven-Kongress*, pp. 41-58 (here: p. 44).

²⁹ Theodor W. Adorno, *Beethoven. Philosophie der Musik*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004.

³⁰ See Joan Wallach Scott, 'Über Sprache, Geschlecht und die Geschichte der Arbeiterklasse', in: Christoph Conrad and Martina Kessel, eds, *Geschichte schreiben in der Postmoderne. Beiträge zur aktuellen Diskussion*, Stuttgart: Reclam, 1994, pp. 283-309 (here: p. 300). For a fundamental text about the philosophical sources of sex- and gender-dualisms' conventional semantics see also Cornelia Klinger, 'Feministische Theorie zwischen Lektüre und Kritik des philosophischen Kanons', in: Hadumod Bußmann and Renate Hof, eds, *Genus. Geschlechterforschung/Gender in den Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften. Ein Handbuch*, Stuttgart: Kröner, 2005, pp. 328-64.

³¹ Ernst Hermann Meyer, *Musik im Zeitgeschehen*, Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1952, p. 175.

³² Klinger, 'Feministische Theorie zwischen Lektüre und Kritik des philosophischen Kanons', pp. 338-9.

³³ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2003.

³⁴ Antonín Sychra, trans. Bruno Liehm, *Parteiliche Musikkritik als Mitschöpferin einer neuen Musik. Eine Einführung in die Musikästhetik des sozialistischen Realismus*, Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1953; Czech original, 1951, p. 10.

³⁵ Meyer, *Musik im Zeitgeschehen*, p. 163.

³⁶ Sychra, *Parteiliche Musikkritik als Mitschöpferin einer neuen Musik*, pp. 124-5.

³⁷ Klaus Theweleit, *Männerphantasien*, 2 vols, Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Roter Stern, 1977-8.

³⁸ See, for example, Stefan Weiss, “‘Die Hand am Gewehr, und der Frieden wird sein’: Friedensklänge aus der DDR”, in: Susanne Rode-Breymann, ed., *Krieg und Frieden in der Musik*, Hildesheim: Olms Verlag, 2007, pp. 103-32.

³⁹ The affinities drawn between civilians and soldiers from the outset in socialist realist rhetoric are fundamental here.

⁴⁰ Uta G. Poiger observes that ‘this insistence on specific norms of male and female respectability found one of its most powerful articulations in official rejections of jazz as a music associated with gangsters and prostitutes. [...] East German authorities could not relinquish their own association between female sexual passivity, “civilisation”, and “whiteness”.’ ‘Rock’n’Roll, Female Sexuality, and the Cold War Battle over German Identities’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 68:3 (1996), 577-616 (here: p. 593). For a description of the connection between intellectuality and femininity through ‘lacking realism and irresponsibility’, see Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, p. 182.

⁴¹ Poiger notes with regard to both German states, that ‘the consumption of American popular culture was connected to female sexual expressiveness, male hyperaggression, and fascist behavior and was therefore incompatible with respectable German femininity and masculinity.’ Poiger, ‘Rock’n’Roll, Female Sexuality, and the Cold War Battle over German Identities’, p. 593. See also Andreas Huyssen, ‘Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other’, in: Andreas Huyssen, ed., *After the Great Divide. Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987, pp. 44-62, especially p. 47.

⁴² Klaus Theweleit, *Männerphantasien*.

⁴³ See Nina Noeske, *Musikalische Dekonstruktion. Neue Instrumentalmusik in der DDR*, Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau, 2007.

⁴⁴ Sigrid Neef, “‘Alles was ist, ist um seiner selbst willen da.’” Zum Bild der Frau in Dessau Opern’, *MuG*, 39:6 (1989), 291-6 (here: p. 291).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

⁴⁶ Dessau himself occasionally played the role of a madman-composer within the musical life of the GDR; see Tischer’s essay in this volume for some more discussion of this.

⁴⁷ Neef, ‘Alles was ist, ist um seiner selbst willen da’, p. 293.

⁴⁸ Cornelia Klinger, ‘Feministische Theorie zwischen Lektüre und Kritik des philosophischen Kanons’, pp. 352-3.

⁴⁹ Neef, ‘Alles was ist, ist um seiner selbst willen da’, p. 296.

⁵⁰ Nina Noeske, ‘Die beste aller möglichen Welten: Bredemeyers Candide (1981/82)’, in: Michael Berg, Albrecht von Massow and Nina Noeske, eds, *Zwischen Macht und Freiheit. Neue Musik in der DDR*, Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2004, pp. 141-56.

⁵¹ Antje Kaiser, ‘Leben oder Sterben “Hand in Hand”. Musikalische Frauencharaktere in Friedrich Schenkers *Bettina*’, *MuG*, 38:3 (1988), 135-7.

⁵² See for example Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, rev. edn, 2000.

⁵³ Relevant here is Volker Braun’s brilliant parody of the GDR parliament in *Hinze-Kunze-Roman*. He describes a meeting of ‘die tüchtigen Glieder unserer Gesellschaft’, which ends up in an erotic, fleshly, sensuous utopia. Volker Braun, *Hinze-Kunze-Roman*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000; 1st edn, 1985, p. 143: ‘Es war eine große Versammlung in der geschmückten Sporthalle, es waren ausgesuchte, delegierte Schwänze, die alle der Bewegung SCHNELLER LÄNGER TIEFER angehörten, tüchtige Glieder, Mitglieder unserer fleißigen Gesellschaft.’ See also Roderick H. Watt, ‘Sex and Socialism in Volker Braun’s *Hinze-Kunze-Roman*’, *The Modern Language Review*, 91:1 (1996), 124-37 (here: p. 136): ‘In this extended sexual allegory of the actual weaknesses and potential strengths of contemporary socialism the language of socialist political theory and practice is consistently applied to sexual activity and vice versa. The result is an entertaining and telling satire emphasising the shortcomings of the GDR’s patriarchal, phallogocentric brand of socialism, which not only denies women their rights but demands from its male citizens personal self-negation in the interests of ideological orthodoxy.’

⁵⁴ Noeske, *Musikalische Dekonstruktion*, pp. 147-67.

⁵⁵ Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *The American Historical Review*, 91:5 (1986), 1053-75 (here: p. 1069).

⁵⁶ Michel Foucault, trans. Ian McLeod, 'The Order of Discourse', in: Robert Young, ed., *Untying the Text. A Post-Structuralist Reader*, Boston and London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, pp. 48-78 (here: p. 61).

⁵⁷ Leipzig: Reclam, 1979.

Laura Silverberg

**‘Monopol der Diskussion?’:
Alternative Voices in the Verband Deutscher
Komponisten und Musikwissenschaftler**

Post-reunification scholarship on music of the GDR has extensively documented the relationship between party bureaucrats and music professionals, and most studies have advanced a top-down model of power relations between state and composer. Although few aspects of East German culture were free from party oversight, such stereotypical representations reduce East German music to a mere outgrowth of a political system. In many cases, alternative voices sought to reform working conditions for musicians and expand the range of compositional styles deemed acceptable by the party. This chapter describes an episode in which composers challenged the authority of the leaders of the Verband Deutscher Komponisten und Musikwissenschaftler in a public forum: the weekly paper *Sonntag*. Their ensuing exchange demonstrates that those outside of the upper echelons of musical bureaucracy could have a profound influence on East German aesthetic debates.

The ideological goals of the SED dominated East German musical life and defined the professional obligations of composers and musicologists. SED officials formulated artistic policies, instituted socialist realism as official aesthetic doctrine, and insisted that new music build from national traditions and convey a positive socialist message. Party loyalists at the helm of the Verband Deutscher Komponisten und Musikwissenschaftler (VDK) ensured the SED’s hegemony in aesthetic matters by leading the charge against composers who deployed modernist techniques redolent of the enemy West. With an editorial board controlled by party members, the VDK mouthpiece *Musik und Gesellschaft* monopolised public discourse about music and was instrumental in advancing the artistic ideals of the SED.

Drawing from an impressive array of archival materials, musicologists and historians in recent years have repeatedly and meticulously described instances of the SED’s abuse of power in musical matters, including campaigns against Hanns Eisler’s *Johann Faustus* and Paul Dessau’s *Die Verurteilung des Lukullus* in the early 1950s; Heinz Alfred Brockhaus’s work as a Stasi informant; and Paul-Heinz Dittrich’s Stasi-facilitated dismissal from the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler Berlin.¹ And in documenting the relationship between party bureaucrats and music professionals, most such studies have

advanced a top-down relationship between state and composer.² Yet one questions whether this model has been the conclusion of research or the starting point.

Although few aspects of East German culture were free from party oversight, a methodology that dwells on the SED cultural apparatus risks viewing East German music as the mere outgrowth of a political system. Such an approach obscures individual efforts to propose alternatives to the rigid aesthetic preferences of party officials and VDK leaders. Because so many of these reformers were socialists or even party members, these alternative voices should not be characterised as dissident or oppositional in a political sense. Rather, they sought to expand the range of acceptable compositional practices in East Germany and reform working conditions within the VDK. Contrary to what one would expect in a state with severe limitations on freedom of speech, challenges to SED aesthetic dogma were voiced openly and surfaced at times in party-run newspapers and journals. The conditions of these musical debates echo David Bathrick's observation that, in contrast to the underground realm of Samizdat literature in other Eastern Bloc countries, dissenting views in the GDR 'appeared in official publications or were written in hopes of being published.'³ Even as composers and musicologists holding alternative views suffered severe rebuke from colleagues and party bureaucrats, their efforts eventually prompted the VDK to revisit its earlier policies.

This essay describes a specific episode in which alternative voices challenged the authority and aesthetic preferences of VDK leaders: the 1956 publication of a series of articles in the weekly paper *Sonntag*. The authors of these essays publicly criticised a number of conditions that they believed hampered musical development and constrained discourse about music. While some articles addressed matters of technique and musical language, others focused on obstacles to open debate within the Verband. This episode is striking not simply for the frankness (and even biting sarcasm) with which the participants expressed themselves, but also for the VDK's earnest reaction to these opposing views. Although the *Sonntag* articles defied the authority of VDK leaders, the publications still compelled the Verband to re-evaluate its reception of modern music and ability to foster discussion among composers and musicologists. The *Sonntag* episode thus demonstrates that those outside the upper echelons of the musical

bureaucracy could have a profound effect on East German aesthetic debates.

Prologue: The 'Mighty Handful' and New Music in the 1950s

At the time the *Sonntag* articles appeared in 1956, a group of five musicologists collectively known as the 'mighty handful' led East Germany's premiere musical institutions. Nathan Notowicz served as general secretary of the VDK, Eberhard Rebling as editor-in-chief of *Musik und Gesellschaft*, and Ernst Hermann Meyer as professor of musicology at Humboldt University and VDK president. Georg Knepler and Harry Goldschmidt both worked at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin, in the capacity of rector and musicology professor, respectively. Although everyone in the 'mighty handful' except for Goldschmidt had spent the Second World War in western exile, they uniformly subscribed to the narrow anti-modern views of music that Stalin and Zhdanov advanced in the Soviet Union.⁴ After the war, these musicologists advised party bureaucrats in musical matters, helping the SED craft a music policy that mirrored that of the Soviets.⁵

Although Meyer was the only member of the group who actually composed music, this 'mighty handful' showed little restraint in advising East German composers about their creative work. A representative speech in this regard was delivered by Rebling in November 1955 and published under the title 'Tradition und Neuerertum' in *Musik und Gesellschaft*. (The term 'Neuerertum,' broadly defined as the quality of being new and innovative, seems to be a particular East German coinage that emerged during the aesthetic debates of the immediate post-war years.) Disparaging the radical compositional experiments associated with the West, Rebling argued that truly new music should develop from Germany's greatest traditions, which he vaguely defined as 'alle die Erscheinungen der Vergangenheit [...] die als eine *Norm des Humanismus* gelten können.'⁶ Rebling limited his pantheon of classic composers to 'alle bedeutenden Komponisten in der Zeit des Aufstiegs des Bürgertums, von Schütz über Bach, Händel bis zu Beethoven und auch die großen Meister des 19. Jahrhunderts.'⁷ Wagner, Richard Strauss, and Max Reger lacked Rebling's unequivocal support because he believed that the humanist element of their music mingled too closely with the naturalism and subjectivism of the late nineteenth century. Ever hostile toward modern music, Rebling also excluded the accessible

Paul Hindemith and modernist Arnold Schoenberg from this line of German tradition.

Rebling did little to explain how East German composers ought to build from their musical heritage. Rather than discuss specific compositional techniques, he focused on what he identified as a broader humanist attitude of composers from the past. According to Rebling,

Anknüpfen an die Tradition heißt in erster Linie die von unseren Klassikern geschaffenen Normen des Humanismus fortsetzen, weiterführen, schöpferisch weiterentwickeln und sich ihre konsequent fortschrittliche Haltung, ihr Ringen um eine immer tiefere Durchdringung der Wirklichkeit mit den Mitteln der Musik zum Vorbild zu nehmen.⁸

At the same time, he acknowledged that an East German composer might draw from the past to express contemporary sentiments:

Wenn [...] ein Komponist unserer Zeit ein bestimmtes Pathos, eine bestimmte Innigkeit zum Ausdruck bringen will, also das Pathos der gewaltigen Leistungen unseres Arbeiter-und-Bauern-Staates oder die Innigkeit des Gefühls der Heimatliebe unserer Menschen, so wird er, vielleicht ohne es bewußt zu wollen, mit dem Pathos auch gewisse Stilelemente der Musik Händels übernehmen oder die Innigkeit mit Anklängen an Schubert, Schumann oder Brahms gestalten.⁹

Admittedly, Rebling tried to have it both ways. While attempting to limit the appropriation of tradition to a nebulous humanist attitude, the tradition he suggested composers adopt remained that of the symphony and the sonata, of tonal harmony, and of Handel, Schubert, and Brahms.

Drawing a sharp contrast between music of the GDR and the ‘sogenannte neue Musik’ of the West, Rebling offered this more straightforward condemnation of western modernism:

Seit Schönbergs Opus 11 und Strawinskis ‘Petruschka’ und ‘Sacre du printemps’ wurde es üblich, von der neuen, von der modernen Musik zu sprechen, die angeblich heute bis zur konkreten Musik und den wildesten Experimenten mit präparierten Klavieren und der elektronischen Erzeugung von Klängen den *einzig* richtigen Weg in Neuland darstellen soll. Gegen welches Alte nun richtet sich diese sogenannte neue (oder besser gesagt modernistische) Musik? [...] Nun, ganz verschiedene Richtungen des Modernismus seit 1911 sind sich trotz verschiedenster Gegensätzlichkeiten in einem einig: in der radikalen Ablehnung der gesamten Tradition. [...] Man sucht das Neue also ausschließlich in neuen Klängen oder Klangkombinationen. Diese Art falschen Neuerertums will das Neue also nur auf der formalen Ebene, im musikalischen Material suchen.¹⁰

In Rebling's opinion, new music ought to build from the national heritage, and the radical experiments favoured by western modernists were therefore neither legitimately new nor appropriate for East German music. This conservative, classicising vision of new music dominated VDK policies and publications. In the 1950s, articles in *Musik und Gesellschaft* dismissed most composers of the twentieth century (with the exceptions of Eisler, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich) as late bourgeois and unworthy of serious attention. Not surprisingly, the majority of East German composers during this period turned to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music for inspiration, and western modernist techniques remained virtually absent from East German new music.

Act I: The *Sonntag* Articles

While Rebling's 1955 speech reinforced the old anti-modernist stance of Stalin and Zhdanov, other areas of East German culture and politics had begun a process of de-Stalinisation. Under orders from the Kremlin, SED officials ushered in the 'New Course' shortly after Stalin's death in 1953. Although the reforms were chiefly economic, East Germans also enjoyed a general expansion in freedom of expression. Consequently, many members of the intelligentsia began to reassess the Stalinist dogma that had driven East German cultural life. For example, at the Fourth Writers Congress in January 1956, East German poet Stephan Hermlin and others advocated greater engagement with modern writers from the West such as Sartre, Beckett, Hemingway, and Faulkner.¹¹

The gradual increase in expressive freedom and engagement with western modernism gained momentum in February 1956, when, at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Khrushchev denounced Stalin's personality cult and acknowledged the crimes of Stalin's regime. Khrushchev's revelations shocked those East German intellectuals who had been sympathetic to the ideals of socialism and loyal to the SED. Already emboldened by the party's tolerance for public criticism, the cultural intelligentsia openly debated aspects of Stalinism that they had long taken for granted. This process of revisionism was itself institutionalised; for the next couple of years, party bureaucrats and cultural organisations published statements rejecting the dogmatism of the Stalin years while reaffirming their commitment to Marxism-Leninism.¹²

Conceived in late 1955 and published in January 1956, the first *Sonntag* articles are noteworthy because they preceded the Twentieth Party Congress. Although the instigators of the *Sonntag* controversy benefited from the general thaw following Stalin's death, their willingness to question established music policies well before the Congress made it appropriate to do so reflects considerable courage and initiative. Even as the *Sonntag* debate continued to unfold during the months following the Congress, no published or archival records indicate that the VDK leaders or *Sonntag* authors explicitly engaged at this point with the news coming from the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, one can hardly doubt that Khrushchev's revelations influenced the participants in the *Sonntag* episode, and one must be mindful of the Congress when reading and interpreting musical documents from the spring of 1956.

Run by reform-minded socialists, the Kulturbund's weekly paper *Sonntag* was less beholden to party politics and provided intellectuals with a relatively open platform for cultural and political discussion. It was therefore *Sonntag*, rather than *Musik und Gesellschaft*, that initiated the first public critique of East German musical life. Gustav Just, editor of *Sonntag*, recalled that he had long wished to publish a series of articles on the backwardness of East German music, but the real impetus came from a 1955 meeting he had with Paul Dessau in Halle, in which Dessau 'began to swear furiously at our "Music Tsars", who so unfortunately opposed modernism and with their doctrinaire Zhdanov dogma were impeding rather than supporting the development of socialist music.'¹³ Just encouraged Dessau to write on the matter, and Dessau agreed to do so, as did composers Kurt Schwaen and Gerhard Wohlgemuth. Hanns Eisler also expressed interest in contributing, but agreed to remain 'in reserve' should they later need the support of a more prominent composer.

Although they lacked the power of the 'mighty handful', Dessau, Schwaen, and Wohlgemuth were no outsiders to East German political and musical life. All were members of the VDK; Schwaen had served as secretary since 1953, and Wohlgemuth was a member of the executive committee. Moreover, Dessau's and Schwaen's impeccable political credentials made it nearly impossible for the VDK or SED to dismiss them as sympathetic to the western bourgeoisie. Schwaen, a member of the KPD since 1932, had served a three-year prison sentence under the Nazis for his political activities. Following the war,

he composed a number of works for children and amateur ensembles. A staunch socialist and advocate of western modernist techniques, Dessau strove to reconcile his progressive politics with progressive compositional methods. He learned the twelve-tone technique from René Leibowitz and greatly admired Arnold Schoenberg, with whom he was acquainted while in exile in Los Angeles during the Second World War. While many members of the VDK considered Dessau misguided in his attempts to use avant-garde techniques to express a socialist message, few questioned his political sympathies.

The articles that Dessau, Wohlgemuth, and Schwaen published in the 29 January 1956 issue of *Sonntag* reflect not a wholesale rejection of the VDK and socialist music culture, but rather a genuine effort to reform East German musical life. Wohlgemuth’s contribution focused principally on the bureaucracy within the VDK, which, in his opinion, impeded the expression of alternative views. In particular, he observed the following:

viele Probleme werden in ihr [*Musik und Gesellschaft*] gar nicht behandelt, oder wenn, dann in oberflächlicher Weise. Auch finden sich in ihr ästhetische Urteile solcher Art vertreten, daß man nur allzu deutlich den persönlichen Geschmack eines Einzigen oder einer Gruppe aus ihnen heraushört. [...] Es fehlt aber unserer Zeitschrift *Musik und Gesellschaft* der Meinungsstreit, wie uns auch im Verbandsleben das wohlvorbereitete Streitgespräch fehlt.¹⁴

Schwaen’s essay lambasted the narrowness of East German music, concluding, ‘der Reiz des Klanges ergibt sich aus den Obertönen, die zu dem Grundton hinzutreten. Unsere Musik ist reizlos; wir haben ein Fundament, aber die Obertöne fehlen.’¹⁵

Dessau’s contribution was by far the most inflammatory. The title, ‘Einiges, worüber wir Musiker nur wenig oder gar nicht sprechen,’ suggests frustration with not only musical life itself, but also the lack of discussion about the conditions facing composers, performers, and audiences.¹⁶ Though caustic in tone, the article expressed Dessau’s concern that East German concert and radio culture pandered to petit-bourgeois tastes by promoting light entertainment music. Instead, Dessau argued, East Germans needed to hear high quality music, particularly music of the twentieth century. Ballet schools ought to play more Prokofiev and less Tchaikovsky, and radio programming desperately needed reform:

Drehe ich meinen Apparat an, so fühle ich mich oft in die Zeit des Wiener Kongresses versetzt. Man spielt fast nur Walzer und schwache Intermezzi. Ich dachte, das sei die sogenannte ‘Rasiermusik’? Aber ich höre es tagesüber, sogar des Abends. Und wer rasiert sich schon den ganzen lieben langen Tag?¹⁷

Dessau’s reference to the Congress of Vienna was pointed. Rather than simply decry East German radio as backward, he associated it with a time in which absolutist powers redrew the map of Europe and stifled the liberalism and civil rights inspired by the French Revolution. According to Dessau, if radio stations must offer light music, they should at least broadcast lighter works by Mozart, Haydn, or Beethoven.

Dessau was no less scathing in his assessment of East German contemporary music, which he considered even more reactionary than radio programming:

Wenn man die Augen schließt, glaubt man bei einigen Werken unserer Zeitgenossen, man lebe im 18. Jahrhundert. Wir leben aber glücklicherweise im 20. Jahrhundert, dem großen Jahrhundert der gesellschaftlichen Umwälzungen. Im großen Jahrhundert des aufblühenden Sozialismus. In der Morgenröte einer neuen, gesünderen, echteren Menschheit! Wo klingen in unseren Werken diese Töne auf? Sind da die Kadenzten und Modulationen des 18. Jahrhunderts am Platze?! Unsere Komponisten wissen fast alle, daß die ‘Kadenz’ [...] sich seit dem Entstehen des ‘Tristan’ (das sind fast 100 Jahre her) emanzipiert hat! Bei Schostakowitsch z.B. findet man keine derartigen Anachronismen mehr, nicht in der 10. Sinfonie noch im 5. Streichquartett (um von zwei seiner wichtigen Werke der Letztzeit zu reden).¹⁸

Finally, Dessau railed against the ‘mighty handful’ of musicologists, who,

läuft geschlossen Sturm gegen die vielseitige Entwicklung unserer Musik, orientiert sich lieber an Händel als an den großen Musikern unseres Jahrhunderts wie Schönberg, Anton Webern, Alban Berg, Bartók, Schostakowitsch und Prokofjew und vergißt dabei, daß nur in ständiger Wechselwirkung mit dem neuesten zeitgenössischen Schaffen unsere klassische Musik zu echtem Leben erwachen kann.¹⁹

Dessau principally framed his advocacy of modern music in political terms: a new, progressive, socialist society needed new music. SED bureaucrats and VDK leaders could hardly argue with his insistence that the public be exposed to high quality classical music. Nor did they disagree with Dessau that traditional music ought to be renewed in a manner relevant to the present day. But Dessau’s rejection of

bourgeois models and advocacy of the modernist twelve-tone technique conflicted with the established position of the VDK.

Gustav Just recalled that the set of articles ‘hit like a bombshell, for so many taboos were violated, so much was expressed publicly that had hitherto been thought only in private.’²⁰ Readers responded more or less positively, with one letter to the editor exclaiming: ‘Die eine Seite Ihres SONNTAG [...] gehört zum Bedeutendsten und zum Allernötigsten, was in unserer Deutschen Demokratischen Republik über Musik je gedruckt wurde!’²¹ Composers Max Butting, Rudolf Wagner-Régeny, and Fritz Reuter, along with critic Ernst Krause, contributed articles for later issues, though their assessments were far from unanimous. Reuter, for example, encouraged composers to reject modernist experimentation and return to the roots of folk music, claiming that their goal should be to bring into the world ‘gesunde Kinder, und nicht nur [...] interessante Kinder.’²²

But most articles echoed Dessau’s opinion that there had been too much emphasis on music of the past. Chief among these was Krause’s ‘Tradition und Neuerertum’, a likely response to Rebling’s speech of the same title discussed earlier. Rebling’s speech had appeared in *Musik und Gesellschaft* only weeks before Krause’s article, and Krause explicitly countered Rebling’s insistence that East German composers find inspiration in music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Tradition und Neuerertum? Daß unsere Komponisten ans klassische Erbe anknüpfen müssen, ist doch wohl eine Binsenweisheit. Aber ich könnte mir auch vorstellen, daß sie sich dabei nicht ausschließlich an den Ausdrucksidealen des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts, sondern an der Musiksprache dieses Jahrhunderts orientieren: also an Janáček, Bartók, Hindemith u.a. Ist es nicht ein bedenkliches Zeichen, daß Menschen von heute (denen ja der letzte Krieg wahrlich kein Geräusch erspart hat) nicht vor den zerrissenen Klangexpressionen des ‘Wozzeck’ erschrecken, sondern vor den idealisierenden Schönheitsfluten des Violinkonzerts von Spies, dem gepfefferten Pathos des Klavierkonzerts von Goerner oder den Romantizismen Meyerscher Lyrik? Was hilft der progressive Inhalt, wenn die Form nicht als musikalische Aussage dieser unsrer Zeit mit ihren mächtig vorwärtsdrängenden Ideen empfunden wird!²³

Not only did Krause reinforce Dessau’s critique of the VDK’s backwardness, but he also offered a veiled criticism of Rebling, editor-in-chief of *Musik und Gesellschaft*. Already quite critical of East German music, Krause’s article thus held particular significance for readers of *Musik und Gesellschaft* and for Rebling in particular.

Act II: The VDK Responds

Having challenged the monopoly of *Musik und Gesellschaft* on discussions of East German music, the *Sonntag* articles set off a flurry of activity within the VDK. Gustav Just recalled in his memoirs that:

the Composers' Union counterattacked, held meetings and advised its obedient members not to continue the discussion in *Sonntag* because such matters belonged to the Union mouthpiece *Musik und Gesellschaft*. Eberhard Rebling, who had previously sought my friendship and of whom I was quite fond, treated me with emphatically cool contempt. [...] As I jokingly tried to bridge the gap between us, he said: 'Your discussion has served a good purpose. It has created publicity for *Musik und Gesellschaft*.' I was no slouch, and admittedly not very tactful; I promptly printed this comment as the quotation of the day. That really did it.²⁴

Over the ensuing months, a public battle unfolded on the pages of *Sonntag* and *Musik und Gesellschaft*. *Sonntag* attacked *Musik und Gesellschaft* quite directly; editorials in *Musik und Gesellschaft* countered these criticisms only indirectly and avoided explicit references to its antagonist. By refraining from mentioning the rival paper, the editors of *Musik und Gesellschaft* hoped to avoid legitimising the claims of their opponent and thus downplay the actual effect that the articles had on the VDK.

The VDK's first public response to *Sonntag* appeared in the opening editorial to the March 1956 issue of *Musik und Gesellschaft*. The editorial appeared to observe the fifth anniversary of the Verband by reflecting on their accomplishments – in particular, what they perceived as growing participation in their increasingly sophisticated debates. As reports on VDK activities typically focused on quantifiable accomplishments such as the number of new compositions, new music concerts, or concert attendance, the celebration of something so abstract as improvements to the discussion climate is striking:

War es anfänglich nur ein recht kleiner Kreis von führenden Komponisten und Musikwissenschaftlern, so schlugen die Auseinandersetzungen allmählich immer höhere Wellen, und immer mehr Kollegen beteiligten sich daran. [...] Der Verband und seine Zeitschrift waren der Schauplatz vieler und heftiger Auseinandersetzungen über Fragen der Musikästhetik, des sozialistischen Realismus, des echten und falschen Neuerertums, über neu entstandene Werke, über Probleme des Inhalts, der Form und des Handwerks unserer Kunst.

[...] Unsere Zeitschrift wird auch in der Zukunft, ja in noch stärkerem Maße als bisher, das Forum unserer Auseinandersetzungen über die brennenden Probleme unseres Musikschaffens und Musizierens, über neue Aufgaben und Erkenntnisse sein. Wenn in der letzten Zeit in einigen Publikationen, wie im

Sonntag, in Aussprachen innerhalb des Verbandes solche Probleme angeschnitten und gegensätzliche Meinungen zutage getreten sind, so werden sie in aller Offenheit und bei aller Achtung der Persönlichkeit des Gesprächspartners in unserer Zeitschrift zur Sprache kommen, soweit es um wesentliche Fragen unseres Musiklebens handelt und die Argumente auf einer sachlichen Grundlage beruhen. Die Streit der Meinungen ist eine unabdingbare Notwendigkeit in unserem Wachstumsprozeß.²⁵

By only mentioning *Sonntag* in passing, *Musik und Gesellschaft* rebutted the paper’s criticisms without appearing to engage them directly. The editorial’s claim that discussion had grown from a small circle of composers and musicologists to a larger group of colleagues countered the pointed accusations of Dessau and Wohlgemuth, who accused the ‘mighty handful’ of dictating judgments for the entire VDK. In a common posture of self-criticism, the editorial acknowledged that these debates had not always been fruitfully resolved, but that it was the duty of *Musik und Gesellschaft* (and, presumably, not *Sonntag*) to do so.

A few weeks later, the following response, entitled ‘Monopol der Diskussion?’ appeared in *Sonntag*:

Nein, ihr lieben Freunde von der Redaktion *Musik und Gesellschaft*, von schöpferischen Auseinandersetzungen, von tiefgehenden Meinungsverschiedenheiten quillt eure Zeitung nicht über. Aber in den Kreisen der Musiker und in der musikinteressierten Öffentlichkeit wird heiß gestritten, und deshalb gerade haben wir die Diskussion begonnen! Uns geht es nicht um die Fachfragen, sondern um die künstlerische Atmosphäre, um das kulturelle Klima. Wo auch immer wir Anzeichen der Selbstgenügsamkeit und der Stagnation feststellen, werden wir eine Diskussion eröffnen.

Wir würden uns sehr freuen, wenn nun in *Musik und Gesellschaft* ein lebhaftes Gespräch zustande kommt – hoffentlich über noch wesentlichere Fragen, als sie bei uns gestellt wurden – und sehen deshalb mit Spannung dem Aprilheft entgegen. Das Märzheft enthält leider noch keine Ansätze dazu.²⁶

Indeed, the remainder of the March issue of *Musik und Gesellschaft* kept to its usual format, eschewing heated debate in favour of concert reviews, reports from worldwide celebrations of Mozart’s 200th birthday, and discussions of folk music and worker songs.

Act III: Hildburghausen

Taken at face value, the March editorial of *Musik und Gesellschaft* could easily lend the impression that the *Sonntag* articles were of little concern to the VDK. Yet the unpublished protocol of a meeting of the

Verband's executive committee in Hildburghausen, held on 17-18 March 1956, indicates that the *Sonntag* articles prompted a great deal of anxious discussion.²⁷ Three key issues emerged during the gathering: first, the specific role of *Musik und Gesellschaft* in giving voice to VDK members; second, the ability to express opinions that opposed the SED and leaders of the VDK; and third, the need to reassess modern music from the West.

Because the *Sonntag* articles had prompted the special meeting of the executive committee, one purpose of the discussion was to determine why members of the VDK had published in *Sonntag* rather than broach their criticisms in *Musik und Gesellschaft* or at meetings of the Verband. For at least some of those present at Hildburghausen, the *Sonntag* articles came as an unwelcome surprise. Composer Leo Spies complained that those who claimed they could not voice their opinions only rarely attended VDK meetings; then 'plötzlich erschien alles im *Sonntag*.'²⁸ Others countered that a general stagnation of discussion in *Musik und Gesellschaft* had led VDK members to lose interest in the journal. Wohlgemuth reiterated his observation that *Musik und Gesellschaft* did not publish differences of opinion. The protocol similarly noted that one member criticised the journal for only relaying the standpoint of the editor-in-chief and silencing those with other opinions.²⁹

But Ernst Hermann Meyer suggested that the perceived inability to speak freely might hinder VDK members:

Man glaubt sicher, mancher von uns, daß das, was in *Musik und Gesellschaft* steht, nicht die Meinung des Vorstandes ist, sondern die Meinung der SED ist und da hat man Angst, etwas dagegen zu sagen. Ich möchte mit aller Deutlichkeit erklären, daß stimmt nicht, Kollegen. Es ist nicht im Interesse der SED, der ich angehöre, eine bestimmte festgesetzte Meinung gerade in solchen ideologischen Fragen zu vertreten, zu der die anderen schweigen müssen. Immer wieder sagt unsere Partei, wir bitten euch mitzuarbeiten, denn einen wirklichen Fortschritt kann es nur geben, wenn Diskussionen bestehen, wo eine kollektive Leistung besteht.³⁰

Despite Meyer's declarations to the contrary, a number of those present at Hildburghausen cited a general apprehension about contradicting the views of the SED and VDK leadership, what Wohlgemuth described as a 'Geschmacksdiktatur'.³¹ Even Knepler admitted that fears of party oversight could impede free expression and he related his experience at a meeting he had attended:

Der Leiter sagte zur Abstimmung: wer dagegen ist, erhebt sich von seinem Platze, wer einverstanden ist, verharrt in seiner Position. Nun, ich brauche nicht zu sagen, daß alle in ihrer Position verharrten und alle Beschlüsse einstimmig gefasst wurden [...]. Warum haben sie es nicht gewagt? Weil sie glaubten, hier spricht die SED, dagegen darf man nichts sagen. Aber das entspricht nicht den Tatsachen [...]. Nun gut, der Komponistenverband lebt nicht im Vakuum, sondern in dieser Situation. Solch eine Auffassung, man darf nichts sagen, ist ja verbreitet.³²

Even though Meyer had tried to dismiss such concerns, the fact that even Knepler – one of those in the ‘mighty handful’ – broached the matter of SED dominance suggests that it was a pressing concern for more than a few.

Those in attendance at Hildburghausen also revisited the dogmatic, anti-modern interpretations of socialist realism that pervaded the evaluation of new music. Although many in the executive committee found Dessau’s promotion of twelve-tone technique deeply problematic, some members agreed with the *Sonntag* articles on at least one point: the need to grapple with the variety of achievements in western modern music. Rather than discount it as unsuitable for a socialist message, Knepler advocated a more refined view of bourgeois music and less entrenchment in the classics:

Ferner glaube ich, haben wir zu sehr dazu geneigt, die bürgerliche Musik in einen Topf zu werfen und nicht genug zu differenzieren. Z.B. ist Hindemith ganz was anderes als die Zwölftonmusik. Ein Beispiel. Man müsste sicherlich mit anderen Maßen messen. Das haben wir eigentlich noch nicht getan – sie haben recht – wir sind zu sehr historisch. Wir haben zwar viel über Bach und Beethoven gesagt, aber sehr wenig oder nichts über Hindemith.³³

Wohlgemuth similarly advocated a closer look at Stravinsky’s music, and Notowicz acknowledged that music was often treated in the past ‘zu undifferenziert und undialektisch als geschlossenes Ganzes’.³⁴ This decision to evaluate modern music and composers on a case-by-case basis was a critical step toward later, more nuanced engagements with modernist techniques.

Epilogue

The sting of the *Sonntag* publications appears to have worn off by May of that year. Except for *Musik und Gesellschaft* reports on the Hildburghausen meeting, neither *Sonntag* nor *Musik und Gesellschaft* explicitly mentioned the incident again. *Musik und Gesellschaft* continued to provide a bare minimum of articles on aesthetic matters.

Gustav Just published one more editorial in *Sonntag*, which criticised the unwillingness to debate important matters in the GDR:

Wie oft kommt das vor: Ein Bürger unserer Republik liest in einer Zeitung einen Artikel, eine Meinung, eine Notiz, womit er absolut nicht einverstanden ist – und er schweigt dazu! [...] Ist das eine eines demokratischen Staatsbürgers würdige Haltung, Fehler, Unrecht, Unstimmigkeiten in der Umgebung zu bemerken und statt mit ganzen Leidenschaft für ihre Beseitigung zu kämpfen, zu schweigen, als ginge es ihn nichts an?³⁵

By the early spring of 1957, the answer to Just's question became clear. In a series of show trials against intellectuals that began following the Hungarian Revolution, Just and his colleagues Wolfgang Harisch and Walter Janka were tried and imprisoned for 'counter-revolutionary activities' – that is, for proposing a platform of reform socialism.

And yet, the VDK continued to debate the significance of modern western music for East German compositional practice. Just as the Twentieth Party Congress rejected Stalin's authority while upholding the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism, the VDK now scrutinised the meaning of socialist realism under Zhdanov. In a pair of articles published in the February 1957 issue of *Musik und Gesellschaft*, the VDK finally grappled publicly with the musical ramifications of Khrushchev's speech. Published under the title 'Zwischen Dogmatismus und Modernismus', the articles reflect a drive to re-evaluate without revolutionising.³⁶ The editorial preface remarks that 'wie auf allen Gebieten des sozialistischen Aufbaus haben sich seit dem XX. Parteitag der KPdSU auch in der Musik die Diskussionen über dogmatische Einengungen und Überspitzungen der letzten Jahre erfreulich belebt,' but warns against the impulse 'das Kind mit dem Bade auszuschütten und sich wieder mit offenen Armen den modernistischen Strömungen auszuliefern.'³⁷ Condemnations of Zhdanov's judgments as too dogmatic or unjust mingled with reaffirmations of socialist realism. While many in the VDK demonstrated increasing openness toward modern music of the West, they still instituted boundaries between what was acceptable (the accessible, quasi-tonal, and often folk-like music of Hindemith, Britten, Kodály) and what was not (Schoenberg's modernist twelve-tone method).

Many elements of the *Sonntag* controversy reappeared in later musical debates. Already in 1956, the principal split in the VDK was between composers and musicologists, rather than between party

members and non-members. For example, SED member Dessau had far more in common with non-member Wohlgemuth than with musicologist and party comrade Rebling. This divide grew more pronounced in the 1960s, as composers in increasing numbers deployed modernist techniques while the majority of musicologists condemned these compositional practices. Composers largely stood back from aesthetic discussions, even when their own works were the source of contention. Wohlgemuth’s dodecaphonic ventures in his First String Quartet (1961) provoked the ire of music critics and prompted lengthy debate within the VDK, but few composers – Wohlgemuth included – participated in the conversation.³⁸ Despite his unquestionable support for the socialist cause, Dessau’s use of the twelve-tone method in works such as *Appell der Arbeiterklasse* (1960-1) reliably elicited harsh criticism from musicologists. As in the *Sonntag* episode, however, members of the VDK found common ground in the belief that music is connected to society, not autonomous from it.

The *Sonntag* articles constituted the most direct affront to VDK leadership until the mid-1960s. They also remained one of the most public challenges to the SED’s rigid aesthetic preferences in the GDR’s entire short history. Transcripts from meetings of the VDK reveal that, after 1956, VDK members contested the opinions of their leaders with growing frequency. Yet published reports from VDK gatherings still emphasised conformity in aesthetic matters, not lively debate, and dissenting views usually remained behind closed doors. One of the most significant aesthetic controversies of the mid-1960s – a document by aesthetician Günter Mayer known as the *Problemspiegel* – prompted months of heated debate within the VDK, eventually leading the Partei der Arbeit der Schweiz to intervene on behalf of Mayer’s teacher Goldschmidt. Offering a nuanced Marxist argument for deploying modernist techniques, the *Problemspiegel* played a critical role in reshaping attitudes toward musical modernism within the VDK. Nonetheless, unlike the interchange between *Sonntag* and *Musik und Gesellschaft*, the *Problemspiegel* was never published, and its attendant controversy barely reached the public eye.³⁹

1956 marked a key turning point in East German musical life. A strictly top-down model of the relationship between state and composer would attribute this shift principally to the Twentieth Party Congress, with political reforms trickling down to the activities of

music professionals. Without dismissing the role of the Congress in convincing VDK leaders to reformulate their position on modern music, it was the specific efforts of Just, Dessau, Schwaen, Wohlge-muth, and other *Sonntag* contributors that set the VDK on the initial trajectory for reform. Although it may be tempting to view the SED and VDK as monoliths, a surprising amount of discord existed within this official realm. It is therefore critical that scholarly investigations into East German musical life look beyond the apparent uniformity of party, state, and professional organisations to examine the diversity of individual opinions and actions. While the SED had established an immense bureaucratic apparatus aimed at ensuring its hegemony in musical matters, East German composers and musicologists still questioned the ideas and authority of those in power. Rather than remain at the periphery of official East German musical life, these alternative voices inspired changes from within.

Notes

¹ For more on the controversies surrounding Eisler's and Dessau's operas, see Maren Köster, *Musik-Zeit-Geschehen: zu den Musikverhältnissen in der SBZ/DDR 1945 bis 1952*, Saarbrücken: Pfau Verlag, 2002; Joachim Lucchesi, *Das Verhör in der Oper: die Debatte um die Aufführung 'Das Verhör des Lukullus' von Bertolt Brecht und Paul Dessau*, Berlin: BasisDruck, 1993; Joy Haslam Calico, *Brecht at the Opera*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. The relationship between the Stasi and individual members of the VDK is described in Lars Klingberg, 'IMS "John" und Schostakowitsch: Zur Stasi-Karriere von Heinz Alfred Brockhaus', in: Günter Wolter and Ernst Kuhn, eds, *Dmitri Schostakowitsch, Komponist und Zeitzeuge*, Berlin: Ernst Kuhn, 2000, pp. 194-226. Daniel Zur Weihen details the Stasi's surveillance of Dittrich in "'Ich versprach, mein Möglichstes zu tun" – Komponisten im Blick des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit', in: Matthias Tischer, ed., *Musik in der DDR: Beiträge zu den Musikverhältnissen eines verschwundenen Staates*, Berlin: Verlag Ernst Kuhn, 2005.

² Lars Klingberg, *Politisch fest in unseren Händen: musikalische und musikwissenschaftliche Gesellschaften in der DDR: Dokumente und Analysen*, Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1997; Daniel Zur Weihen, *Komponieren in der DDR: Institutionen, Organisationen und die erste Komponistengeneration bis 1961*, Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau, 1999; David Tompkins, 'Composing the Party Line: Music and Politics in Poland and East Germany, 1948-1957', Ph.D. Diss, Columbia University, 2004; Toby Thacker, *Music after Hitler, 1945-1955*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007.

³ David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995, p. 60.

- ⁴ A Swiss citizen, Goldschmidt remained in Switzerland during the war.
- ⁵ Particularly during the immediate post-war years, occupying Soviet officers also played an important role in crafting East German music policy. See Köster, *Musik–Zeit–Geschehen*.
- ⁶ ‘Tradition und Neuerertum’, *Musik und Gesellschaft* (hereafter *MuG*), 6 (1956), 18. The italics are in the original.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Ibid., p. 19.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Jost Hermand, ‘The “Good New” and the “Bad New”’: Metamorphoses of the Modernism Debate in the GDR since 1956’, *New German Critique*, 3 (1974), 73-92 (here p. 74).
- ¹² Shortly after the Congress, Walter Ulbricht glibly remarked that Stalin ‘no longer belonged to the classics of Marxism-Leninism.’ See Hermann Weber, ed., *DDR. Dokumente zur Geschichte der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik: 1945-1985*, Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986, p. 225.
- ¹³ Gustav Just, trans. Oliver Lu, *Witness in his Own Cause: the Fifties in the German Democratic Republic*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995, pp. 13-14.
- ¹⁴ Gerhard Wohlgemuth, ‘Musikwissenschaft und musikalische Praxis’, *Sonntag*, 29 January 1956.
- ¹⁵ Kurt Schwaen, ‘Fundament ohne Obertöne’, *Sonntag*, 29 January 1956, 12. The essay is also available in Ulrich Dibelius and Frank Schneider, eds, *Neue Musik im Geteilten Deutschland: Dokumente aus den fünfziger Jahren*, Berlin: Berliner Festspiele, 1993, pp. 244-5.
- ¹⁶ Paul Dessau, ‘Einiges, worüber wir Musiker nur wenig oder gar nicht sprechen’, *Sonntag*, 29 January 1956, p. 12. The second half of the article is reprinted in Dibelius and Schneider, *Neue Musik im Geteilten Deutschland*, pp. 242-4.
- ¹⁷ Dessau, ‘Einiges, worüber wir Musiker nur wenig oder gar nicht sprechen.’
- ¹⁸ Ibid.

- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Just, *Witness in his Own Cause*, p. 14.
- ²¹ Fritz Schedlich, 'Letter to the Editor', *Sonntag*, 12 February 1956, p. 12.
- ²² Fritz Reuter, 'Mut zur Einfachheit', *Sonntag*, 26 February 1956, p. 12.
- ²³ Ernst Krause, 'Tradition und Neuerertum', *Sonntag*, 5 February 1956, p. 12.
- ²⁴ Just, *Witness in his Own Cause*, p. 14.
- ²⁵ 'Fünf Jahre VDK – fünf Jahre "Musik und Gesellschaft"', *MuG*, 6 (1956).
- ²⁶ 'Monopol der Diskussion?', *Sonntag*, 25 March 1956.
- ²⁷ Stenographic transcript from meeting of the VDK executive committee in Hildburghausen, 17-18 March 1956. Available in the Stiftung Archiv Akademie der Künste (SA-AdK), VDK Archiv 83.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p. 5.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 12. The member is identified in the report only as 'Kollege Dr. Glücksmann'.
- ³⁰ Ibid., p. 13.
- ³¹ Ibid., p. 41.
- ³² Ibid., pp. 19-20.
- ³³ Ibid., p. 21.
- ³⁴ 'Schöpferische Atmosphäre oder Selbstgenügsamkeit: Fortsetzung des Berichtes über die Diskussion des VDK-Zentralvorstandes in Hildburghausen', *MuG*, 6 (1956), 11.
- ³⁵ Gustav Just, 'Schweigsame Partner – oder über den Nutzen von Diskussionen', *Sonntag*, 27 May 1956.
- ³⁶ The term 'dogmatism' emerged after the Twentieth Party Congress as a code word for anything connected to the views of Stalin and Zhdanov.
- ³⁷ 'Zwischen Dogmatismus und Modernismus', *MuG*, 7 (1957), 66. The preface was unsigned but likely written by Rebling.

³⁸ See Siegfried Köhler, ‘Zu Gerhard Wohlgenuths Streichquartett 1960: Gehemmt von engstirniger Theorie’, *MuG*, 11 (1961), and Walther Siegmund-Schultze, ‘Technik: weder gut noch böse’, *MuG*, 11 (1961).

³⁹ Laura Silverberg, ‘Between Dissonance and Dissidence: Socialist Modernism in the German Democratic Republic’, *Journal of Musicology*, 26:1 (2009), 44-84.

Curating the GDR

Jonathan Osmond

**German Art Collections and Exhibits since 1989:
the Legacy of the GDR**

This chapter examines several pivotal exhibitions of GDR art that took place within Germany around the turn of the twenty-first century. Unification has occasioned a thorough reappraisal of the German visual art tradition, partly because of the practical problems of reintegrating public collections, but also extending to broader questions about figurative and historical art. Naturally, this raises questions about the modes of presenting art in the twenty-first century, particularly in light of the two German dictatorships of the last century. Should the cultural products of a forty-year period – which had always maintained strong connections with their earlier German ‘heritage’ – be subsumed into longer-term narratives, set apart as historical curiosities of little aesthetic value, or removed altogether?

In the twenty years since the fall of the Berlin Wall the enlarged Federal Republic of Germany achieved remarkable success in maintaining political and social stability in the centre of Europe. In the process it witnessed and fostered a renewed cultural self-confidence, which drew upon the German past but which was also in the international contemporary vanguard. A component of that past is the forty-year cultural production of the German Democratic Republic, and contributing to Germany’s international profile are a number of visual artists whose careers at least began in the GDR. Prices for contemporary work at salerooms around the world confirm that living German artists – such as Gerhard Richter, Georg Baselitz and Anselm Kiefer – are amongst the most sought-after. There may be a number of reasons for this, but not least amongst them are that many German artists confront difficult historical topics and that they do so in a primarily figurative manner. The contribution of the visual art of the GDR to this situation is evident, but also complex.

In Germany since the collapse of the GDR there have been many twists and turns in the approaches taken towards its cultural legacy. The state-sponsored visual arts faced an initial period of outright rejection – certainly in western Germany, and to an extent in the East too – which has been followed by a shifting set of interactions between present-day concerns and the visual heritage of the GDR. Aesthetic, political, ethical, pragmatic, economic, and personal con-

cerns entered into a long-running debate in Germany, called from time to time – with no great originality – the *Bilderstreit*.¹ At its narrowest, the discussion has been about whether the artists and artistic products of a dictatorship should be accorded legitimacy and credibility within a democratic society. At its broadest, it has involved a major reappraisal of the history of German art. This reappraisal has three principal dimensions: the German artistic canon; the art of the Cold War years; and an aesthetic evaluation of what remains from the art of the GDR. Although its focus has been primarily within Germany itself, it is part of broader international debates about German visual culture and about art in the post-Cold War world more generally. Major exhibits of German art from many periods have been staged in unprecedented numbers in Great Britain since the mid-1980s, opening up new perspectives on post-National Socialist and post-Cold War Germany.² The United States hosted an exhibit of GDR art just as the regime was fracturing, and since then there have been many individual and thematic shows, which have often explicitly addressed questions of German history and identity. The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) in particular has placed significant emphasis on the difficult history of German art in the twentieth century, most recently in the ‘Art of Two Germanys’ exhibit, which subsequently travelled to Nuremberg and Berlin.³ More broadly on the post-Cold War theme, Soviet and Chinese painting have been opened up to the markets and to the viewing publics.⁴ The specific links between Germany and Russia were explored in two giant, multi-media shows in Berlin and Moscow in 1995-6 and 2003-4.⁵

This discussion of collection and exhibition strategies in Germany since 1989 takes place, then, within a much wider international context. Many of the larger exhibits are co-operations between institutions in two or more countries; the art market operates across national boundaries, and in many countries, museum and gallery development is seen as an important economic driver, in addition to its cultural functions. Nonetheless, the emphasis here will be upon the changes which have taken place in Germany itself since German unification. It will be seen that the partial incorporation of the visual legacy of the GDR is only one component of a bigger picture.

Reconfiguring Germany's Art Galleries

The reappraisal of the German visual art tradition has several facets related to the end of Germany's division. It is in part a means of addressing the practical problems of redesigning, reinterpreting and reintegrating the public collections of the two German states. The challenge has been most acute in Berlin, where huge public investment has been made in a realignment of the city's museums and the Preussischer Kulturbesitz. One by one the major international institutions on the museum island in the heart of the old 'capital of the GDR' are being closed, renovated and reopened: the Alte Nationalgalerie, the Bode-Museum, and most recently, the Neues Museum.⁶ The nearby Deutsches Historisches Museum, which used to culminate its documentary displays in the sunny uplands of real existing socialism, has been completely reconfigured and extended. Ambitious plans are also in train for the partial re-creation of the Hohenzollerns' city palace, the Schloss, as an international cultural meeting-point, the Humboldt-Forum. Meanwhile, in what had been West Berlin, the post-war developments of the Dahlem museums and of the Kulturforum on the Potsdamer Strasse (including the Neue Nationalgalerie from the 1960s and the Gemäldegalerie, housing the paintings of the old masters, from the 1990s) have needed to be rethought in the context of the coherent distribution of Berlin's treasures across the city. Other developments include the establishment in 1996 of the contemporary art exhibition space in the converted Hamburger Bahnhof, the opening in 2001 of the Jüdisches Museum, the new wing of which was designed by architect Daniel Libeskind, and the rehousing nearby of the Berlinische Galerie in 2004. Not all of these initiatives could be described as parts of a grand strategy for the city, and some of them have their origins well before 1989. Nonetheless, they are all testimony to serious attempts both to commemorate and to celebrate, connecting the traumatic past with Germany's prolific artistic heritage. No museum in Berlin – whether primarily historical or cultural – escapes the need to position itself in relation to the Third Reich, World War II and the Cold War, even if they are not its prime focus.

It is not only in reunited Berlin, however, that there have been changes. Throughout Germany museums and galleries have wrestled with matters directly or indirectly connected with the demise of the GDR and German unification: how to present figurative and historical

art; how to deal with the pre-twentieth-century past in the light of the two German dictatorships of the last century; and the modes of presenting art in the twenty-first century. It is striking that in the 1990s there were three primary reorganisations in German public art galleries: of the art of the nineteenth century; of contemporary art; and of the GDR art in the galleries of eastern Germany, at first removing most of it from the walls and only later coming to a more considered position.

Major institutions in both the old and the new Federal States – in Berlin, Leipzig, Dresden, Frankfurt am Main, Hamburg, Hanover and elsewhere – closed their nineteenth-century galleries for refurbishment or complete rebuild. Both nineteenth- and twentieth-century collections were redesigned in a major extension of the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg also in the 1990s, and in September 2000 the extraordinary Georg Schäfer collection of nineteenth-century paintings moved into its own purpose-built museum in Schweinfurt, twenty-five years after the death of Schäfer himself. Germany's presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2007 was marked by an exhibit in Brussels and then Munich entitled pointedly 'Views on Europe: Europe and German Painting in the 19th Century'. A series of galleries linking German art to most of the countries of Europe in turn culminated in a display of Adolph Menzel as the epitome of both German particularity and cosmopolitanism.⁷

This apparent rediscovery of the nineteenth century is not just a German phenomenon. Recent decades have seen that era given much more attention in Britain (the Pre-Raphaelites) and the United States (the Hudson River school), while French academic work by artists such as Bouguereau has become more visible and popular again since the 1980s. Nineteenth-century portraiture and landscape from Russia have also been exhibited in the Netherlands, Britain and elsewhere.⁸ In the German case, however, there are issues at stake which give the nineteenth-century works a particular resonance. Both the National Socialists and the promoters of socialist realism in the GDR accorded nineteenth-century German artists such as Menzel and Wilhelm Leibl special status, both for their realism and – in Menzel's case – for their portrayal of German history. Throughout the years of the GDR the work of these artists was explored, in particular in the Frederick the Great paintings of Bernhard Heisig.⁹ The romanticism of the earlier Caspar David Friedrich (of whom there was a huge retrospective in

Essen and Hamburg in 2006-7) was especially prized by the National Socialists, and has more recently influenced Wolfgang Mattheuer in the East and Anselm Kiefer in the West of Germany.¹⁰ In other words, the re-display of German nineteenth-century portraiture, landscape and history painting poses some uncomfortable questions about the relationship of modern united Germany to nationalist discourses of the nineteenth century and the uses to which they were put in the twentieth. These questions were certainly asked before 1989, though within certain constraints in the GDR, but they now feature more prominently in the political context which has developed since then. As in other countries, there is an element of rehabilitation of the non-Impressionist nineteenth century, but also a confrontation with the more difficult history of German visual art over the last two centuries. Meanwhile, vast new spaces for contemporary art have also opened in a number of cities. The Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin was followed a year later, in 1997, by the Galerie der Gegenwart of the Kunsthalle in Hamburg, and in 2002 by the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich. Next door to the latter, a public-private initiative, the Museum Brandhorst, followed in 2009. This institution, like the Museum Frieder Burda in Baden-Baden, opened in 2004, derives from a private collection of the modern and contemporary. In all these cases the prominent figures of the post-1945 West German art scene (including those, like Gerhard Richter, who had migrated from the East) are displayed alongside their famous international counterparts, primarily from the United States. Here too there is a sense of the rehabilitation of the German within the international, a connection which had been so brutally ruptured by the National Socialists and which had been tested during the Cold War. In one instance, the historical linkages caused major controversy. The Hamburger Bahnhof displays derive in large part from the private collection of Friedrich Christian Flick, and the association of his family's considerable fortune with both the National Socialist regime and with the corruption of the political parties of the Federal Republic led to protests about the housing of the collection in Berlin. The argument that Flick was thereby making amends for the past did not convince all commentators.¹¹

There were, of course, many different factors involved in this dramatic overhaul of collection and exhibit venues – cultural tourism and new technology amongst them. Parallel developments can also be observed in Britain, France, Spain and the United States. Nonetheless,

German unification in 1990 played a particular part in the way in which German galleries and museums now came to show the present and the past of German art in an international context. An especially troublesome feature was the reassessment of the art of the GDR. Should the cultural products of a forty-year period – which had always maintained strong connections with the earlier German ‘heritage’ – be subsumed into longer-term narratives, set apart as historical curiosities of little aesthetic value, or junked altogether? Since unification, all three things have happened, in varying degrees.

Exhibiting GDR Art

Before 1989, the works of at least some artists from the GDR were known in the Federal Republic. The quartet of Heisig, Mattheuer, Willi Sitte and Werner Tübke, plus a small number of other practitioners approved by the GDR authorities, exhibited in the West, notably at the sixth Documenta in Kassel in 1977. And several West German private collectors and gallery-owners made a speciality of exposing GDR art to connoisseurs. Peter and Irene Ludwig built up their collection in Oberhausen,¹² and Galerie Brusberg displayed such works on the Kurfürstendamm in West Berlin. Rather than necessarily showing any political sympathy with the GDR, this niche market appealed because of the figurative subject matter and the painterly styles – expressionist in the case of Heisig and Sitte, old-masterly in the case of Tübke, and with touches of *Neue Sachlichkeit* and surrealism in the case of Mattheuer. These approved artists from the GDR also benefited from being permitted to travel and to exhibit abroad: in Italy, Britain, France, and eventually the United States. This was part of a deliberate foreign policy strategy, which also favoured this cultural outreach as a means of generating hard-currency income.¹³

The relatively privileged world of the most prominent artists of the GDR was thrown into immediate disarray by the events of 1989-90. These so-called ‘Painter Princes’ came under attack from several quarters, notably from Georg Baselitz, who described them succinctly if impolitely as ‘Arschlöcher’. In an interview in 2005 he made it clear that his controversial comment had only ever applied to the usual four suspects:

Die Arschlöcher-Bemerkung betraf nur die Staatskünstler Heisig, Mattheuer, Tübke und Sitte. Diese vier Maler sind korrupte Künstler, die mit dem miserablen System einer Diktatur an vorderster Stelle gearbeitet haben. Sie waren abhängig

von der Stasi und schlechte Maler noch dazu. Mit diesen Leuten kann man nicht Frieden schließen.¹⁴

In this viewpoint come together two of the most crucial accusations made about the prominent artists of the GDR: that they were collaborators with a dictatorship *and* that they were bad painters. An attack on the role of individuals, however, did not in itself address the question of what was to be done with their works and those of others in the holdings of the museums and other institutions of the GDR. Article 35 (2) of the Einigungsvertrag did specify that: ‘Die kulturelle Substanz in dem in Artikel 3 genannten Gebiet [i.e. the GDR] darf keinen Schaden nehmen.’¹⁵ However, this was scarcely a specific enough statement about what ‘cultural assets’ might include, or of what would count as ‘damage’.

One of the first effects of German unification on the reception of East German art was, according to Bernd Lindner, an immediate slump in visitor numbers to museums and exhibits. He also detected a change in the social profile of visitors, with a fall in the number of ‘workers’ involved. Neither of these developments was surprising, in the light of all the other concerns and distractions facing the population of eastern Germany in 1989-91. Furthermore, as the economic infrastructure collapsed or was reshaped, the social and cultural roles of enterprises disappeared, and many smaller exhibition spaces closed for financial reasons. There was some attraction, though, in new experiences from the West. In 1991, again according to Lindner, the most successful show in the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden was of Andy Warhol.¹⁶

In the course of the 1990s, several large exhibits and conferences were held in the old GDR and Berlin about various aspects of official art under the SED. For the most part the shows documented state art policy and the collections of the parties and mass organisations. In other words, the emphasis – particularly in the Deutsches Historisches Museum in Berlin – was on the *historical* dimension, rather than on questions of the intrinsic aesthetic merit, if any, of the works on display.¹⁷ Even this ‘documentary’ aspect came to be one of considerable controversy, attached in particular to the name of Burg Beeskow, south-east of Berlin. This had been one of several collecting points for the art of the GDR, others being at Festung Königstein in Saxony and in Halle. The collapse of the SED regime had entailed, in some cases almost immediately and in others over a longer timeframe, the

dismantling of an infrastructure of public art. As political parties, mass organisations, and agricultural and industrial enterprises were dissolved and their premises disposed of, vast quantities of officially-sponsored artwork found itself without ownership. This was for the most part not the more prestigious material, which was already to be found in museums and galleries, but – with some exceptions – the day-to-day stuff, with particular reference to the working population. Some examples were from the early days of socialist realism in the 1950s, but far more was derivative material from the later decades. Much of it had little obvious political relevance, and included innocuous landscapes, portraits and still lifes, plus all kinds of handicraft kitsch, political busts and so on. Herbert Schirmer, CDU Minister of Culture in the de Maizière government of 1990, was instrumental in creating the Dokumentationszentrum Kunst der DDR for the new Federal States of Berlin, Brandenburg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, an enterprise which occasioned much debate in the 1990s.¹⁸ There were those, like the artist Hans-Hendrik Grimmling, who argued that the material collected was just rubbish to be disposed of.¹⁹ A visit to the storage rooms at Burg Beeskow certainly reveals a lot of dross, which in most other countries would never have been retained at public expense.²⁰ Nonetheless, there is a powerful historical argument that since such a collection of 23,000 artefacts has been amassed, it would now be irresponsible to let it be lost. It need not be *Ostalgie* (though it can be), which suggests that future research on GDR culture and society would be damaged if this resource were to be abandoned. There have been some interesting thematic exhibits from the collection, but the designation ‘documentation centre’, rather than ‘art collection’ is undoubtedly the more appropriate.

The Weimar exhibit of 1999 was a special landmark in the debate about the art of the GDR. Weimar, European city of culture in that year, witnessed a tri-partite show on the theme of ‘Aufstieg und Fall der Moderne’.²¹ The curator Achim Preiss used a variety of techniques to draw a line under what he saw as the historic art of the twentieth century.²² The first part of the show, in the Schloss, concentrated on the development of the ‘modern’, particularly in its Weimar context. Its temporary hanging of works in front of the old masters collection was not without its critics, but this was as nothing compared to the reception of parts two and three. These dealt respectively with the Third Reich and the GDR and were housed provocatively in the

decrepit post-war Mehrzweckhalle on one side of the unfinished National Socialist Gauforum. On the ground floor, works bought by or on behalf of Adolf Hitler were propped up against boards. Classicised erotica on the one hand and peasant genre scenes on the other were presented in this tawdry setting, deliberately to denigrate them. This treatment, redolent to many of the ways in which the Nazis themselves had displayed rejected art in 1937 and beyond, coupled with what was happening on the floor above, led to a deluge of criticism. Because of the way in which the space on the second floor was organised, it appeared that GDR art was being equated to the art of the Third Reich. Through the use of heavy grey tarpaulin, the main area had been converted into a sort of rotunda evocative of Tübke's *Frühbürgerliche Revolution in Deutschland* panorama at Bad Frankenhausen. The paintings, in no very obvious order, were hung closely together and two or three deep. The effect was of an amateur show or flea market. There were two other main spaces: the corridor which led into the rotunda, flanked on one side by monochrome photographs of drab daily life and on the other by giant canvases from the Palast der Republik in Berlin on the theme of 'Wenn Kommunisten träumen'. Leaving the central space, there was then a 'wedge' of a room displaying the work of artists – such as Gerhard Altenbourg – less to be described as 'official'. Although in the press and, more often, in the visitors' books there were expressions of interest in and support for the provocative exhibit concept, the overwhelming response from artists, politicians and the general public was that of outrage. Described in retrospect as 'das unsägliche Sammelsurium, das ein Architektur-Professor von phantastischer Inkompetenz 1999 in der Kulturhauptstadt Weimar hatte veranstalten können,'²³ the show was accused of taking a West German attitude towards the whole of GDR art and in the process trashing and ridiculing it. Legal proceedings were launched by several artists to have their paintings taken out of the exhibit, and on one occasion two artists physically removed their works. There was a re-hang in an attempt to placate the critics, but then the exhibit closed six weeks earlier than intended.²⁴

If Preiss had intended to provoke, which he surely did, then he was entirely successful. However, the exhibit was undoubtedly a gross misjudgement. This was not because it was critical of major and minor figures in the GDR art world, nor because it raised questions about the equivalence of Nazi and GDR art (without giving any serious

answers), but because it flouted the conventions of how to treat the works of living artists, because it failed to take account of a potential similarity with the pillorying character of ‘Degenerate Art’ in 1937, and because it treated (almost) all painting produced in forty years of the GDR as if it were the same. In a sense, though, Weimar 1999 had a longer-term therapeutic effect. So much vitriol had been thrown and so much debate about the worth of GDR art had been had that subsequent discussion could be more measured. Several conferences followed – for instance, in Leipzig in May 2000, in Schloss Neuhardenberg in August 2003, and in Bonn in May 2007 – which brought together critical partners from all sides of the debate.

The next major exhibit after Weimar, ‘Kunst in der DDR’ in 2003, could not have been more different in its approach, nor in its reception.²⁵ First shown in the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, and revived in 2004-5 at the Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in Bonn, ‘Kunst in der DDR’ was, if anything, over-reverential in its approach. Unlike the Weimar extravaganza, it was curated by two East Germans, Eugen Blume and Roland März, whose careers had been in the GDR. They divided the galleries in part chronologically and in part thematically, missing out almost all stereotypical socialist realism from the 1950s and including some, if not many, artists who had been thorns in the side of the GDR authorities. One such was A.R. Penck. The overall impression was that there had been expressive, abstract, and conceptual strands in the art of the GDR, in addition to the undoubted prevalence of figurative, realist and historicising tendencies. The Leipziger Schule received solemn attention, including such works as Mattheuer’s *Ausgezeichnete* (1973-4), an image which has long been used to illustrate social disillusionment and tension in later GDR society. Documentary aspects of the exhibit and the catalogue confronted questions about state control and lack of artistic freedom, without retreating from the basic premise that GDR art changed over time, was various in style and scope, and had serious things to say about modern society and German history.

Beyond the stand-alone exhibits, museums in eastern and western Germany have found various ways of handling the artistic legacy of the GDR. Examples may be taken from four cities. The Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, after coming under fire for its initial inclusion in a re-hang of works by Sitte and others, has a small sample

from the major quartet and a few others. The preliminary 1:10 version of Tübke's Panorama is amongst them. Though the GDR is covered in rooms of its own, there is otherwise no particular distinction, positive or negative, from the way in which the other twentieth-century galleries are handled. In the extraordinarily spacious new build of the Museum der bildenden Künste in Leipzig, there is a more-or-less permanent exhibit in the lower ground floor given over to art from both German states 1949-89. This gives the opportunity for viewing 'East' and 'West' German works alongside each other, and throws up some illuminating parallels. Before it closed for renovation, the Albertinum in Dresden reduced the number of GDR works on its walls; in its reopened splendour in 2010, large spaces are devoted to Gerhard Richter and Georg Baselitz, and Mattheuer and others are still on display. The re-opened Stadtmuseum on the other hand concentrates on Dresden art, not making a particular distinction between works produced before or after 1949. Of particular interest – both because it was located in the old Federal Republic and not in the GDR, and because of a particular controversy which will be elaborated below – is the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg. There the twentieth-century collection is displayed so as to include art from both the Third Reich and the GDR. However, both are shown in small side-rooms as if to emphasise that the art is problematic and should not be viewed as a natural part of the German canon. From the Third Reich are Adolf Ziegler's *Akt* (1942) and Sepp Hiltz's *Die rote Halskette* (1942), both much reproduced images from the Great German Art Exhibit. From the GDR were displayed in 2006-9 Sighard Gille's less than socialist realist *Gerüstbauer – Brigadefeier* (1975-7) and Wolfgang Peuker's disturbing portrayal of sexual violence, *Wände* (1981). The main galleries, on the other hand, follow the 'normal' pattern of expressionism, *Neue Sachlichkeit*, and then post-war international abstraction and conceptual art.²⁶

The display ethos of the Nuremberg museum is that it takes a documentary, rather than an aesthetic or art historical approach to modern German art, and it was this contention which lay behind the controversy in 2000 and beyond over the planned Willi Sitte exhibit. The headline news at the time was that the showing of 'Willi Sitte – Werke und Dokumente' had been called off because of protests about the honouring of an artist who had played a major part in the power structures of the GDR art establishment. In fact, as the volume which

emanated from a symposium on the subject in Nuremberg in 2001 makes plain, the debate was rather more complicated than that. Since the project had a 'documentary' focus, it had always been intended that the show of Sitte's work would be accompanied by political materials, some of which raised questions about his role as President of the Verband Bildender Künstler der DDR. When allegedly new revelations came to light in 2000, the board of the museum decided to undertake further research before permitting the exhibit to be staged. In the event, subsequent debate between the museum, Sitte himself, and other interested parties meant that the show never took place at all.²⁷ This has not prevented Sitte's works from being displayed in a fine new gallery in Merseburg, which also houses the Willi-Sitte-Stiftung für realistische Kunst.²⁸ There are similar private foundations for the late Werner Tübke and Wolfgang Mattheuer in Leipzig, both associated with the gallery of Karl Schwind, established in Frankfurt am Main in 1989 and specialising in figurative works from the former GDR.²⁹

Another approach to the art of the GDR has been to reassess groups of works which were either on the fringes of acceptability to the regime or were produced more-or-less in private. These aspects were present in the 2003 'Kunst in der DDR' exhibit but are also very effective both aesthetically and commercially in smaller galleries. The 1950s have been fertile ground in this respect, where figurative – but in GDR official terms 'formalist' – works have been shown alongside documentation of interference and suppression by the authorities. The Kunstverein 'Talstrasse', a private gallery located in Halle on the other side of the river Saale from the shade of the Burg Giebichenstein art school, has shown such works in 'Verfemte Formalisten' (1998) and 'Meisterschüler vom Pariser Platz' (2007). In the works of Manfred Böttcher, Harald Metzkes, Ernst Schroeder and Werner Stötzer, the latter show conveyed a powerfully bleak and reflective 1950s atmosphere, which bears comparison with contemporaneous works in Britain and elsewhere.³⁰ The international dimension – in this case French, rather than British – is also to be found in Sigrid Hofer's exposition and analysis of abstract Art Informel in Dresden. This show – in Marburg, Dresden and also at the Kunstverein 'Talstrasse' – was a reminder of all the work which was created in the GDR outside the official channels.³¹ It also suggested that there should be more consideration of those artists who switched between figurative and

abstract modes when circumstances suggested. Although not included in the exhibition, Hans Kinder in Dresden was one such artist; his abstract works of the Weimar Republic and of the 1970s and 1980s are now stressed more than his ultra-socialist realist contribution to the 1953 Dresden exhibit: the Freie Deutsche Jugend carrying aloft a portrait of Stalin.³²

The twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall occasioned numerous ceremonies and exhibits in Germany and abroad, which reflected on the events of 1989-90 and also on the world as it has changed so dramatically since that time. As far as the visual arts were concerned, the major event was 'Art of Two Germanys/Cold War Cultures' or, in its German version, 'Kunst und Kalter Krieg: Deutsche Positionen 1945-89'. This exhibit, in three variants in Los Angeles, Nuremberg and Berlin, benefited from joint American-German curation by Stephanie Barron and Eckhart Gillen, which to a certain extent distanced it from the internal German debate since 1989, as discussed in Justinian Jampol's essay in this collection. For a show which stressed its Cold War location, the displays were remarkable for downplaying the explicitly political. In a broadly chronological format, the works from East and West Germany were shown intermingled, emphasising the thematic, particularly the 'German', connections. In a significant departure from 'Kunst in der DDR' from 2003-5, socialist realism was properly represented with a number of works by Rudolf Bergander, Heinz Löffler, Otto Nagel, Heinz Drache and Heinrich Witz. The Los Angeles version was in an art museum, whereas the German variants were displayed in the 'documentary' context of the Nuremberg venue and in the historical museum in Berlin. This difference serves to highlight the ambiguities of how East German art is to be presented, even twenty years after the demise of the GDR.³³

Reconsidering GDR Art

What, then, are the main issues which lie behind the chequered history and sometimes acrimonious disputes around the visual art of the GDR? In some respects, but only in some respects, there are similarities with the discourses surrounding the Salon and the Impressionists in late nineteenth-century France, the academies and the secessions in the German Kaiserreich, National Socialist art and expressionism, and, of course, socialist realism and 'formalism' in the

Soviet Union in the 1930s and the GDR in the 1950s. Put a little simplistically, the official art of the GDR came to represent figurative and recognisable art attuned to popular taste, but sufficiently connected to the longer western canon to allow for intellectual art historical debate. Opposite of this and its precursors was the uncontrollable, 'unfinished' and speculative, which – if it referred to real life at all – did so in critical and disturbing ways. But this dichotomy refers primarily to the early decades of the GDR, and even then not completely. Though it is clear that in some respects the implementation of socialist realism *did* connect visual art with the working people, there is also no doubt that the more disturbing images of Heisig, Tübke and Volker Stelzmann and the fleshy nudes of Sitte were off-putting rather than inviting. On the other hand, in the 1970s and 1980s some of the rather more bleak everyday images from the Leipziger Schule did strike a chord with their public.³⁴

From its very beginnings, socialist realism in the GDR had to contend with accusations that its products differed little from those of the National Socialists. If there were elements of truth in that early on – minus, of course, the fundamental racist element in Nazi art – the development over a much longer time span than the Third Reich ever managed led to a wide differentiation of approaches. Where comparisons came back to bite, though, was when the question of dealing with GDR art was set alongside questions of how, even today, to present art from the Third Reich in public settings. The 1999 Weimar exhibit, no doubt quite intentionally, brought this to the forefront. It is instructive in this context to consider the flourishing of recent art-history scholarship on the Third Reich. Whereas most standard works on the subject quite rightly highlight racial and gender stereotyping, rural ideals, celebration of military valour and other propagandist purposes, the in-depth studies of individual artists which have appeared since the mid-1990s pay much closer attention to the iconography and its origins.³⁵ One does not have to claim that Werner Peiner, Adolf Ziegler, Adolf Wissel and so on are great artists worthy of rehabilitation in order to be able to subject their works to serious scrutiny and to uncover their intentional and implicit meanings. This approach can be very suggestive of broader social and cultural meaning, and is something substantially different from simply displaying them in historical exhibits on 'dictatorship', valuable though some of these may be.³⁶ The same thing surely applies to artists from the GDR, a regime which, though

unpleasant and oppressive in many regards, did not launch war or genocide. The protected artists were serving a non-democratic system and they were complicit in the suppression of others, but if one were to judge which art might appear in public on the grounds of complete political independence and personal moral integrity, there would be many empty galleries around the world, let alone in Germany itself. The problem seems to lie in a combination of 'neutral' art connoisseurship on the one hand and the commercial pressures of a celebratory art world on the other. If artists from the more distant past are judged by scholarship to be great visionary practitioners, fetching large sums in the auction houses, then the fact that they might have been superstitious, sexist, racist, violent lackeys is of no consequence to us. It may add a spice to the experience of looking at their works, but their personalities and behaviours cannot impinge upon us. That this is not true of the artists of the Third Reich even now, nor of the artists of the GDR, is a problem. It can, of course, be sidestepped by the ultimate damnation that no official art under those regimes could be good art. This was, of course, one of Baselitz's thrusts.

So what might lie behind the argument that work by the official artists of the GDR should not be displayed because it is no good? Leaving aside the truism that judgements about whether a work of art is any good or not vary even between trained professional critics, the accusation seems to rest both on distaste for modern political art on behalf of those in power and on a low esteem for eclectic, highly-referenced 'historical' pieces. Sitte, Heisig and Tübke repeatedly showed in their work that they were incredibly well-versed in the western canon. In positively post-modern fashion they included multiple visual citations in their paintings from the German and Italian Renaissances, from nineteenth-century artists such as Menzel and Courbet, and from critical artists of the twentieth century, such as Picasso, Otto Dix, Max Beckmann and Felix Nussbaum. Their non-German references were, however, two-edged. Only because they were accorded the right to travel and exhibit abroad, it could be argued, were they able to indulge fully in a rounded aesthetic, whereas artists less reliable politically were denied such luxuries and even hampered in their exhibiting at home.

Despite their eclecticism, there cannot surely be substance in any claim that GDR cultural policy and formal academic training promoted uniformity of style. In fact, the styles of Sitte, Heisig,

Mattheuer and Tübke are very distinct the one from the other, and their works are almost invariably recognisable across a crowded room. The problem has perhaps more to do with authenticity of another kind. All four are/were critical artists, but – except to an extent in the case of Mattheuer – their critique was always directed westward, rather than towards the shabby political regime which they served. This applies particularly to their treatment of the National Socialist past. War and fascism are condemned in dramatic fashion, but Nazism's racism and genocide only appear tangentially and/or belatedly. Personal responsibilities are not evoked openly – although they obviously do lie behind Heisig's tortured scenes of Breslau – and all the blame is placed upon the Federal Republic. In the light of recent world affairs Willi Sitte may, however, have a point when he suggests that his *Höllenturz Vietnam* (1966-7) might still have a resonance today.³⁷

One view voiced since the 1970s is that the major artists of the GDR and their pupils had a connection with the German visual heritage which for decades in West Germany was subsumed under international modernism and postmodernism. Elements of this come out in the post-1990 debates. In his letter of 5 June 1999 to Rolf Bothe, criticising the Weimar exhibit, Mattheuer wrote as a postscript, 'Was ist das überhaupt für ein Begriff: DDR-Kunst. Spricht man je von BRD-Kunst? Wenn überhaupt, dann doch von deutscher Kunst.'³⁸ And Heisig, resentful of Baselitz calling him an 'Ausländer', declared in 2005: 'Ich bin Deutscher. Ostdeutscher, aber Deutscher!'³⁹ It is a slightly dangerous position, however, and one redolent of GDR rhetoric itself, to assume with Günter Grass that in the GDR 'es wurde deutscher gemalt', while West German art was cosmopolitan and international. Joseph Beuys was very clearly working within a German tradition, and Anselm Kiefer has made an international career through reflecting in his work about the uncomfortable German past.

As the older artists die – both Tübke and Mattheuer in 2004 – and the work of new generations develop, the sensitivity of the display of work from the GDR has undoubtedly diminished. There are still the dangers of a 'canon' of GDR art being created (Peter-Klaus Schuster), or alternatively of relegating the art of the GDR to a 'Bilder-Zoo' (Bernd Lindner), but in practice there is now a welcome variety of critical treatments. The ultimate irony is that amongst the plethora of artistic forms in a now pluralist united Germany, figurative realism is

one of the strongest. With surrealist, one might even say postmodernist, aspects, this has developed in western Germany as well, but currently to the fore is the so-called Neue Leipziger Schule.⁴⁰ The large mysterious canvases of Mattheuer-pupil Neo Rauch decorate not only the Museum der bildenden Künste in Leipzig itself, but also galleries nationally and internationally. His disturbing constellations of figures frequently draw upon historical, and often revolutionary, allusions, placing them in the context both of the nineteenth century and of the GDR.⁴¹ Rauch's wife, Rosa Loy, applies a feminist perspective in her images of near-identical female twins.⁴² Others associated with the 'school' include Tim Eitel and Christian Brandl. Norbert Bisky, whose troubling portrayal of naked or near-naked adolescent boys and girls references the art of the Third Reich and socialist realism, was born in Leipzig, though he studied under Baselitz in Berlin. There can no longer be any doubt that the legacy of the GDR is fully part of the serious visual culture of united Germany today, and has raised many interesting questions about the longer-term history of the visual arts in Germany. Whether 'eastern' works from 1949-90 grace major art galleries or are stacked in warehouses, they deserve to be subject to careful historical and art historical scrutiny, without thereby implying that the dictatorship was acceptable, or for that matter that liberal democracies produce only good art.

Notes

¹ See, for example, Kunstsammlungen zu Weimar, ed., *Der Weimarer Bilderstreit: Szenen einer Ausstellung: Eine Dokumentation*, Weimar: VDG, 2000; Friedrich Dieckmann, 'Bilderstreit und ein Ende?', *Freitag*, 34, 15 August 2003.

² Examples include: Gabriele Wittrin, ed., *Tradition and Renewal: Contemporary Art in the German Democratic Republic*, Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1984; Christos M. Joachimedes, Norman Rosenthal and Wieland Schmied, eds, *German Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture 1905-1985*, London: Royal Academy of Arts and Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985; Keith Hartley, ed., *The Romantic Spirit in German Art 1790-1990*, Edinburgh, London and Stuttgart: South Bank Centre, National Galleries of Scotland and Oktagon Verlag, 1994; Ingrid Ehrhardt and Simon Reynolds, eds, *Kingdom of the Soul: Symbolist Art in Germany 1870-1920*, Munich, London and New York: Prestel, 2000; Françoise Forster-Hahn, Claude Keisch, Peter-Klaus Schuster and Angelika Wesenberg, eds, *Spirit of an Age: Nineteenth-Century Paintings from the Nationalgalerie Berlin*, London: National Gallery, 2001. In London there have also been individual retrospectives of: Georg Baselitz (2007), Max

Beckmann (2003), Joseph Beuys (1999 and 2005), Lovis Corinth (1997), Otto Dix (1992), Isa Genzken (2009), George Grosz (1997), Rebecca Horn (2005), Jörg Immendorff (1995), Wassily Kandinsky (1999 and 2006), Martin Kippenberger (2006), Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (2003), Paul Klee (2002), Gabriele Münter (2005), Albert Oehlen (2006), Sigmar Polke (2003-04), Gerhard Richter (2003-4 and 2009), Charlotte Salomon (1998-9), and Rosemarie Trockel (1998-9).

³ Peter Nisbet, ed., *Twelve Artists From the German Democratic Republic* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Busch-Reisinger Museum, 1989; Robert Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Forty Years of Painting*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002; Reinhold Heller, ed., *Confronting Identities in German Art: Myths, Reactions, Reflections*, Chicago: Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, 2003; Mark Coetzee and Laura Steward Heon, eds, *Life After Death: New Leipzig Paintings from the Rubell Family Collection*, Miami and North Adams: Mass MoCA, 2006; Sabine Rewald, ed., *Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s*, New York, New Haven and London: Metropolitan Museum of Art and Yale University Press, 2006; Ulrich Bischoff, Elisabeth Hipp and Jeanne Anne Nugent, eds, *From Caspar David Friedrich to Gerhard Richter: German Paintings from Dresden*, Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006. See Justinian Jampol's essay in this volume for details of the major LACMA exhibitions.

⁴ On the Soviet Union, see Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998; and also the online catalogue at <http://www.behind-the-iron-curtain.de/download/katalog.pdf> of a Berlin exhibit in 2009-10 entitled 'Behind the Iron Curtain: The Art of Socialist Realism'. On China, see the catalogue of a 2005-09 exhibit in Bern, Hamburg and Berkeley, California: Bernhard Fibicher and Matthias Frehner, eds, *Mahjong: Chinesische Gegenwartskunst aus der Sammlung Sigg*, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006. And in 2008-9 the Saatchi Gallery in London hosted 'The Revolution Continues: New Chinese Art'.

⁵ Irina Antonowa and Jörn Merkert, eds, *Berlin-Moskau/Moskau-Berlin 1900-1950*, Munich and New York: Prestel, 1995, and Pawel Choroschilow, Jürgen Harten, Joachim Sartorius and Peter-Klaus Schuster, eds, *Berlin-Moskau/Moskau-Berlin 1950-2000*, 2 vols, Berlin: Nicolai, 2003.

⁶ See 'Editorial: Berlin's Museumsinsel', *The Burlington Magazine*, 148 (2006), 71-2; 'Editorial: Berlin's Neues Museum', *The Burlington Magazine*, 151 (2009), 815.

⁷ Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden and Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen München, eds, *Blicke auf Europa: Europa und die deutsche Malerei des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2007.

⁸ Henk van Os and Sjeng Scheijen, *Ilya Repin: Russia's Secret*, Groningen and Zwolle: Groninger Museum and Waanders, 2001; David Jackson and Patty Wageman,

eds, *Russian Landscape*, Schoten, Groningen and London: BAI, Groninger Museum and The National Gallery, 2003.

⁹ Jörn Merkert and Peter Pachnicke, eds, *Bernhard Heisig: Retrospektive*, Munich: Prestel, 1989.

¹⁰ Hubertus Gassner, ed., *Caspar David Friedrich: Die Erfindung der Romantik*, Essen, Hamburg and Munich: Museum Folkwang, Hamburger Kunsthalle and Hirmer, 2006; Ursula Mattheuer-Neustädt, ed, *Wolfgang Mattheuer: Abend, Hügel, Wälder, Liebe: Der andere Mattheuer*, Bielefeld and Leipzig: Kerber, 2007; Andrea Lauterwein, *Anselm Kiefer/Paul Celan: Myth, Mourning and Memory*, London and New York: Thames & Hudson, 2007.

¹¹ See Peter Kessen, *Von der Kunst des Erbens: Die 'Flick-Collection' und die Berliner Republik*, Berlin and Vienna: Philo, 2004; and Thomas Ramge, *Die Flicks: Eine deutsche Familiengeschichte über Geld, Macht und Politik*, Frankfurt am Main and New York: Campus, 2004.

¹² Bernhard Mensch, ed., *Durchblick: Ludwig-Institut für Kunst der DDR Oberhausen*, Oberhausen: Ludwig-Institut, 1984.

¹³ See Christian Saehrendt, *Kunst als Botschafter einer künstlichen Nation: Studien zur Rolle der bildenden Kunst in der Auswärtigen Politik der DDR*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2009; Wittrin, *Tradition and Renewal*; and Nisbet, *Twelve Artists From the German Democratic Republic*.

¹⁴ Karolina Pajdak and Frank Zauritz, 'Rot-Grün ist das Peinlichste, was in Deutschland seit des Kriegsend passiert ist', *B.Z.-Online*, 4 September 2005, at: <http://www.bz-berlin.de/archiv/in-der-b-z-am-sonntag-spricht-der-gro-szlig-e-maler-georg-baselitz-ueber-seine-kopf-ueber-bilder-das-leben-in-einem-120-zimmer-schlo-szlig-und-die-kanzler-portraits-article268034.html> (accessed 20 December 2010).

¹⁵ *Der Einigungsvertrag*, Munich: Goldmann, 1991, p. 901.

¹⁶ Bernd Lindner, "'Anders als in Dresden damals...': Ostdeutsche Kunstrezipienten und ihre Ausstellungserfahrungen nach 1989', *Deutschland Archiv*, 31 (1998), 732-44.

¹⁷ For example, Monika Flacke, ed., *Auf der Suche nach dem verlorenen Staat: Die Kunst der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR*, Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum and Ars Nicolai, 1994; Monika Flacke, ed., *Auftragskunst der DDR 1949-1990: Bildende Künstler in der DDR zwischen Ästhetik und Politik*, Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 1995; Dieter Vorsteher, ed., *Parteiauftrag: Ein Neues Deutschland: Bilder, Rituale und Symbole der frühen DDR*, Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 1996; Paul Kaiser and Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, eds,

Enge und Vielfalt – Auftragskunst und Kunstförderung in der DDR: Analysen und Meinungen, Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 1999; and Dokumentationszentrum Kunst der DDR, ed., *Volks Eigene Bilder: Kunstbesitz der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR*, Berlin: Metropol, 1999.

¹⁸ *Die Depots der Kunst: Symposium 13. bis 15. November 1996 Burg Beeskow*, Beeskow: Dokumentationszentrum Kunst der DDR, [1997].

¹⁹ Hans-Hendrik Grimmling in conversation with the author, Berlin, 22 November 2006.

²⁰ Author's visit to Burg Beeskow, 15 November 2006.

²¹ Rolf Bothe and Thomas Föhl, eds, *Aufstieg und Fall der Moderne*, Ostfildern-Ruit: Kunstsammlungen zu Weimar and Hatje Cantz, 1999.

²² Achim Preiss, *Abschied von der Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Weimar: VDG, 1999.

²³ Dieckmann, 'Bilderstreit und ein Ende?'

²⁴ Kunstsammlungen zu Weimar, *Der Weimarer Bilderstreit*.

²⁵ Eugen Blume and Roland März, eds, *Kunst in der DDR: Eine Retrospektive der Nationalgalerie*, Berlin: G+H Verlag, 2003.

²⁶ See Ursula Peters, ed., *Moderne Zeiten: Die Sammlung zum 20. Jahrhundert*, Nuremberg: Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 2000.

²⁷ G. Ulrich Grossmann, ed., *Politik und Kunst in der DDR: Der Fonds Willi Sitte im Germanischen Nationalmuseum*, Nuremberg: Verlag des Germanischen Nationalmuseums, 2003.

²⁸ *Willi Sitte: 28. Februar 2006 – 85. Geburtstag*, Merseburg: Willi-Sitte-Galerie, 2006. The website (accessed 22 December 2009) is at: http://www.willi-sitte-galerie-merseburg.de/Willi_Sitte.html.

²⁹ See <http://www.galerie-schwind.de/galerie.0.html> and <http://www.tuebke-stiftung-leipzig.de/> (both accessed 22 December 2009).

³⁰ Dorit Litt and Matthias Rataiczky, eds, *Verfemte Formalisten: Kunst aus Halle (Saale) 1945 bis 1963*, Halle (Saale): Kunstverein 'Talstrasse', 1998; Matthias Rataiczky and Dorit Litt, eds, *Meisterschüler vom Pariser Platz: Malerei und Plastik aus Berlin der 1950er Jahre*, Halle (Saale): Kunstverein 'Talstrasse', 2007.

³¹ Sigrid Hofer, ed., *Gegenwelten: Informelle Malerei in der DDR: Das Beispiel Dresden*, Frankfurt am Main and Basel: Stroemfeld, 2006.

³² Hans Kinder, *Figurationen: Aus dem A-Zyklus*, Halle (Saale): Staatliche Galerie Moritzburg and Landeskunstmuseum Sachsen-Anhalt, 2001; *Dritte Deutsche Kunstausstellung Dresden 1953*, Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1953, unnumbered plate: Hans Kinder, 'Weltfestspiele 1951'.

³³ Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckmann, *Art of Two Germanys/Cold War Cultures*, New York: Abrams, 2009; Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckmann, eds, *Kunst und Kalter Krieg: Deutsche Positionen 1945-89*, Cologne: DuMont, 2009.

³⁴ Bernd Lindner, *Verstellter, offener Blick: Eine Rezeptionsgeschichte bildender Kunst im Osten Deutschlands 1945-1995*, Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau, 1998; Birgit Poppe, *Freizeit und Privatleben in der Malerei der DDR: Formen und Funktionen neuer Motive der Leipziger Schule nach 1970*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000.

³⁵ For example, Ingeborg Bloth, *Adolf Wissel: Malerei und Kunstpolitik im Nationalsozialismus*, Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1994; Anja Hesse, *Malerei des Nationalsozialismus: Der Maler Werner Peiner (1897-1984)*, Hildesheim: Olms, 1995; Olaf Peters, *Neue Sachlichkeit und Nationalsozialismus: Affirmation und Kritik 1931-1947*, Berlin: Reimer, 1998; Elke Frietsch, 'Kulturproblem Frau': *Weiblichkeitsbilder in der Kunst des Nationalsozialismus*, Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau, 2006; Nikola Doll, *Mäzenatentum und Kunstförderung im Nationalsozialismus: Werner Peiner und Hermann Göring*, Weimar: VDG, 2009.

³⁶ Most recently, 'Kunst und Propaganda: Im Streit der Nationen 1930-1945', Deutsches Historisches Museum Berlin, January-April 2007.

³⁷ Author's conversation with Willi Sitte, Merseburg, 22 July 2007.

³⁸ Wolfgang Mattheuer to Rolf Bothe in: *Der Weimarer Bilderstreit*, 5 June 1999, p. 132.

³⁹ Barbara Möller, "'Ich bin Ostdeutscher, aber Deutscher!'" Martin-Gropius Bau: Berlin ehrt Bernhard Heisig', *Hamburger Abendblatt*, 15 October 2005 at: <http://www.abendblatt.de/daten/2005/10/25/495940.html> (accessed 21 December 2010).

⁴⁰ See Claudia Mesch, 'Socialist Primitivism and the "New" Leipzig School', *The Art Book*, 14:1 (February 2007), 54-5.

⁴¹ Neo Rauch, *Neue Rollen*, Wolfsburg: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 2006.

⁴² Ulrike Lorenz, ed., *Rosa Loy: Die Verbündeten*, Gera: Kunstsammlung Gera, 2003.

Silke Wagler

Re-introducing GDR Art to Germany: the Kunstfonds in Dresden

The Kunstfonds in Dresden, part of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen in Dresden, holds one of the most important collections of post-1945 Saxon art, including one of the largest collections of GDR art in the world. The author, herself the director of the Kunstfonds, describes how she balances the precarious tension between practical and political considerations in preserving this artistic tradition. Recently, the Kunstfonds has turned to more creative means of exhibition, including a series of archival shows that allow visitors access to many of the hidden treasures of the collection. It has also commissioned new works by current German artists that purposefully dialogue with GDR art, thereby bringing the former artworks into the living realm of post-*Wende* artistic creation.

In socialist systems, the fine arts played an important role in communicating political and social ideals. They helped citizens to visualise the idealised future of a victorious socialism while also establishing and representing the new political and social order of the German Democratic Republic. Accordingly, during the tenure of the GDR myriad works of art were commissioned or bought by councils, public institutions, political parties, and mass organisations. At the time of the regime's collapse, these works were located not only in state museums and collections but also in the public sphere: in work plants, factories, schools, kindergartens, hospitals, hostels and urban spaces, often as architectural objects integrated into building structures and in squares. The fall of the wall was followed by a complex reorganisation of society and administration which impacted significantly on this artistic stock. Alongside political changes, the responsibility for national property (*Volkseigentum*) and art generally passed to the newly established *Länder* within the boundaries of the former GDR. This left artwork of the former GDR in a precarious position as no firm commitment to the conservation, care, and research of these artworks was ever secured.

This essay considers the fate of this artistic heritage in Saxony (Freistaat Sachsen), which today holds one of the most extensive collections of GDR art in Germany. The Kunstfonds oversees one of the most important collections of art created in post-1945 Saxony and

has two focal points: GDR art and contemporary Saxon art. The collection comprises approximately 25,000 works in all genres of the visual arts, amongst them painting, sculpture, graphic art, applied art, conceptual art, video and installation art, as well as works in public and architectural contexts such as sculptures and murals. The organisation was created by the formation of the Kunstfonds in 1991 from a cache of art assets that remained from the former GDR, including inventories from the Büro für Bildende Kunst located at the Rat des Bezirkes Dresden, the Akademie der Wissenschaft der DDR, and the Büro für architekturbezogene Kunst. Parts of the collection are comprised of artworks formally in the possession of GDR party offices and mass organisations, which were held in trust after 1990. This remarkable pool of GDR art was complemented later by artistic bequests and donations. As a result, the Kunstfonds holds the richest and largest number of works commissioned by and acquisitions of state institutions, GDR parties, and mass organisations outside of the Kunstarchiv Beeskow near Berlin. Since 1992, the collection has been systematically updated with purchases made by the Saxon state. This has resulted in a unique situation in that the collection currently documents a history of Saxon art curation and acquisition that charts a period of over forty years and spans two different political systems.

It is against this background that the current activities of the Kunstfonds must be considered. In addition to the usual activities associated with maintaining and documenting the collection, the Kunstfonds is committed to encouraging and promoting contemporary art in Saxony. Through exhibitions and creative display concepts, little-known examples of GDR and contemporary Saxon art are made available to the public in both formal and informal contexts. In some cases, the revival of GDR art from the Kunstfonds' collection has merged with its current mission to support and disseminate contemporary Saxon art; the GDR holdings themselves have inspired artistic meditations on the GDR, its art, and its post-*Wende* legacy. This essay details some of these efforts being made by Saxon curators on behalf of the long-standing artistic legacy of their state.

Practical Challenges to GDR Art Curation

When the GDR collapsed, a significant number of paintings, sketches, and sculptures were on loan to public spaces where they performed and fulfilled their socialist role in the public sphere. After 1990, many

of these institutions closed, were taken into private ownership, or were simply demolished. This had significant implications for artworks on loan; frequently they were treated as part of the furniture rather than as legitimate aesthetic objects, and were discarded as debris. This happened with no regard to the actual value of the works, which admittedly varied considerably. Works of significant interest were subjected to the same fate as those of lower quality. The documentation of these works was haphazard, often incomplete and sometimes non-existent. This has rendered salvage operations particularly difficult for curators, and the process of tracking down and saving extant works represents a major task for staff at the Kunstfonds. The Kunstfonds launched a project to take stock of existing inventories and records within Saxony in 2002, but with the understanding that many missing works are likely to remain unaccounted for. In the case of works that have survived, conservation is a major concern. Works situated in public and architectural contexts are more visible to the public but they are also more at risk of damage or loss. Saxony's urban environments underwent exhaustive re-developments after 1989, and many artworks were not protected. Preservation efforts were hampered both by the lack of expert discussion concerning both their aesthetic value and their historic significance in the post-*Wende* landscape.

In the GDR, public art was commissioned in Dresden by either the Rat der Stadt or Rat des Bezirkes; the first step in saving this art has involved determining who is responsible for it today. In 2002, the Kunstfonds together with the city of Dresden launched a pilot scheme to list and track murals and sculptures. The scale of the project has proved overwhelming, however, and systematic results have yet to be achieved. Saving works of art embedded in public contexts is a proverbial race against time; urban developments continue at rapid speed while older buildings fall into disrepair and are demolished. The transfer of property from state administration to private ownership has posed further difficulties in accounting for GDR art. Only in rare cases are inventories created, and generally no agreements are put in place to ensure the preservation of artworks.

After the *Bilderstreit* that followed the upheaval of 1989-90, the stores in depots and magazines remained predominantly dormant for much of the 1990s. Public interest in GDR art receded as Germans attempted to leave an unpleasant past behind them. As Jonathan

Osmond notes elsewhere in this volume, the curation of GDR art was a contentious issue, and several exhibitions – most notably the infamous Weimar exhibition of 1999 – became highly controversial.¹ In the aftermath of such treatments of GDR art, analytical attempts to reconsider its artistic legacy and heritage remain difficult. Twenty years after the *Wende*, there is still no continuous academic debate or coherent public consent about its future. The widely varying viewpoints continue to create difficulties for curators who want to engage positively with this body of work; they are compelled either to take on the role of activist or to explore alternative creative ways of incorporating GDR art into exhibition formats and themes.

Showing GDR Art: Exploring Alternative Formats in the Kunstfonds

Key to shaping the general national attitude towards the cultural heritage of the GDR and public perceptions of artworks produced in the state are the reappraisals and investigations undertaken by museums and collections, both of which are constrained by internal structures and working conditions. In this regard, the Kunstfonds faces several challenges. For a long time, its collection was distributed across various locations, few of which met basic requirements for the storage of art, and active curatorial work and research inevitably suffered as result. The acquisition of a new space in 2005 has improved storage facilities and working conditions tremendously, and the collection's archive, which contains documents pertaining both to the collection's history and the provenance of individual pieces, is now accessible for scholarly research. Currently, the Kunstfonds is also engaged in the acquisition of documents and publications from private archives pertaining to the artists represented in the collection, which we hope will become an important source for future research. Networking has also proved pivotal to the success of the collection. Within Germany, the Kunstfonds has developed professional contacts with other museums, foundations, and archives. There has also been a marked rise in foreign interest in GDR art and the Kunstfonds has responded to requests for loans from countries such as Poland, France, and the United States of America. Perhaps most importantly in this context, the Kunstfonds serves as a crucial resource for artists who were active in the GDR; many of those involved in the creation of

public art in the state have depended on the Kunstfonds to determine whether or not their works survived the *Wende*.

Schaudepot #3. *Weibsbilder*, Kunstfonds, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (2008)



Unlike other state collections, the Kunstfonds does not possess its own exhibition space and therefore its collection is not as present in the public realm as we would wish. Generally, the Kunstfonds contributes pieces to co-operative exhibitions and projects taking place in other museums. The ability to develop larger-scale independent shows has been limited not only by space but also by the difficulty in procuring financial resources for projects centring on the GDR. Despite such restrictions, however, the Kunstfonds has experimented with alternative exhibition formats, focusing in particular on a modified version of the *Schaudepot* concept. These exhibitions take place in the storeroom of the Kunstfonds and involve works that are held in the storage depots. Accessible by guided tour only, they have become popular with visitors who enjoy the experience of going behind closed doors. The success of the series is also undoubtedly due to its focus on

GDR art, a focus which offers something unrivalled in the region. Avoiding traditional exhibition methods of showcasing a small number of masterpieces, the *Schaudepot* series highlights a broad range of GDR art; recent exhibitions have focused on themes such as travel, construction work and, as illustrated above, women.² This approach underscores the fact that there is much to be discovered in the depots, that GDR art was not restricted to the works of a few well-known and widely-exhibited artists.

Artistic Hinges: Contemporary Artists and GDR Art

The Kunstfonds seeks not only to reintroduce GDR art into a wider artistic discourse, it also aims to stimulate creative reconsiderations of its value and place in post-*Wende* Germany. In this context, it has supported a series of innovative artistic projects that engage with the cultural legacy of the GDR, and offer alternative forums for analysing the legacy of Saxony's past. These projects question the public attitude towards GDR art, remind society of its responsibility to confront the past, and offer a translation of the GDR's artistic legacy by incorporating its forms and styles into new artworks. Such creations have become part of the collection and play an important role in defining a twenty-first-century approach to GDR art; these works of art function as joints or hinges between the two emphases of the Kunstfonds – GDR art and contemporary Saxon art – and reflect the daily work of its staff. The following three examples illustrate this engagement between contemporary artists and the art of the GDR.

Rückblick/Re-Viewing (2003)

The American artist Janet Grau (b. 1964), who has been based in Dresden since 1999, has recently occupied herself with the concept of *Pflege*, embarking on a series of projects that explore its various meanings. With definitions ranging from 'care' to 'maintenance and custody', the term denotes the care for and preservation of objects, cultural assets and traditions, and everyday objects. Her projects deal with the 'theme of the depot and [offer] an interpretation of the past as well as the public sphere, thus addressing questions of cultural identity.'³ She is interested in concepts of collective memory, in storage habits, and in private obsessions,⁴ and explores issues surrounding the care and neglect of cultural treasures in her works.

Grau's *Rückblick/Re-Viewing*, on which she began work in 2003, was inspired by two separate events: her discovery of the substantial assets of the GDR that were kept in storage and away from public reach in Dresden; and the severe flooding of the city in 2002, which necessitated the evacuation of many art warehouses. The multi-part installation is based on video material filmed in the former store rooms of the Kunstfonds. In advance of filming, Grau selected fifteen pictures from the storage depot of the Kunstfonds. These were then shown to thirty participants, each of whom was asked to select a picture to talk about. The participants were given no information about the artworks – no names, affiliations, dates or origins. They were not told which paintings had already been chosen by others, and were given no guidelines as to the form their descriptions should take. The participants were then filmed describing their chosen piece of art while the artwork itself remained obscured from the view of the camera.⁵ The person describing the painting was in the centre of the frame while only the backsides of the canvases were partially visible.

As Grau acknowledges this positioning directly and ironically relates to the absence and invisibility of GDR artworks within the post-*Wende* public sphere. And yet, while the images themselves remain hidden, they become reflected in the faces, words, and attitudes of the participants. The result is a series of very personal encounters with and communications about GDR paintings. Some of the participants disregard artistic context entirely and instead search for potential meanings within the images. Others take the opportunity to meditate about themselves, shifting the focus from the artwork itself to the dynamics of viewing art.⁶ Instead of debates over political contexts or questions of value, Grau captures intimate, individual encounters with GDR art. Questions of the artworks' quality remain unanswered – that is, 'neither negative nor positive assumptions are made, as has often been the case when works of the Socialist Realism period are shown.'⁷ Thus the typically problematic confrontations with art from this period are avoided.

As an American artist, Grau's role is that of an external observer. She does not share the emotional concerns which arise in the debates surrounding the status of Eastern German artworks, and this allows her to offer an outside perspective on the both the art and the period of recent German history.⁸ By means of *Rückblick/Re-Viewing*, Grau draws attention to the substantial but dormant stock of the Kunstfonds,

acknowledges the unanswered questions of its heritage, and facilitates its reincorporation into the imaginations of contemporary German audiences.

Janet Grau, *Rückblick/Re-Viewing* – participant Will Clapp describing his chosen piece of art in the Kunstfonds.



Verschwundene Bilder (Disappeared Pictures, 2005-08)

The young Leipzig photographer Margret Hoppe (b. 1981) takes another approach to the themes of invisibility and oblivion in her work, *Verschwundene Bilder*. A graduate of the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst in Leipzig, Hoppe follows the traces of art in public spaces from the former GDR. Her interest was triggered by the disappearance of this art from public and semi-official spheres, especially those works that once fulfilled political and representative roles.⁹ As noted earlier, the enormous changes to the physical landscape of East German cities exposed murals and architecture to a gradual process of destruction and disappearance. Deprived of their original function and importance, many of the buildings in which this

art was located were either closed down, left to decay, or altered via restoration and redevelopment.

Margret Hoppe, from *Verschwundene Bilder*: ‘Bernhard Heisig, ohne Titel, 1969’, Sgraffito, Gästehaus des Ministerrates der DDR, Leipzig, 400 x 1200 cm, Gästehaus am Park, Leipzig, 2006.



Hoppe's series documents the different stages of this process of disappearance. Her primary subjects are the empty spaces in rooms and on walls and facades that remained after the removal or painting over of murals, as illustrated above. At times, she also captures the dismantling process itself, using archival materials in the Kunstfonds' depot – where the pictures are often wrapped or packed in boxes – to emphasise the uncertain future of the artworks. Instead of adorning buildings, they now lie dormant in the magazines, waiting to be remembered, rediscovered, and re-evaluated by future generations. Hoppe's photographs bear the absent artists' names, the titles of the original works, and their dates. Her images therefore serve as substitutes for invisible and lost works – after-images of their fate. By re-engaging with this inventory of disappeared pictures, Hoppe keeps them visible and prevents them from retreating into memory. By

questioning current attitudes towards GDR art and the way it is treated, she confronts a part of recent German history.

Zukunftsversprechen (Future Promise, 2004-5)

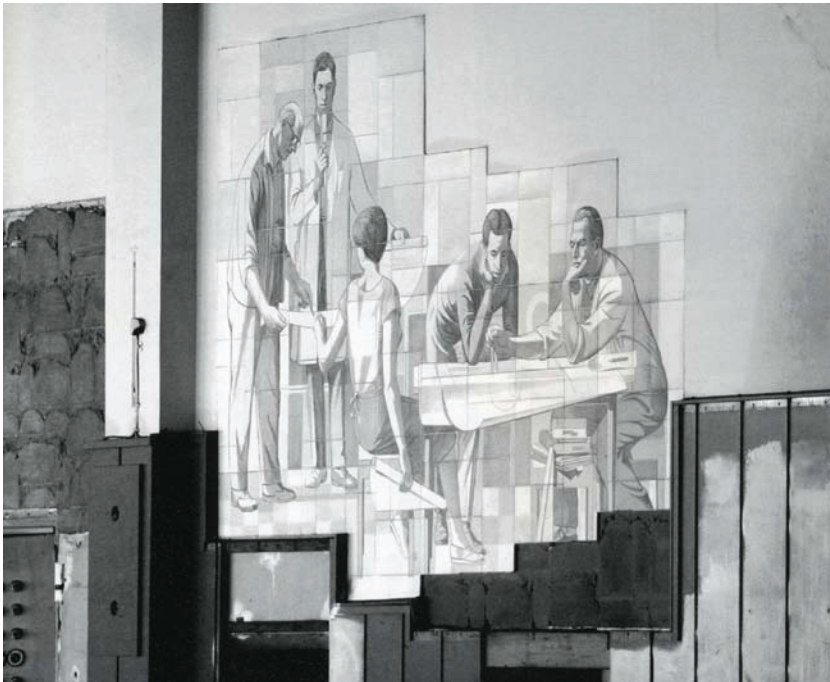
Formed in 1996, the Dresden artists' collective REINIGUNGS-GESELLSCHAFT (RG) engages in artistic practices that both address and react to social processes. Contributors Martin Keil (b. 1968) and Henrick Mayer (b. 1971) 'suchen bei ihren Projekten gezielt Zusammenhänge auf, in denen ihre kritischen Ansätze zu den Themen "Arbeit" und "Gesellschaft" konkrete Anbindung finden. Solche Anknüpfungspunkte ergeben sich in der regel durch Kooperationen.'¹⁰ They work within wide-spread contexts. The research projects of the RG deal with various changes in societal values, especially those influenced by global economisation in all spheres of life.¹¹ Currently, their focus is on the concept of 'work', a subject of intense discussion in Germany and one most often measured by employment figures. RG have approached the topic in a variety of alternative ways, producing, for example, series of photographs of a job interview and of protest demonstrations. Of particular interest are their three-dimensional models depicting the idea of work, such as their model of a job agency's waiting room in Dresden.¹²

Building on these is their installation, *Zukunftsversprechen*, which has its starting point in the archaeological recovery of a socialist realist mural once located at the canteen of the former VEB Verpackungsmaschinen, a former state-owned factory in Dresden.¹³ The Meissen porcelain mural, *Projectierung*, originally formed part of a larger project entitled *Freizeitgestaltung und Projektierung* (1965). The original frieze was created by the Dresden artist Erich Gerlach (1909-2001) in the early 1960s and pictures engineers and workers who are occupied with technical plans and engineering drawings.¹⁴ The mural offers a picture of an idealised socialist working environment, with people of different ages and sexes unified around a table and working harmoniously together. It represents an embodiment of the well-known GDR slogan: 'Arbeite mit, plane mit, regiere mit!'

The starting point for *Zukunftsversprechen* was the excavation of the frieze from the currently deserted and dilapidated factory. This was conceived as a performance act, and the uncovering of the mural from the rubble was filmed. The next step of the artistic project involved researching the mural. The RG closely investigated the

history of the mural, conducting archival research, and documenting the origins of the commission, its sketches, and its historical relation to everyday life in the factory. They even interviewed Gerlach's son and located some of the people who had served as models for the figures in the mural, transcribing their recollections about the process. Ultimately, the recovered and restored mural served as the central focus of the final installation, which took place in the Kunstverein in Kassel in 2004-5. Accompanying the mural was the video footage of the recovery and the historical documentation of its construction and political function.

Ernst Gerlach, *Projektierung*, Meissner Porzellan, 1965, canteen of the former VEB Verpackungsmaschinen, Dresden



By confronting the unredeemed 'future promise' that Gerlach's mural promoted, RG called into question future imaginings and utopian ideals: 'Anhand dieses historischen Referenzpunktes wird die Bedeutung von Fortschritts- und Wachstumsdenken thematisiert,' along with the consequences that changes in societal values create.¹⁵

More than *Rückblick/Re-Viewing* and *Verschwundene Bilder*, the genesis and execution of *Zukunftsversprechen* mirrors the complicated levels of work and responsibility that the Kunstfonds negotiates. It extracts from a mural that is decades old a message that is still of relevance to contemporary society despite the considerable historical (and artistic) changes that have occurred since its conception. The RG provides a contemporary translation of the curatorial activities of post-*Wende* institutions such as the Kunstfonds and proves that socially and politically engaged GDR art is relevant to present-day discussions.

REINIGUNGSGESELLSCHAFT, *Zukunftsversprechen* (Future Promise, 2004-5)



Conclusion

The Kunstfonds has a professional commitment to the academic discourse surrounding the GDR's legacy through its conservation and documentation activities. It helps to establish basic standards for the classification and valuation of GDR art by placing it in dialogue with a history of local art that extends into the twenty-first century. On a broader level, the Kunstfonds' mission is to make this cultural heritage accessible to the wider public in order to raise social

awareness and encourage people to engage with their recent history. Exhibitions in the style of the *Schaudepot* and the dialogues with the past that characterise the contemporary installations described in this essay play a crucial role in provoking public discussion and in drawing an active awareness to a vital part of Saxony's artistic legacy. As Sven Hillenkamp observes, '[w]as wir weggepackt haben, weil wir es nicht mehr aufregend fanden, wird wieder aufregend, wenn wir vergessen haben, was es war.'¹⁶

Notes

¹ See, for example, Kunstsammlung zu Weimar, ed., *Der Weimarer Bilderstreit. Szenen einer Ausstellung. Eine Dokumentation*, Weimar: VDG-Verlag, 2000.

² Five exhibitions have taken place to date: 'Aufbaubilder', focusing on the rebuilding of Dresden after World War II, 2006; 'Reisebilder' (Travel Images), 2007; 'Weibsbilder' (Female Images), 2008; 'Gruppenbilder' (Group Images), 2009; and 'Arbeitsbilder' (Work Images), 2010.

³ Barbara Steiner and Julia Schäfer, eds, *Janet Grau, Signifikante Signaturen 2004*, Dresden: Standstein, 2004, p. 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵ See Barbara Steiner, 'Zwischen Zwangshandlung und kultureller Heldentat', and Julia Schäfer, 'Rückblick/Re-Viewing I 2003', both in: *Janet Grau, Signifikante Signaturen 2004*, pp. 7-8 and 18.

⁶ See the leaflet for the 2003 project, Janet Grau: *Rückblick/Re-Viewing*.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Schäfer, 'Rückblick/Re-Viewing I 2003', p. 19.

⁹ Margret Hoppe, 'Die verschwundenen Bilder/The Disappeared Pictures', in: Stefan Becht and Josefine Raab, eds, *Gute Aussichten. Junge deutsche Fotografie 2007/2008*, Hamburg: Books on Demand, 2007, pp. 16-17; and Margret Hoppe, 'Die verschwundenen Bilder', Exhibition Catalogue, Dresden: Edition Beyer, 2007, pp. 8-9 and 11.

¹⁰ See REINIGUNGSGESELLSCHAFT (RG), *The Future Promise*, Exhibition Catalogue, Kassel: Kasseler Kunstverein, 2004, pp. 4-5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹² Ibid., p. 7.

¹³ This factory, which was established in 1963, was taken over by a Cologne-based stock company in 1990. In 1991 the canteen was closed and after temporary use as a production hall the building was abandoned and has been empty since 1996. See: REINIGUNGSGESELLSCHAFT (RG), *The Future Promise*, p. 16.

¹⁴ Gerlach studied at the Dresden Academy for Applied Arts from 1927-9 and was a graphic artist at the German Hygiene Museum Dresden. He also worked as an independent artist and was involved in the mural campaign of the Second German Art Exhibition in 1949. Later he realised more murals, amongst them the one in question.

¹⁵ See REINIGUNGSGESELLSCHAFT (RG), *The Future Promise*, p. 14.

¹⁶ Sven Hillenkamp, 'Flohmarkt der Eitelkeiten', *Die Zeit*, 28 May 2003. Cited in Steiner and Schafer, *Janet Grau, Signifikante Signaturen 2004*, p. 4.

Justinian Jampol

**‘GDR on the Pacific’:
(Re)presenting East Germany in Los Angeles**

This essay details how archives and museums shape historiography and stresses the role that politics play in the arena of global curation. The author, director of the Wende Museum, explores Los Angeles’ position as an alternative space for the re-evaluation of East German art. He traces the city’s historical relationship with Germany, and focusing on the activities of both LACMA and the Wende Museum examines the extent to which Los Angeles’ attempts to interpret the legacy of the Cold War can challenge the deep-seated historical divides that impact on the reception of East German culture nearly twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In January 2009, Stephanie Barron, senior curator of modern art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), together with the aid of art historian Eckhart Gillen of the Kunstprojekte-Berlin, launched the exhibition ‘Art of Two Germanys/Cold War Cultures’. Building on the success of Barron’s earlier German-themed LACMA exhibitions, this was the inaugural event of the brand new, palm-tree-lined Broad Contemporary Art Museum building, designed by architect Renzo Piano. Barron and Gillen featured artwork from both the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic and placed the images on equal footing, allowing them to share wall space in the same gallery halls. At first glance, an exhibition that compares and contrasts art from the two Germanys might be deemed an unusual choice for the inaugural event in a new \$56 million institution in Los Angeles. Given, however, LACMA’s extensive collection of German art and the presence in the city of an audience accustomed to being challenged with German art, the decision was subjected to little scrutiny by the Los Angeles public.¹ Responses in German curatorial circles were markedly different; the exhibition’s juxtaposition of East and West German art gave rise to considerable commentary and critique. While the design of the exhibition was a point of interest in the United States, with American journalists expressing surprise that quality art had been produced in the GDR, it became a major story in Germany, where East German art had long been dismissed and denigrated.²

The reception and instrumentalisation of twentieth-century German art within Germany has been heavily influenced by contemporary

politics, and the collapse of the GDR offered yet another opportunity for a reassessment of its legacy. The debates and arguments over the past – specifically regarding what the GDR *means* – have often coalesced within the realm of culture, including here the iconography, art, architecture, and everyday material culture associated with the former East Germany.³ The tone is rarely neutral. Charges of neo-colonialism, for example, were levied against the unified German government for attempting to replace the East German *Ampelmännchen* (GDR traffic-light signals) with their West German counterparts, which sport a distinctly different design. Similarly heated public protests have erupted over the destruction of significant GDR architectural landmarks, most notably the Palast der Republik. Within the curatorial world, institutions and individuals that deal in or collect East German art objects are often dismissed as being engaged in uncritical *Ostalgie*.

As keepers and interpreters of culture, museums have emerged as central subjects of these debates, whether passively, through their validation of particular normative perspectives, or actively, as in the case of several museum exhibitions that have subsequently drawn ire and rebuke.⁴ Such issues are by no means confined to public gallery halls; they also determine activities in the private backrooms of curatorial institutions. German museums have become involved in the process of reclassifying large portions of East German art as historical material, prioritising their historical value while simultaneously denying their status as ‘art’.⁵ As a result, tens of thousands of paintings have been relocated to warehouses or *Kunstdepots* in Brandenburg, Saxony, and Saxony-Anhalt over the last twenty years.

As these limited examples demonstrate, museums – be they focused on art, culture, or history – impose, reflect, and shape cultural value and are therefore inescapably political entities. In deciding what and how to exhibit, they determine what is worthy of preserving, what is excluded, and what is dismissed as kitsch. Such decisions are influenced by a range of factors that include economic, cultural and emotional considerations. While problematic negotiations of the past are not limited to Germany, the region perhaps presents a special case.⁶ Victimisation and repression are central components of German identity, a trope that has re-emerged in recent narratives of the GDR. There has been a spate of recent memorials built to commemorate victims of communism, for example,⁷ while grant-making organi-

sations have been established to support projects and initiatives examining communist oppression.⁸ This post-*Wende* process has had consequences for historical material. Artwork supporting the former official party line, including solidarity with the Third World, women in the workplace, and industrial progress, has been destroyed or has simply disappeared. In this context, national history, museums, and material culture occupy particularly sensitive positions in Germany, an observation that suggests that alternative exhibition sites might play an imperative role in the reconsideration of East German art.

West meets East – Los Angeles

How would cultural institutions present the GDR if such immediate sensitivities were not a factor, if the issue of nostalgia was to evaporate, if the voices of the historical actors and witnesses were to be mitigated or at least contextualised, and if geographic proximity was removed from the equation? The question is currently being raised in Los Angeles, a city that the poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht once compared to the sprawling metropolis of hell, a plastic city without any cognition of the past:

[...] Und endlose
Züge von Autos
Leichter als ihr eigener Schatten, schneller als
Törichte Gedanken, schimmernde Fahrzeuge,
in denen
Rosige Leute, von nirgenher kommend,
nirgenher fahren.
Und Häuser, für Glückliche gebaut, daher
leerstehend
Auch wenn bewohnt.⁹

The temporal and uprooted nature of life in Los Angeles has often provoked criticisms alluding to its status as a land without a past – a place of absent or 'artificial' history. This common perception is only magnified by the myths and glamour of Hollywood and Los Angeles's notoriety as the global centre of mass media. Yet, while many have charged that Los Angeles lacks interest in historical self-reflection, it undoubtedly has a long history of being interested in all things German.

During World War II, Los Angeles became the adopted home of numerous German exiles fleeing the Third Reich, earning itself the

titles of the ‘Weimar of the West’ and ‘Weimar on the Pacific’.¹⁰ Intellectuals including Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Franz Werfel, and Lion Feuchtwanger converged on the city and prospered. In this sprawling metropolis, Thomas Mann wrote his masterpiece, *Doktor Faustus*, in which the character of the devil bore an uncanny resemblance to the modernist composer, and fellow Los Angeles exile, Arnold Schoenberg. Others, such as Hanns Eisler and Fritz Lang, contributed significantly to the burgeoning film industry.¹¹ At the close of the war, several of these émigrés, including Brecht, Eisler and the composer Paul Dessau, returned to East Germany to take up new positions in the evolving communist society of the Soviet Occupied Zone, and later the GDR. Yet even after the departure of the majority of exiles from Southern California at the conclusion of World War II, their influence continued to pervade Hollywood and the broader Los Angeles cultural scene. To this day, Los Angeles boasts some of the largest collections of German art, archives, and material culture in the world, located primarily in the area’s major institutions: The Getty Museum and Getty Research Institute, LACMA’s Rifkind Collection, the Museum of Contemporary Art, the University of Southern California (USC), and the Huntington Library in San Marino. Indeed, a cursory glance at some of the major exhibitions mounted in Los Angeles over the last twenty years demonstrates the region’s interest in German art:

“‘Degenerate Art’: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany’, LACMA, Spring 1991;
 ‘Exiled to Paradise: German Intellectuals in Southern California’, USC, Spring 1992;
 ‘Driven into Paradise: L.A.’s European Jewish Émigrés’, Skirball Center, Spring 2005;
 ‘Exiles and Émigrés: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler’, LACMA, Spring 1997.

In recent years there has been a marked shift in focus in Los Angeles’s fascination with all things German; a preoccupation with exile culture has yielded to a growing interest in the post-war division of Germany.¹² This shift was embodied in the LACMA exhibition, ‘Art of Two Germanys/Cold War Culture’, which attracted the attention of the global press. Understandably, the exhibition attracted significant attention in Germany. Several reviewers specifically emphasised the neutral space of Los Angeles as a necessary precondition

for the re-evaluation of Cold War art. In a provocative article in *Die Zeit*, the journalist and art critic Hanno Rauterberg polemically addressed the politicisation of East German art in Germany, arguing that the ‘Art of Two Germanys’ exhibition could not have occurred in unified Germany; it could have only taken shape in a place like Los Angeles:

Eine bahnbrechende Ausstellung in Los Angeles lehrt uns, die deutsche Kunst der Nachkriegszeit neu zu sehen und zu bewerten. Sie begräbt die alten Ost-West-Feindbilder. In Deutschland patrouillieren keine Kunstpolizisten, daran muss man noch mal kurz erinnern. Es gibt auch keine staatlichen Prüfungsämter für Ästhetik oder Museumszensoren. Und doch herrscht ein eigentümlicher Zwang: Eiserne Vorhänge durchziehen die deutsche Kunstlandschaft, geistige Sperrgebiete, wohin man schaut. Denn selbst 20 Jahre nach dem Mauerfall ist der Kalte Krieg nicht zu Ende, nicht in den Köpfen vieler Museumsdirektoren.

[...] Doch freut euch nicht zu früh, Befreiung naht! Und es ist ausgerechnet das ach so imperialistische Amerika, das die deutsche Kunstwelt aus ihren Ressentiments herausreißen will. Offenbar braucht es kalifornische Sonne und den Abstand von 10000 Kilometern, um das alte Freund-Feind-Denken zu überwinden.¹³

Like Brecht, Rauterberg remarks on the sun-drenched distances between Germany and California, and yet unlike Brecht, he argues for the museological benefits of a place where ‘people come from nowhere and are nowhere bound’.

‘Art of Two Germanys’ curator Stephanie Barron, who has played a leading role in shaping the perspective of German art in Los Angeles, echoed a similar sentiment in a published interview with *Deutsche Welle*:

Coming at this project as someone in the United States, I don’t bring the same baggage that I would if I were a curator in Germany – for better or for worse. [...] I think I wasn’t burdened by many of the expectations that (Germans) would have coming to the exhibition. [...] For many in our audience [...] they come freshly looking at it as art – not with any preconceptions about East as one thing and West as something else. I find that very liberating and very fresh.¹⁴

In this particular case, the characterisation of Los Angeles as ahistorical has allowed it to emerge as a neutral negotiator in the highly contentious debate of German history and art. LACMA’s venture was well-reviewed, well-received, and well-attended. To mark the opening of the exhibition, cultural institutions throughout the city offered complementary programming that highlighted the need for a

fresh look at East Germany. In anticipation of the exhibition, the Goethe Institute in Los Angeles held a lecture series of scholarly talks about East Germany. In early 2009, the Getty hosted a symposium dedicated to exploring art and culture in the GDR while the DEFA Film Library and the Los Angeles-based Wende Museum co-sponsored the film series 'Wende Flicks', which brought East German filmmakers to Los Angeles to introduce the final films made by the East German film collective. The series, which was presented at a variety of institutions throughout Los Angeles, including UCLA, the Hammer Museum, LACMA, and the Goethe Institute, broke various institutional attendance records, including overall attendance for a single event at the Goethe Institute.

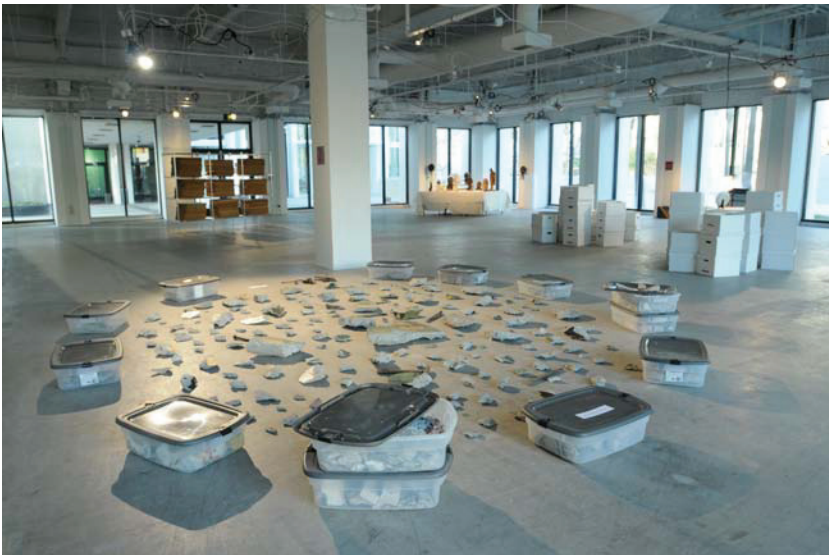
Although 'Art of Two Germanys' closed on 19 April 2009, events and programs dedicated to East Germany continued at a tireless pace. In October 2009, the Wende Museum, in collaboration with the German Historical Institute, convened a three-day conference hosted by UCLA and the Villa Aurora Foundation entitled, 'Germans' Things: Material Culture and Daily Life in East and West, 1949-2009'. The conference explored the use of material culture as a viable source of information and simultaneously investigated how material culture has been used to represent the two Germanys' Cold War relationship in the post-*Wende* period. Various GDR-themed forums at the Hammer Museum and Museum of Tolerance followed, culminating in November 2009, when Los Angeles, the sister-city of Berlin, hosted the official United States commemorative celebrations of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The Wende Museum: Los Angeles, California

Many of the East German-related events, exhibitions, and projects in Los Angeles involve the Wende Museum, a research institute devoted to archiving and providing access to the material record of Eastern Europe in the Cold War, with a focus on East Germany. Currently, I serve as the director of the museum, which was founded in 2002 and firmly established in 2004, when it moved to a new facility in Culver City. This relocation provided the physical space necessary to warehouse and catalogue the collection of over 100,000 objects and categories of materials. In order to meet the high cataloguing demands, the Wende Museum relies heavily for its development on collaboration with and assistance from the Los Angeles eleemosynary and academic

community. It benefits directly from relationships with public history and museum studies departments, such as those located at the University of California Riverside and USC, and participation in work-study and internship programs administered by UCLA and the Getty Trust. Shelving systems were donated by the Goethe Institute, while the museum’s state-of-the-art film digitisation equipment was designed in collaboration with the Academy for Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences (to transfer 16mm East German film to high definition digital format). In addition to screening DEFA films, the museum has a centre for film digitisation specialising in East German health, hygiene, and educational films.

Image from the ‘Collected Fragments – Traces of the GDR’ exhibition. The Wende Museum, 2009



As emphasised in the 2009 exhibition ‘Collected Fragments – Traces of the GDR’, illustrated above, the Wende Museum’s focus is on materials that are, for practical and political reasons, not included in other museum collections.¹⁵ This includes subjects from the rich field of East German pornography to restaurant menus, collections that are both currently being used by cultural scholars and historians in their research.¹⁶ Other materials have been donated to the Museum

by former historical participants who believe that their personal collections would be politicised by European institutions. This is especially the case with perpetrators, many of whom worked for the notorious police services such as the Stasi. Recently, John Ahouse, a librarian at the Wende Museum, has begun cataloguing a collection donated to the Museum by former East German border guards who never considered granting their materials to a German institution, for fear of political backlash. Similarly, the personal papers of Erich Honecker from his time in Moabit prison in the early 1990s were gifted to the Museum by Honecker's confidant Hans Wauer who had previously threatened to destroy the papers fearing that a European institution would politicise them. Thus, as with the 'Art of Two Germanys' exhibition, the political and geographic distance of the Wende Museum has benefits, in this case allowing the Museum to preserve materials that might otherwise have been destroyed.¹⁷

In many respects the Museum can be regarded as a direct manifestation of the difficulties surrounding the legacy of the GDR since the *Wende*. If the items in its collections were deemed of historical or aesthetic value, they would be housed in the appropriate institutions, and the Museum would not exist. The collections are in effect made up of materials that have been relegated to the dustbin of history, both before and after the *Wende*. Included in the collections are, for example, plush velvet banners from the 1950s with large gaping holes where Stalin's profile was removed in the 1960s. After 1989, as Silke Wagler discusses in her essay in this volume, a large part of the art and other cultural materials produced in the GDR, was either consigned to *Kunstdepots* or de-accessioned altogether. Works of art ended up in attics, basements, antique shops, flea markets, and small historical auction houses, where East German paintings were sold alongside Nazi paraphernalia and Prussian uniforms. It is these discarded items that form the basis of the Wende Museum's collections. In a post-*Wende* climate, these items are divorced from their original meanings; curators are now faced with the challenge of exploring how such items should be interpreted, and of determining what they mean.

Many of these issues of historical relevance and meaning come together in Heinz Drache's 1952 painting *Das Volk sagt 'Ja' zum friedlichen Aufbau*, which was loaned by the Wende Museum to LACMA for inclusion in the 'Art of Two Germanys' exhibition. A commission for the Dritte Deutsche Kunstausstellung in Dresden in

1953, Drache's oil-on-canvas painting depicts workers building the grand East Berlin boulevard of Stalinallee, a popular theme in the political art of the early 1950s. The painting was initially acclaimed and received widespread press attention. Its fame was short lived however; in the wake of 17 June 1953, Drache's artistic homage to the same 'heroic' workers who had initiated the uprising offered an uncomfortable and conflicted message. The painting was relegated to a dark basement in East Berlin for the next four decades, and was joined by other works by Drache in the early 1990s, when paintings were removed from galleries, offices, exhibitions, and archives of the eastern *Länder* of the newly unified Germany. The Wende Museum acquired several of these paintings in 2007.

Heinz Drache, *Das Volk sagt 'Ja' zum friedlichen Aufbau* (1952)



Along with the many conceptual and practical benefits resulting from Los Angeles's outsider status come some specific drawbacks, most of which pertain to Los Angeles's disengagement. The United States was a major actor in the drama of the Cold War, and Los Angeles is very much a product of the military industrial complex that boomed in the post-war era. Weapons factories rose from the semi-arid landscape just as quickly as suburbia began to dominate the

geographic and cultural landscape of Southern California. The supposed target of these military weapons was the Soviet Union and its Eastern Bloc satellites, the latter of which were viewed simply as hapless victims of the red empire. Such rhetoric enabled Americans to interpret the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 as the liberation of West-loving Eastern Europeans from the grips of Soviet domination.

But over the last twenty years, as fear of nuclear war and the politics of the Cold War has steadily eroded and been replaced with new fears of terrorism and global economic and environmental decline, audiences to the exhibits sometimes lack a historical and educational context for the art they are viewing. This absence of political and historical awareness is problematic for curators. While the political component of East German art and material culture should not dominate or dictate interpretation, it played an undeniable role in the realms of production, dissemination, censorship, and reception. In fact, it is the rich and complex mixture of politics, culture, history, and art that makes the products of East Germany particularly dynamic, and more importantly, renders them useable sources of information about society, artistic expression, and everyday life.

Conclusion

The prioritisation of aesthetic quality over cultural or historical significance raises a strong, and perhaps political, point that has important consequences. It allows for East German art to be displayed and appreciated as art rather than as evidence of dictatorship, as is often the case in Germany. The recognition of East German art as art (even when this recognition comes at the expense of political and cultural awareness) provides a rationality for its preservation and exhibition; Western civilisation displays art, it does not destroy it. The tendency to evaluate GDR art purely in terms of its merit as historical documentation has led to a practice of non-conservation and a reluctance to spend state resources preserving overwhelming amounts of material. This reluctance has been compounded by the dominance of an interpretive lens of totalitarianism, which posits 'communist art' as a monolithic expression of an omnipotent regime. In this context, ten paintings make the same point as a thousand and the need to collect and preserve withers. This chapter argues that GDR art deserves to be strategically collected in an ongoing process, involving

a long-term and more nuanced approach that both recognises the plurality of GDR art and promotes a differentiated and evolving understanding of East German artistry. Such a position is not without controversy: in 2005, Dr. Rainer Eckert, director of the Zeitgeschichtliches Forum in Leipzig and a genuine victim of the GDR regime, responded to my arguments with the retort that everything that needed to be collected had already been collected.¹⁸

Those who ascribe to the totalitarian model and assert the immorality of East German art certainly have a trump card in the Stasi. The Stasi, which had real and harmful implications for the well-being of East German citizens, has become synonymous with the repression of the East German state apparatus and its systematic control over the people, its culture, and its art. From this perspective, East German material culture and art are simply remnants of a terrible regime and, similar to Nazi art, museums should resist exhibiting or even ceremoniously destroying such cultural products. In this model, such actions serve to avenge the grotesque way in which culture was manipulated during periods of totalitarian rule. Although the validity of the model has come under question in recent years, its moral imperative continues to dominate state policy in Germany. The Sabrow-Kommission report, for example, determined that too great an emphasis was being placed on the Stasi in the exhibitions and collections of state-funded cultural institutions.¹⁹ (Excluded from this were investigations of everyday life and the varied relationship between culture and politics.) Despite such recommendations, however, the report, which was submitted to the Bundestagsausschuss für Kultur und Medien in 2007, was ultimately altered by the government minister for culture in order to re-emphasise the centrality of the Stasi and draw parallels between the GDR and the Third Reich.²⁰

Because the conflict between East German perpetrators and their victims is absent from the Los Angeles political landscape, there is not the same pressure to interject the moral messages that would normally predetermine or at least heavily influence German approaches to the art or materials on display. With this moral priority removed, the use of material culture and art can be expanded to offer insight into products, lifestyles, aspirations, and activities that shaped everyday life in the GDR. In other words, materials that would otherwise remain hidden or presented within the context of a strict totalitarian

narrative are free to be used as evidence to reach unscripted conclusions. The display of *Auftragskunst*, or officially commissioned art, in Southern California does not spark protests such as those that occurred at the Neue Nationalgalerie in 1994, when curators sought to exhibit paintings of the Leipziger Schule.²¹ Moreover, exploration of political iconography within the realm of everyday life does not immediately lead to charges of indulging in naïve nostalgia for the former German state. In sum, by allowing the viewer to come into contact with perspectives of the GDR that venture beyond the undeniable brutality of the Stasi, visitors can engage with moral questions in a more thoughtful, multifaceted, and meaningful way.

Los Angeles institutions, including the Wende Museum, cannot resolve the problems of German history. And yet, they continue to play an important role in the debates surrounding the reception of East German art and culture. As German history has become internationalised, Los Angeles has emerged as an important alternative voice in debates about what East Germany *means*. German newspaper articles that address the latest controversy over how the past is represented increasingly include outside perspectives, in particular those from Los Angeles. In this case, Los Angeles is in a particularly unique position. While it remains far away from the frontlines of the historical struggle, it simultaneously belongs to German historiography, both through the early waves of German exiles and the more recent run of contemporary exhibitions, projects, and programmes. The juxtaposition of Berlin and Los Angeles and their contrasting approaches to and arguments about GDR art, helps to define and illuminate the constantly changing contours of the perceptions and legacy of East Germany.

As a final postscript we may consider the following recent exchange between the two cities. When the repackaged version of LACMA's 'Art of Two Germanys' exhibition came to Berlin in October 2009, it was housed in the Deutsches Historisches Museum, which perhaps controls more East German art than any other institution. The shift in where and how the exhibition was presented – notably, in a *history* museum rather than an art gallery and with the East German artworks reprioritised as historical objects – is suggestive of the differing priorities and approaches of the two cities. These differences were the theme of a recent roundtable forum in Berlin, hosted by Peter Tokofsky of the Getty Trust and organised by

the Los Angeles-based *Zócalo*, a forum for civic discourse directed by *Los Angeles Times* journalist Gregory Rodriguez.²² The forum, which was entitled 'Los Angeles vs. Berlin: How Should New Cities Deal with Their Pasts?', explored for the most part the contrasts between the two cities. Yet a common thread was clear. Despite their differences, Berlin and Los Angeles have contributed significantly, both directly and indirectly, to a trans-continental relationship that dates from World War II, and the two remain today as influential and often critical observers of one another. Ultimately, it is a relationship that is both informative and constructive, and one that has significant potential for dealing with the complex legacies of the GDR.

Notes

¹ International interest in the Neue Leipziger Schule was fuelled by American collectors such as the Rubbell family and critics from *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker*. See Arthur Lubow, 'The New Leipzig School', *New York Times*, 8 January 2006; and Peter Schjeldahl, 'Paintings for Now', *The New Yorker*, 4 June 2007.

² Michael Kimmelman, 'Art in Two Germanys Often Spoke the Same Tongue', *New York Times*, 12 January 2009.

³ See Rudy Koshar, *Germany's Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998; Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, eds, *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008; and Mark Landsmann, *Dictatorship and Demand: The Politics of Consumerism in East Germany*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.

⁴ For a discussion of different approaches see Jonathan Osmond's account in this volume of the 1999 exhibition 'Aufstieg und Fall der Moderne' in Weimar and the 2003 'Kunst in der DDR' exhibition at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin.

⁵ For example, the artworks housed in the Palast der Republik, representing some of the most important artists in East Germany, were transferred to the Deutsches Historisches Museum; many of those paintings were on display in the Weimar exhibition. See Barbara Wolbert, 'De-arranged places: East German Art in the Museums of Unified Germany', *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 19 (Spring 2001), 57-64.

⁶ István Rév in Hungary has, for instance, led the charge to uncover the political motivation behind the creation of the national historical museum in Budapest, called the 'House of Terror' which conceptually links the Third Reich and communism,

supporting the approach and agendas of the conservative factions in Hungary. See István Rév, 'The Terror of the House', in: Robin Ostow, ed., *(Re)Visualizing National History: Museums and National Identities in Europe in the New Millennium*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008, pp. 47-89. For a discussion of the debates surrounding the concept of Germany's *Sonderweg*, or special path in history, see Peter Baldwin, *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust, and the Historians' Debate*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1990.

⁷ See Thomas Schaarschmidt, 'Die Debatte um das Votum Expertenkommission zur Zukunft der DDR-Aufarbeitung (2004-2007)', Vortrag Bernauer Strasse, 17 December 2007, p. 3.

⁸ The brochure of the *Stiftung zur Aufarbeitung der SED-Diktatur* states that the organisation 'aims to testify to the injustice of the SED-regime and its victims, to further the anti-totalitarian consensus within our society as well as to strengthen democracy and German unity.'

⁹ Bertolt Brecht, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 10, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967, p. 830.

¹⁰ See Ehrhard Bahr, *Weimar on the Pacific: German Exile Culture in Los Angeles and the Crisis of Modernism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

¹¹ *The Song of Bernadette*, based on Franz Werfel's novel, took several Academy Awards, though not Best Picture, in 1943. Special thanks to John Ahouse for his helpful comments about the exiles in Los Angeles. John Ahouse, 'Prepared Remarks', read at a meeting of the Los Angeles Book Collectors on 24 September 2002; subsequently read at the American Center, Moscow, on 14 May 2005.

¹² This shift is mirrored in Hollywood where World War II films such as Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) have dominated the Academy Awards. In the new century, more attention has been paid to the post-war period. Spielberg directed *Munich* about the 1972 Olympics in 2005; *Das Leben der Anderen* won the Oscar for Best Foreign Film in 2007, and *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex* was nominated in for the same award in 2008.

¹³ Hanno Rauterberg, 'Kunst in BRD und DDR: Nun kann die Mauer fallen', *Die Zeit*, 29 January 2009.

¹⁴ Kate Bowen, 'Top LA Curator Breaks the East-West Divide in German Art', Interview with Stephanie Barron, *Deutsche Welle*, 30 January 2009.

¹⁵ 'Collected Fragments – Traces of the GDR', The Wende Museum, co-curated by Justinian Jampol and Joes Segal, December 2009.

¹⁶ Josie McLellan (University of Bristol) has worked on erotica in the GDR and Paul Freedman (Yale University) is researching a project concerning luxury foods in the GDR.

¹⁷ Arnold Bartetzky, 'Lenins Asyl unter Kaliforniens Himmel', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 July 2009.

¹⁸ As Eckert argued, 'I can't really say I understand the point of what he [Jampol] is doing [...]. Almost everything is already documented in Germany [...]. And actually it bothers me that someone in California is making such claims.' Jody K. Biehl, 'East Germany Goes Hollywood: A Cold War Museum in Sunny Climes', *Der Spiegel International*, 22 April 2005.

¹⁹ See Martin Sabrow, Rainer Eckert, Monika Flacke, Klaus-Dietmar Henke, Freya Klier, Roland Jahn, Tina Krone, Peter Maser, Ulrike Poppe and Hermann Rudolph, eds, *Wohin treibt die DDR-Erinnerung? Dokumentation einer Debatte*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007.

²⁰ Schaarschmidt, 'Die Debatte um das Votum Expertenkommission zur Zukunft der DDR-Aufarbeitung (2004-2007).'

²¹ See Joes Segal, 'Disturbing things: the interpretation of GDR cultural history', paper presented at 'German's Things: Material Culture and Daily Life in East and West, 1949-2009', Los Angeles, October 2009.

²² See <http://www.zocalopublicsquare.org/thepublicsquare/2009/07/last-night-los-angeles-vs-berlin> (accessed 14 December 2009).

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Notes on Contributors

Skyler Arndt-Briggs is Executive Director of the DEFA Film Library at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. She has co-ordinated a number of significant exhibitions of GDR films; notably, in 2005, she collaborated with The Museum of Modern Art (New York) and the Goethe-Institute to present the most comprehensive retrospective of East German films ever screened in the United States. Arndt-Briggs received her Ph.D. from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and currently has research interests in Weimar Republic culture and society, and post-*Wende* representations of the GDR.

Joy Haslam Calico received her M.M. from the University of Illinois and her Ph.D. in musicology from Duke University. In addition to a robust publication record, her recent book, *Brecht at the Opera* (2008), has been praised as a 'noteworthy, compelling, and occasionally provocative addition' to East German musicological scholarship. Calico's scholarship has been supported by numerous prestigious fellowships, including grants from the ACLS, the DAAD, the NEH, the American Academy in Berlin, and the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University. She is currently Associate Professor of Musicology at the Blair School of Music at Vanderbilt University.

April A. Eisman received her M.A. in art history from the Courtauld Institute of Art and her Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh. Her publications focus on the visualisation and representation of political trauma in German, Chinese, and American art. In addition to her scholarship, she worked as a curator for the 'Kunst in der DDR' exhibition at the Neue Nationalgalerie (2003), and the Bernhard Heisig exhibition that toured Germany in 2005. Eisman is Assistant Professor of Art and Design at Iowa State University.

Sigrid Hofer has published extensively on the art, architecture, and memorials of the former German Democratic Republic, including contributions to scholarly journals, museum catalogues, and edited collections. She is the author of *Gegenwelten: Informelle Malerei in der DDR: Das Beispiel Dresden* (2009) and *Reformarchitektur 1900-*

1918: Deutsche Baukünstler auf der Suche nach dem nationalen Stil (2006). She is currently Professor of Art History at Philipps-Universität Marburg.

Justinian Jampol is founder and Executive Director of the Los Angeles-based Wende Museum, a non-profit organisation, established in 2002, which is dedicated to acquiring, preserving, and enabling access to cultural and political objects of Cold War-era Eastern Europe. The Museum maintains headquarters in both the United States and Germany and is affiliated with the University of California at Los Angeles.

Elaine Kelly is Lecturer in Music at Edinburgh University. Her research centres on musical culture and politics in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Germany, and in particular on historiography, canonic reception, and composition in the GDR. She has published in journals such as *19th-Century Music*, *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, *Music and Letters*, and *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*. She is currently completing a monograph on the reception of romanticism in musical culture of the GDR.

Sara Lennox is Professor of German and Scandinavian Studies and director of the Social Thought and Political Economy Programme at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. The majority of her research has focused on German-language women's writing, including her book, *Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters: Feminism, History, and Ingeborg Bachmann* (2007). She has recently received grants from the Humboldt Foundation and the Volkswagen Foundation in support of her new book, which considers transnational approaches to black German literature.

Kristine Nielsen received her Ph.D. in art history from the University of Chicago. She is Andrew W. Mellon postdoctoral fellow in the humanities (2010-12) with the Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Nielsen has published on the subject of political iconoclasm in art and public memorials while also serving on the editorial board of the Scandinavian journal, *Ekfrase: Nordisk Tidsskrift for Visuell Kultur*.

Nina Noeske completed her Ph.D. at the Institut für Musikwissenschaft Weimar-Jena in 2005 with a dissertation on new instrumental music in the GDR. In 2006 she led a research group on the New German School and was involved with the new edition of Franz Liszt's complete writings in Weimar. She is currently junior lecturer in the Forschungszentrum Musik und Gender at the Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien Hannover. She is author of *Musikalische Dekonstruktion. Neue Instrumentalmusik in der DDR* (2007), and co-editor of *Zwischen Macht und Freiheit: Neue Musik in der DDR* (2004), *Jahrbuch Musik und Gender* vols 2 and 3 (2009, 2010) and *Musikwissenschaft und Kalter Krieg: Das Beispiel DDR* (2010).

Jonathan Osmond is the author of *Rural Protest in the Weimar Republic* (1993) and *German Reunification: A Reference Guide and Commentary* (1992). Recent projects include the co-edited volumes, *The Workers' and Peasants' State* (2002) and *Power and Culture: Hegemony, Interaction, and Dissent* (2006). He is currently Professor of Modern European History and Pro Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning at Cardiff University.

Laura Silverberg has written articles on East German music, modernism, and Cold War cultural politics that have appeared in a range of publications, including the *Journal of Musicology*, *Nationalities Papers*, and *Current Musicology*. After receiving her PhD in musicology from the University of Pennsylvania, she held a Mellon post-doctoral fellowship at Columbia University. Now the Associate Director of the Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, she is currently working on a book that examines the competing and converging paths of musical development in East and West Germany after the Second World War.

Matthias Tischer received his Ph.D. from the Institut für Musikwissenschaft Weimar-Jena, after which he participated in the international research project, 'Musical Life in Europe'. A recent fellow at the Technische Universität Berlin and Harvard University, he is the author of *Musik in der DDR* (2005), one of the first comprehensive studies of musical activity within the German Democratic Republic, and *Komponieren für und wider den Staat: Paul Dessau in der DDR*

(2009). He currently teaches in the musicology department at the Hochschule für Musik Franz Liszt Weimar.

Silke Wagler studied Art History, Media, and Communications at the Technische Universität Dresden and the Università degli Studi di Firenze. She began working with the Kunstfonds des Freistaates Sachsen, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden in 2002 and since 2003 has served as head of the institution. She has curated numerous exhibitions of GDR art, and most recently co-ordinated the conference 'Emigranten aus der DDR und ihr Weg in die westdeutsche Kunstszene' (2010) in association with the Arbeitskreis Kunst in der DDR.

Amy Wlodarski received her Ph.D. in musicology at the Eastman School of Music and is currently Assistant Professor of Music at Dickinson College. She has published articles on East and West German Holocaust commemoration in the *Journal of Musicology*, the *Eisler-Studien* series on film music, and the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*. Currently, she is completing a manuscript on early Holocaust memorials in music, a project supported by research grants from the Fulbright Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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