

SOCIALIST SUBJECTIVITIES QUEERING EAST GERMANY UNDER HONECKER



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and Katharine White

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Socialist Subjectivities
*Queering East Germany
under Honecker*

EDITED BY
SCOTT HARRISON,
JEFF HAYTON,
AND KATHARINE WHITE

University of Michigan Press *Ann Arbor*

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We dedicate this volume to all those who have at one point or another found themselves on crooked paths of self-making, unsure of what the future might hold. Just as the subjects we explore in the past did not necessarily follow a linear life trajectory, the same is true of the present: we must continuously seek ways to recognize, make room for, cultivate, and find solace in the potentialities individually and collectively contained within us.

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Figure 1. Mikhail Gorbachev and Erich Honecker during the GDR's Fortieth Anniversary National People's Army Parade on October 7, 1989 (Credit: United Archives GmbH—Sven Simon, courtesy of Alamy)

Beyond the Black Hole *1989 and the Narration of East German History*

Scott Harrison, Jeff Hayton, and Katharine White

On October 7, 1989, Mikhail Gorbachev and Erich Honecker observed a military parade in East Berlin celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). A well-known photograph captures the moment: standing on a grandstand, Gorbachev glances down at his watch beside a smiling Honecker (see Figure 1). In light of East Germany's rapid collapse, this photograph has become emblematic of the unreality of the ruling Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*; SED) and its stubborn leadership in the final years of the GDR.¹ On the surface, the image portrays an out-of-touch ruling elite, oblivious to the changes already underway throughout the communist East. Later that day, Gorbachev warned the SED that "life punishes those who come too late" (*Wer zu spät kommt, den bestraft das Leben*), advice seemingly confirmed by subsequent events.² Less than two weeks after the celebration, Honecker was ousted; on November 9, the Berlin Wall was breached; and within a year, the GDR was no more.

With hindsight, we are wont to privilege Gorbachev's impatience over Honecker's smile. Yet this interpretation, while not wrong, is nonetheless incomplete: by reading the future back into the past, such analysis obfuscates other legitimate understandings of this moment. Autumn 1989 has cast a long shadow across the history of the GDR—especially the Honecker era—as events in retrospect seemed to move East Germany inexorably toward demise. Just as black holes consume all that orbits around them, such narratives reduce East German historical subjects in the 1970s and 1980s to the antechamber of collapse, denying their lives any alternative meanings worthy of investigation.

On that day, however, why shouldn't Honecker be smiling? Or put differently: how might we rethink East Germany under Honecker by focusing on his smile? As one may recall, the speed with which East Germany and the rest of the Eastern Bloc imploded caught everyone by surprise: shock suggesting 1989 obscures rather than illuminates our understanding of late socialism.³ For many East Germans, the 1970s and 1980s were marked by competing trends, dynamic processes, and a multiplicity of experiences that cannot be reduced to a single crisis-filled moment. Indeed, as the editors of a recent volume succinctly put it, "There was not one GDR."⁴ If we hope to recover how East Germans lived not one socialism but *many* socialisms, we must move beyond narrating the last decades of the GDR backwards from state demise.⁵ This is not to argue that the momentous events that transpired in 1989/1990 were somehow unimportant; rather, we hope to make space for the many possibilities that East Germans encountered daily in the late socialist period, even if their room for maneuver was gradually shrinking. At the very least, when interpreting the photograph of the fortieth anniversary, we must take seriously not only Gorbachev's impatience but also Honecker's confident smile.

Socialist Subjectivities examines East German lived realities beyond the GDR's long, slow decline. While East Germany certainly ended in dissolution, not all East Germans experienced late socialism in a singular manner. Socialism and the subjectivities that were fashioned through, with, and against the system were neither static nor unidirectional in orientation. Rather, even after a generation of building socialism in the GDR, Easterners in the 1970s and 1980s continued to grow and evolve as they lived a range of socialist presents and pursued a multiplicity of socialist futures up to and even beyond 1989. To be sure, Easterners' daily endeavors were constrained by the limits of "real-existing socialism," not least by the state's repressive security apparatus, its curtailment of civil liberties, and its reinforcement of the normative structures that governed everyday life in the GDR.⁶ Even a cursory glance at the mountainous records of the Ministry for State Security (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*; MfS or Stasi) makes clear the many ways that East Germans regularly encountered surveillance and disciplinary measures in their lives.⁷ And still, regardless of whether East Germans conformed, rebelled, or more likely existed somewhere in between, they were constantly in the process of transforming real-existing socialism in ways that lent considerable dynamism to their lives and society more generally. Such vitality is intrinsic to the very essence of social and cultural modes of being, and yet, when it comes to understanding late socialism, it is all too

often overshadowed by preoccupations with narrating the 1970s and 1980s as dominated by state collapse.⁸

In seeking to recover socialist subjectivities and retheorizing how we might go about doing so, this volume employs a queer method to interrogate East German history and historiography—an approach that forces us to question our own deeply held assumptions about the relationships between temporality, power, and the making of socialist selves. By way of methodological example, let us turn once more to the photograph of Gorbachev seemingly counting down the final moments of state socialism’s existence. A teleological approach to East German history—one that “begins from the end” and reads the history of the Honecker era backward from 1989—would position Gorbachev as seemingly omniscient, recognizing the GDR’s yet to unfold demise. Meanwhile, Honecker epitomizes a myopic leader whose obstinacy renders him willfully oblivious to the predictable, almost inevitable, failure of state socialism.⁹ In this narration of history, both parade attendees and citizens watching from home must have been, like Gorbachev, checking their watches too.

Yet such an interpretation of this photograph—and late socialism writ large—produces and maintains interpretive silences that deliberately ignore any sort of “temporal heterogeneity” during the Honecker era, denying the possibility that East Germans might have imagined the present or future as anything but predictable and foreclosed.¹⁰ Let’s examine a second photograph from this event that captures a panned-out view of the same grandstand (see Figure 2). From this angle, suddenly everything appears slightly queer to the eye.¹¹ Surrounded by dignitaries, officials, security, and photographers, Gorbachev and Honecker fade into the background, rendering it difficult to make out their expressions, let alone register the former’s impatience or the latter’s smugness. Instead, we are confronted with a collection of individuals unaware of the moment that just occurred—caught up in their own ruminations about what the day might bring. By juxtaposing the first photograph with the second, we are reminded that the previous moment was but one of many whose significance is heightened only when embedded within a narrative of socialist collapse.¹² Yet, if we reorient our gaze, we can begin to relieve this moment—and East German history under Honecker—of its perceived fixity. Doing so not only facilitates a reading of this era that privileges unknowingness over certainty, but it also forces us to sacrifice neatness and coherence in the pursuit of other, equally valid, historical meanings.¹³

When we become “disoriented,” we encounter new analytic possibilities and, more importantly, new subjects whose visions of the future disrupt

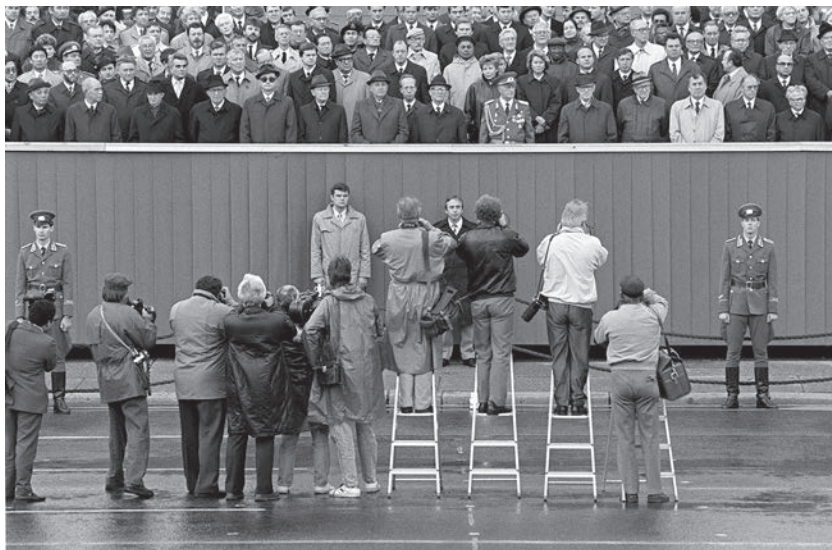


Figure 2. Dignitaries during the GDR's Fortieth Anniversary National People's Army Parade on October 7, 1989 (Credit: Agenzia Sintesi—Fiorani Fabio, courtesy of Alamy)

conventional understandings of late socialism.¹⁴ Queering this moment thus revivifies narratives that are often overlooked in storylines of socialism's demise, while simultaneously illuminating the lifeworlds of our subjects in new and multicolored lights.¹⁵ Ultimately, moving beyond the black hole of 1989 entails a willingness to jettison our normative understandings of East German history to make room for the varied perspectives and praxes that shaped the GDR until it was no more. To recognize the incongruities of the Honecker era is to disabuse ourselves of the notion that we can write a single history of East Germany, compelling us instead to grapple with the crooked lives, unpredictable temporal flows, and realized as well as unrealized futures that people pursued every day under socialism.¹⁶

Socialist Subjects and Queer Temporalities under Honecker

What happens if we relieve East German historical subjects of the conceptual burdens foisted upon them by 1989? By refusing to read the East German past through the lens of 1989, this volume begins to excavate the vast geographies of coterminous presents and unpredictable futures that existed alongside socialism's collapse—in essence, it works to illuminate socialism's

“queer times.”¹⁷ Queer time does not speak exclusively to the lives of queer people but rather to how individuals live nonnormative possibilities in a normative world. Applying queer methods to GDR history allows us to explore the Eastern Bloc as an alternative modernity to the Western liberal-capitalist order, with socialist societies operating in their own heterogenous ways.¹⁸ Moreover, working within the logic of queer time enables us to reanimate East German subjects who were touched, but by no means prefigured, by the continuously evolving socialist system. East Germans lent considerable energy to their society, generating a cacophony of opinions and a diversity of ideas, which, until recently, scholars often obscured by focusing instead on stereotypes of apathy and inertia.¹⁹ Approaching this era from a perspective of queerness allows us to capture how East Germans fashioned not one but many socialisms in the 1970s and 1980s—restoring a certain messiness to a period containing histories that unfolded in anything but a linear trajectory.²⁰

How then do we explore queer temporalities? While there are many ways, the contributors to this volume make clear that *subjectivity* offers a useful tool for recovering past socialisms—and, more to the point, for exploring how East Germans not only survived but lived their own socialist realities.²¹ Regardless of whether one was an apparatchik, artist, or alcoholic, the everyday interactions, experiences, and rituals of late socialism proved crucial to establishing the conceptual frameworks around which subjecthood was constructed. And even though state socialism failed to produce an ideal socialist citizen—an actor with a default identity and a predictable set of self-expressions—as Joan Scott reminds us, it is not “individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience.”²² It was the complex connections and everyday collisions between socialist actors that shook loose alternatives to the socialist system’s normative flow of time, thereby exposing a range of East German subject positions. How exactly this happened depended on context, structures, power, and more. Yet by foregrounding the *fashioning* of socialist subjects, and the iterative nature of socialism itself, the contributions to this volume seek to paint a richer portrait of East Germany during these decades—one that illuminates how East Germans realized their own presents while envisioning alternative futures up to the very moment the GDR disappeared.

Analyzing a multiplicity of East German presents and thinking in terms of the many co-constituted socialist subjects who defined them involves several challenging methodological moves. First, we must cease privileging the state and even society as primary actors, but without losing sight of their

significance. As our authors make clear, socialist subjects acted within a normative framework of state and society without ever being defined solely by them. Second, we must find ways to recover East Germans' disparate modes of being under socialism—recognizing that some saw socialism as reformable, while others viewed it as a dead end, and many more were ambivalent or did their best not to think about it at all.²³ To recognize this is not to argue that the East German state might have somehow endured, or that its subjects wished as much. It is, rather, to reorient our gaze to the many socialist experiences that evolved out of, existed alongside, and caused friction with the GDR's normative order. If we work within the logics of queer time, we can begin to understand how socialist subjects determined their own existences in ways that, at the very least, undermine simplistic interpretations of the GDR based on notions of repression, dissent, conformity, or emancipation. Perhaps most importantly, we can recover how East German subjects imagined varying potentialities for the present—often unbounded by social norms even if only slightly so—as they pursued a range of subject positions in a state whose collapse was impossible to predict.

What Constitutes Socialist Subjectivities?

As scholars have detailed, modern subjectivities have taken many forms as they exist at the intersection of personal agency, political movements, social institutions, discursive power structures, and cultural norms.²⁴ No one has articulated this quite as clearly as Michel Foucault in his musings on the ethos of modernity: “To be modern is not to accept oneself as one is in the flux of the passing moments; it is to take oneself as object of a complex and difficult elaboration.” Indeed, this modernity “compels [one] to face the task of producing [oneself].”²⁵ And yet, there is not a single mold for analyzing the modern subject—or even the various forms that modern subjectivities might take. Rather, self-construction is shaped by the ever-changing circumstances around which individuals navigate their self-understandings and arrangements. Specificity remains essential: just as the transition from early modern to modern selfhood was predicated upon political, social, and cultural currents particular to a given time and place, East Germans elaborated their own complex notions of selfhood in ways that were ideologically informed and relationally shaped through interactions with the broader collective of GDR society during the postwar period. This volume thus takes as its starting point a narrower subset of literature on subjectivities by scholars of the Soviet Bloc who take seriously the twentieth-century socialist projects and the self-making of subjects who lived through them.

Anatoly Pinsky reflects on a set of three definitions in Soviet literature that helps to narrow our approach to East German subjectivities in this regard. The first two conceptions of subjectivity that Pinsky outlines stem from an individual's faculties and experiences. More relevant for our purpose, Pinsky posits a third definition of subjectivity "in a post-structuralist sense" as embodying "an interest in the manifold subjectivities that have existed in recorded human history and in the ways in which these subjectivities are fashioned and fragmented in dialogue with political, social, and cultural institutions and phenomena."²⁶ This definition fits well with the broader conception of subjectivities outlined by Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser and critical gender theorists such as Judith Butler, who encourage us to reject "a whole, coherent subject that preexists speech or action."²⁷ Applying this to the GDR, the contributors to this volume acknowledge the contingent and flexible nature of self-fashioning, as well as the transformative potential that existed within the alternative and yet intersecting paths that subjects pursued under real-existing socialism.

Crucially, Soviet scholars such as Anna Krylova have further criticized the unproblematized "liberal subject" that often serves as a discursive frame for examining socialist societies. As Krylova puts it, we must reconsider "the unarticulated assumptions that underlie the Cold War view of human agency"—that is, human agency as represented by the search for the hidden and repressed liberal subject within the socialist system. Her work productively rethinks the false binaries that scholars implicitly impose on socialist actors, including "indoctrination/resistance, belief/disbelief, faith/cynicism."²⁸ Such binaries are indicative of a longer history of the failures of Cold War scholarship to take seriously the socialist modernity project on its own terms—thereby disregarding the varied experiences and expressions of socialist subjects in the process.²⁹ The contributors to this volume seek to reassess how we go about recovering socialism(s) by investigating our own subject positions, on the one hand, and the subject positions of those whom we write about on the other.

Finally, building on a body of socialist-focused literature is not to suggest that this volume ignores the work of scholars who historicize subjectivities in the postwar capitalist West, in fact quite the opposite. For instance, Joachim Häberlen's recent work on the emotional politics of the alternative Left in West Germany after 1968 suggests a similarity in the way cultural inheritances "shape a subjectivity" and what historical actors *do* with both those inheritances and the experiences associated with them.³⁰ As Häberlen describes, when individuals are confronted with a mode of being, be it neoliberal capitalist or state socialist, they search horizontally for fellow

citizens with whom to question the limits of who they are and what they might become. Of course, subjectivity in the West was rooted in different sociopolitical foundations, and the actualization of these pursuits manifested in their own materializations. Thus, while we recognize that Western individuals are not wholly dissimilar from the East German subjects described in this volume, we seek to specify the axis on which East German subjectivities unfolded.

GDR Historiography and the Making of East German Subjects

The East German past has generated no lack of scholarly attention, from early debates on totalitarianism, to work analyzing the complexities of state, society, and *Alltag* (everyday life), to the recent focus on transnational histories of environmental movements, solidarity, and racialized “othering.”³¹ Theoretical frameworks—from a “thoroughly ruled society” and a “welfare dictatorship” to a “participatory dictatorship” and a “consensus dictatorship”—likewise abound.³² And yet the history of the GDR has been written unevenly. Whereas scholarship on the immediate postwar era of building socialism has been marked by considerable creativity and imaginative explication—from the reconstruction of society to the making of socialist citizens—scholarship on the latter decades has instead been dominated by a search for explanations of the GDR’s systemic decay.³³ Fortunately, this asymmetry has begun to change in exciting ways. In recent years, scholars have challenged how we might approach the late socialist period by complicating the dominant narrative of East Germany’s decline and collapse.

One promising trend in recent scholarship has been the recognition that the socialist system was far from static. Scholars have instead emphasized that even when industrial plans, social initiatives, and renewal projects went awry, East German workers, intellectuals, and officials found ways to reinvent themselves, renew civic engagement, and transform state socialism. We see such efforts in places where we perhaps least expect them—from prefabricated housing complexes and state-organized cultural venues to public squares and citizen garden plots.³⁴ Far from characterizing the 1970s and 1980s as decades of stagnation and apathy, recent literature on the GDR has begun excavating the many ways East Germans pursued their own visions of state socialism and how these endeavors continuously rewrote the normative script. *Socialist Subjectivities* seeks to build on such emergent trends not only by bringing socialist citizens into the fold of our narratives, but also by repositioning them as the purveyors of these transformations. In doing

so, the contributors herein attend to the many subjectivities that Easterners imagined, fought for, and ultimately lived in the 1970s and 1980s in ways that further expand our knowledge of the various histories that unfolded during this period.

It is worth noting that the concept of subjectivities has been relatively underutilized in GDR scholarship—or as Mary Fulbrook concluded, it has remained “a contentious and inadequately explored field.”³⁵ When scholars do embrace the idea of socialist subjectivities, they have tended to privilege the notion of citizens’ retreat into the private sphere where more personal understandings and practices are considered to have manifested themselves.³⁶ One notable exception is earlier work centered around the concept of *Eigen-Sinn*—translated as stubbornness, willfulness, or self-reliance—which explicitly theorizes subjective meanings that emerge in everyday life from the factory floor to the artists’ workshop.³⁷ As Alf Lüdtke, Thomas Lindenberger, and others have demonstrated, the concept of *Eigen-Sinn* rejects one-dimensional equations of actions and attitudes with resistance or compliance and thus seeks to complicate either/or narratives of confrontation and consensus. Yet, whereas *Eigen-Sinn* is concerned predominately with individuals’ ability to navigate power structures, subjectivity is broader, providing a theoretical framework to rethink how historical subjects constituted themselves, recognized one another, and called new potentialities into existence.³⁸

By wedding subjectivities theory to queer theory, we further aim to pay attention to how “orientation,” “direction,” and the very act of “turning” are crucial to subject making in the tradition of scholars such as Judith Butler and Sara Ahmed.³⁹ More specifically, we are interested in the unconventional paths our subjects walked as they went about their daily lives. Such a methodological approach is indebted to scholars of the queer German past, who urge us to conceive of cultural shifts as points of departure rather than “heroic genealogies of arrival” in relation to subjecthood, community building, activism, and societal reform.⁴⁰ We see this, for instance, in the growing scholarship on East German gay and lesbian emancipation movement of the 1980s: while some queer East Germans relished the opportunity to participate actively in public life, others felt stifled by the seemingly hegemonic categories of “gay” and “lesbian” and the perceived duties of identifying as such.⁴¹ To this end, scholars of queer German history have productively demonstrated that not all people face, turn, or move in the same direction while navigating sociocultural fault lines—an intervention we hope both to recognize and elaborate upon in this volume.

Ultimately, it is the attention of queer theorists to the deliberate attempts of subjects to slow down time and wade within its interstices to consider what might come next—and who one might *become* next—that makes our work of historicizing East German subjectivities during the Honecker era possible. As Elizabeth Freeman notes, modern states implant a “*chrononormativity*” in the lives of subjects that causes them to cease questioning how and why the timelines of one’s life flows in one particular direction; however, “occasional [temporal] disruptions” such as cultural upheavals, allow subjects to reconsider the extent to which they wish to reproduce and pass on cultural inheritances—from societal rituals to reproductive expectations—if at all.⁴² When we grapple with, reshape, knock down, and pass on revised cultural itineraries to our compatriots, we create new regimes of time with unpredictable subject possibilities. It is the refashioning of the self in relation to socialist heterochronicity that this volume tracks. For us, the central question of the Honecker era, then, is how subjects understood socialism at a given moment in a relational manner—for example, while facing fellow subjects—in ways that allowed them to make sense of their lives and the system as a whole.

In adopting a queer lens, we caution that it is nonetheless important to keep in mind that East Germans perpetuated various forms of normative violence when it came to sex, gender, race, and much else besides, even (or especially) as they lived out their own versions of state socialism. As scholars, we must be careful to recognize the normative power structures that the subjects we write about reinforced in their daily lives, even as they contended with certain rituals, rites-of-passage, and potentialities. As Jennifer Evans points out, “When we deny our own complicity in propping up foreclosed knowledge formations, we neglect valuable opportunities to think anew about the normativizing impulses within queer history writing itself, including assumptions around like-mindedness and homogeneity and also how queer identities and methods can themselves be totalizing and harmful.”⁴³ Honecker surely upheld a normative socialist order as he defied Gorbachev’s warning that time might pass him by. We get just a small taste of this in the photographs analyzed at the outset, which capture an almost entirely male, mostly white-appearing, and perhaps hetero-seeming group of dignitaries and functionaries that the SED invited up on the grandstand. Whether consciously or not, the dissidents, functionaries, soldiers, workers, artists, and others in the following chapters often reinforced the central power dynamics of marginalization, othering, and exclusion that marked socialist society more broadly. In acknowledging as much, we are reminded

that subject formation—socialist or otherwise—elides both easy binaries and uncomplicated teleological readings of the past.

Honecker's Many Germanys

When Erich Honecker replaced Walter Ulbricht as First Secretary of the SED in 1971, his ascent to power was greeted with cautious hope. In contrast to Ulbricht, who was viewed as a hard-liner, Honecker was considered less ideologically rigid and more accommodating to the needs of East German citizens. And in the coming years, these initial impressions seemed to hold true. Over the next two decades, he spearheaded the push toward “consumer socialism” under his slogan of “Unity of social and economic policy,” whereby East German living standards were raised with increased material goods, housing, and leisure opportunities. Social mobility was increasingly possible; education, broad; and social services, extensive. Honecker also secured several notable foreign policy successes such as the Basic Treaty normalizing East-West German relations (as well as gaining broader recognition for the GDR) in 1972, GDR admission to the United Nations in 1973, and his long-awaited visit to the Federal Republic with full state honors in 1987.

Simultaneously, these decades also witnessed increasing complications that destabilized East German society and eroded SED authority. The early liberalization of cultural and intellectual life embodied by Honecker’s encouragement of “no taboos” in 1972 was soon challenged by critical voices, ending with the expulsion of singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann in 1976, an event sparking protests and disillusionment. Under Honecker, the MfS was significantly expanded and demarcation (*Abgrenzung*) from the West became official policy. In 1978, an agreement with the Protestant Church leadership secured religious autonomy in exchange for political acquiescence, an accord that protected dissident activities inside church walls. And already by the late 1970s, growing dysfunction began to characterize East German economic life, which could support neither state expenditures nor citizen demands. When these struggles were intensified by the debt crisis in the 1980s, East Germans often turned to the “second economy” to make up the shortfall, a solution that only exacerbated the problems. Worse, by the mid-1980s, activists were becoming increasingly public with their criticisms of the SED, despite Stasi efforts to neutralize political opposition. When Gorbachev glanced at his watch on the grandstand with Honecker in 1989, East Germany’s time perhaps could have seemed almost up.

The history of East Germany in the 1970s and 1980s is thus typically nar-

rated as a story of early expectations dashed by stubborn political leaders, socioeconomic dysfunction, growing unrest, and eventual collapse. In retrospect, events certainly substantiate this interpretation. Yet, as the authors of this volume demonstrate, other legitimate readings of these decades also exist, as East Germans experienced, lived, and understood state socialism heterogeneously. The Honecker years are critical in this regard. The move from Ulbricht to Honecker inaugurated a subtle but significant transformation in socialist expectations and realities.⁴⁴ By proclaiming an end to the building phase of socialism, Honecker encouraged GDR citizens to imagine new socialisms, and even to pursue them: in the influential words of Reinhart Koselleck, East Germans' "spaces of experience" were broadened thanks to a more expansive "horizon of expectations."⁴⁵ No longer the preserve of the future, socialism became a reality of the here and now, and, as the authors of this volume illustrate, countless East Germans took Honecker up on this offer. In the 1970s and 1980s especially, East German citizens engaged in myriad pursuits and adopted ever-shifting ways of being that continued to sculpt the contours of real-existing socialism right up until the GDR ceased to exist.



Socialist Subjectivities navigates East German subject making across three thematic sections, each of which consists of contributions detailing how subjects challenged normative socialist structures as they fashioned their own queer lifepaths. In section 1 ("Blurred Lines: Locating Subjectivities between Ideology, Practice, and Everyday Life"), Mary Fulbrook examines the GDR as a *post*-Nazi state by tracing the subject positions of individuals who lived one chapter of their lives in the Third Reich and another in East Germany. It is tempting to treat their lives synchronically: first they were Nazis, then—because of ideological indoctrination or necessity, or both—they became socialists. But such an approach misses the complexities of subject making. Instead, Fulbrook reveals how the Nazi past continued to exist diachronically under socialism as former Nazis were brought to trial in the 1980s, affecting their children through intergenerational fallout. To be "outed" in the 1980s as a Nazi, then, was to reveal a temporal incongruity in East German society. By contrast, Markus Wahl explores another type of "outing"—in this case, the disclosure of oneself as an alcoholic seeking recovery. Recognizing alcohol addiction as a disease was not only to buck the normative drinking culture in the GDR but also to make apparent a condition official ideology claimed did not exist: alcohol abuse under socialism. Recovery thus required nontradi-

tional methods. As Wahl effectively shows, doctors went to great lengths to transform clinics' practices and environments in ways that allowed patients to heal and even thrive at the local level. While their chapters are diverse in scope, Fulbrook and Wahl demonstrate that East German subjects often struggled to navigate their own complex materializations under Honecker's normative socialist order.

In chapter 3, Katharine White explores convergences and divergences in the lifework of independent singer-songwriter Bettina Wegner and state cultural functionary Philipp Dyck at the House of Young Talents (*Haus der jungen Talente*; HdjT). Given their proclivities, these two could easily be painted in binary terms: one was an artist, the other, an apparatchik. Yet by tracing the distinct cadences, abrupt turns, and eventual ruptures in their lives, White makes clear how Wegner and Dyck existed not in spite of but rather in relation to one another as they both laid claim to the official cultural production process. In chapter 4, Tom Smith examines how queer East Germans built relationships, friendships, and community in the National People's Army (*Nationale Volksarmee*; NVA). Despite official rhetoric and policy, the existence of queer subjects in this avowedly "straight" institution often forced authorities to recognize same-sex desire among soldiers in the 1980s. Interestingly, we even find a certain slippage in the archives, as Stasi reports leave traces of the queer ways of the NVA itself—apparent through the institutional obsession over and reproduction of the intimate lifeworlds of queer subjects. Taken together, the chapters in section 1 emphasize how state and institutional frameworks held real import in the lives of individuals under Honecker, and how these individuals, in turn, changed institutions and normative structures through their alternative, incongruent, and queer ways of being.

Section 2 ("Interpreting Socialist Realities: Knowledge, Navigation, and Subject Formation") analyzes how East German citizens produced knowledge as they inhabited and steered their own courses through socialism's terrain of coterminous temporalities. In chapter 5, Catrina de Rivera highlights the "in-between" subject position that Christa Wolf occupied as she crafted her 1983 masterwork, *Cassandra*. Through a close reading of the novel, de Rivera illuminates Wolf's elaborations on feminist subjectivity, complicating the notion that Wolf exhibited a distinctly Western or Eastern feminist proclivity. Transporting her readers to ancient Troy, Wolf instead offers us something radically different: an innovative political praxis rooted in gender equality—a third way of "love, care, and nonviolence" that neither wholly embraced nor rejected feminist politics on display in East or

West. In chapter 6, Kyrill Kunakhovich reconsiders how East German dissident subjectivities came to be fashioned through transnational epistolary exchanges. In Kunakhovich's text, East German dissident Gert Neumann and his Polish contemporary Adam Michnik ponder the potentialities, as well as limitations, of solidarity and Solidarity in their respective realities. Whereas Michnik envisioned societal reform as possible in a state whose authorities sought to mimic the authentic bonds generated by citizens at the grass roots, Neumann felt that the East German state had rendered solidarity impossible. What links de Rivera's and Kunakhovich's essays is that their subjects hardly saw dissidence as predictable, one-dimensional, or even fully graspable. There was, simply put, never a default dissident subjectivity to locate in the GDR.

In chapter 7, Scott Harrison highlights the range of subjective positions that became available for same-sex desiring women in East Germany once they abandoned the normative expectations of heterosexual marriage and its associated temporal flow. In lesbian-only activist and affinity groups, women who loved women produced wholly new modes of being as they reveled in "the queer here and now." We see this especially among the readers of the underground journal *frau anders* (miss different), who often eschewed ideas of forming a coherent lesbian emancipation movement and instead chose to slow down time just enough to consider who they might become within socialism. Chapter 8, by Larissa R. Stiglich, sees East Germans in Eisenhüttenstadt as "showing up for socialism" by requesting that state functionaries fulfill their end of the social contract even in the late 1980s. Stiglich mines citizen-written petitions (*Eingaben*) to expose how Eisenhüttenstädters—who had patiently devoted their energies to help construct socialism—expected a certain reciprocity just as the state was on the cusp of collapse. What is especially intriguing about this chapter is how the practice of writing *Eingaben* in Eisenhüttenstadt continued through the very end of the GDR, creating its own sort of "temporal heterogeneity" in this city. In their own ways, Stiglich's and Harrison's chapters both reveal how citizens who wanted more out of socialism occupied a temporal lag as they built bonds of civic intimacy right through the end of the GDR.

In chapter 9, Mor Geller offers us a way to recover socialist subjectivities in an unlikely medium by analyzing the responses of moviegoers to opinion polls developed in the 1970s and 1980s by social scientists at the Central Institute for Youth Research (*Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung*). Ostensibly, such surveys were designed to help cultural functionaries gauge the moods and tastes of film audiences. However, Geller compellingly argues

that opinion polls also functioned as a two-way channel of communication in which citizens outlined how they hoped film—and their lives under socialism—might be refashioned in the future. As the chapters in this section reveal, citizens who engaged in knowledge production about the world they inhabited also provided themselves with the tools to navigate the many contours of East German socialism.

Section 3 (“Fashioning Socialist Selves: Activism, Subversion, and Public Engagement”) reconsiders the extent to which groups that were often considered antagonistic to the regime constructed their subject positions through engagement with the socialist project and one another. In chapter 10, Briana Smith illuminates how state-supported artists used common spaces—from neighborhood streets to city squares—to revitalize public culture during the 1970s and 1980s. While public art exhibitions may have rubbed against official understandings of socialism, as Smith argues, many state-sponsored artists nonetheless saw themselves as engaged citizens seeking to make art accessible and meaningful to East Germans. The actions and exhibitions they staged embraced creativity, fantasy, and the provocative power of play in ways that allowed communities to reimagine social relationships and socialist community. In a similar vein, Jeff Hayton demonstrates how East German punks, rather than retreating into some sort of subcultural niche, instead sought to provoke fellow citizens. As Hayton details, punks disrupted the status quo since their self-actualization depended on societal responses. As interactions between subculture and society changed over time, so too did understandings of punk; by the end of the 1980s, punk was being integrated into state cultural practices, assimilation that youths viewed uneasily since it robbed them of an antagonistic dialectic process that was necessary for their subject formation. In elucidating how artists and anarchists navigated subject formation in public, Smith and Hayton make us question what subversion and activism looked like in the GDR during the 1980s.

Exploring what it meant for East Germans to inhabit multiple activist subjectivities within the semiautonomous spaces of the Protestant Church, Julia E. Ault challenges conventional understandings of civic movements in the 1980s. Focusing on East Germans in environmental and gay rights groups, she traces the overlaps, fissures, and discord that emerged across these movements as activists were animated by different motives. From their ethical concerns and scientific convictions to their engagement in civil disobedience and oppositional activity, activists were often divided rather than united in their endeavors—splits that productively complicate narratives of cohesive social movements. Furthermore, as Ault shows, activists were

steadfast in pursuing their own versions of a better socialist future even if that ultimately meant working within state structures. In chapter 13, Timothy Scott Brown reconsiders the political career of the East German dissident Rudolf Bahro whose book *Die Alternative* (1977)—banned in the East and published in the West—criticized the bureaucratic rule of the Communist party in the GDR. As Brown argues, until his arrest and deportation, Bahro existed both within and outside official channels (in the East and in the West), and his activities should thus be seen as part of a transnational impulse toward socialist democracy that characterized the period after 1968. In detailing the twists and turns of activist lives, both Ault and Brown demonstrate how dissenting activity should be understood as not simply subverting state socialism but rather as part of larger ethical and emancipatory impulses whose orientations very often depended on subjective experiences.

Finally, in the epilogue, Eli Rubin explores what it means to queer GDR history and why the field benefits from this type of methodological intervention. As the Cold War recedes ever further into the past, Rubin suggests that such distance now allows scholars to approach East Germany on its own terms rather than as a proxy for ideological confrontation and system competition. Looking to the future, Rubin suggests that the work done in *Socialist Subjectivities* is indicative of a field pluralizing its object of study and the analytical benefits that come from such a broadening. What ultimately ties the essays in this volume together is the notion that socialist self-making occurred under the specific conditions of late socialism—conditions that require us to search for a language that allows us to reconstruct the various states of existence that marked one’s lifeworlds in a society past. What further binds us is a recognition that humans are not essentialized subjects but rather the product of our own complex, socially constructed, interpretive realities—whereby we do not live one present nor imagine one future but live a plurality of presents and imagine a multiplicity of futures.

Notes

1. See, for example, the photo in the German Historical Institute’s “German History in Documents and Images” collection: https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=3031 (accessed January 22, 2024).

2. Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 156; and Heinrich August Winkler, *Germany: The Long Road West: Volume 2: 1933–1990*, trans. Alexander J. Sager (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 453. Gorbachev did not utter this exact phrase; however, his comments were loosely translated as such at the time.

3. See Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 1–35.

4. Christopher Banditt, Nadine Jenke, and Sophie Lange, “Die DDR im Plural: Einleitung,” in *DDR im Plural: Ostdeutsche Vergangenheiten und ihre Gegenwart*, ed. Christopher Banditt, Nadine Jenke, and Sophie Lange (Berlin: Metropol, 2023), 13. The concept of “multiplicity” draws on Katherine Pence and Paul Bett’s theorization of state socialism as one of multiple alternative modernities. See “Introduction” in *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, ed. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 10–13.

5. For a similar criticism of interpreting the history of the Federal Republic through the lens of 1989/1990, see Jennifer L. Allen, “Against the 1989–1990 Ending Myth,” *Central European History* 52, no. 1 (2019): 125–147.

6. For an example of one critical constraint—the Berlin Wall—see Patrick Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall: East Germany and the Frontiers of Power* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Pertti Aho, *Death at the Berlin Wall* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Hope M. Harrison, *After the Berlin Wall: Memory and the Making of the New Germany, 1989 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

7. On the East German secret police, see, for example, Jens Gieseke, *The History of the Stasi: East Germany’s Secret Police, 1945–1990*, trans. David Burnett (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014); Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, *Stasi konkret: Überwachung und Repression in der DDR* (Munich: Beck Verlag, 2013); and Gary Bruce, *The Firm: The Inside Story of the Stasi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

8. See Yurchak’s critique in *Everything Was Forever*, 27–29.

9. See Mark Kramer, “1989 and Eastern Europe: Reflections and Analyses,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 9 (2011): 1576–1578.

10. On “temporal heterogeneity,” see Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 10–11; and Jennifer V. Evans, “Introduction: Why Queer German History?” *German History* 34, no. 3 (2016): 371–384, here 376.

11. See Sara Ahmed’s explication of “queer moments” in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 1–3, 65–67. See also Eli Rubin’s epilogue to *Socialist Subjectivities: Queering East Germany under Honecker*, ed. Scott Harrison, Jeff Hayton, and Katharine White (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2025), 293–295, where he expounds on Ahmed’s theory.

12. The fortieth anniversary events feature in most narratives of the GDR’s collapse. See, for example, Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, *End Game: The 1989 Revolution in East Germany*, trans. Patricia C. Sutcliffe (New York: Berghahn Books, 2022), 321–327; Hans-Hermann Hertle, *Sofort, unverzüglich: Die Chronik des Mauerfalls* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2019), 44–45; Mary Elise Sarotte, *The Collapse: The Accidental Opening of the Berlin Wall* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 44–47.

13. As Jack Halberstam notes, approaching history from a position of “not knowing” reveals how subjects inhabited “more surprising ways of [having been] in the world” than previously imagined. See Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 2–4, 147–148.

14. On “orientation” and “disorientation,” see Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 1–5.

15. Evans, "Introduction: Why Queer German History?," 371–376; and Samuel Clowes Huneke, "A Queer Wall in the Head: Using Oral Histories to Map Gay Desire across Cold War Germany," *German Studies Review* 45, no. 3 (2022): 495–515.

16. On "crooked" lifelines, see Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 66–67. On using queer methods to expand terrains of historical production, see Helmut Puff, "After the History of (Male) Homosexuality," in *After the History of Sexuality: German Genealogies with and Beyond Foucault*, ed. Scott Spector, Helmut Puff, and Dagmar Herzog (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 23–24.

17. Freeman, *Time Binds*; Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); and Jeffrey Weeks, *Making Sexual History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 181–193.

18. Pence and Betts, "Introduction," 10–13; and Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 9.

19. See, for example, Samuel Clowes Huneke, "East German History and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy," *Central European History* 55, no. 4 (2022): 576–586.

20. Evans, "Introduction: Why Queer German History?" 375. See also Kyle Frackman and Ervin Malakaj, "Introduction: Approaches to Queer Temporalities in German Studies," *Monatshefte* 114, no. 3 (2022): 353–362; and Leila J. Rupp, "What's Queer Got To Do With It?" *Reviews in American History* 38, no. 2 (2010): 189–198, here 193.

21. In defining socialist subjectivities, see especially Anna Krylova, "The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 1 (2000): 146.

22. Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 773–797, here 779.

23. This counters, for instance, approaches such as Steven Pfaff, *Exit-Voice Dynamics and the Collapse of East Germany: The Crisis of Leninism and the Revolution of 1989* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

24. On modern, Western selfhood, see Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

25. Michel Foucault articulates a notion of modern man as envisioned by Charles Baudelaire in "What Is Enlightenment?," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 41–42. "One/oneself" have been substituted here for the original "him/himself" in the quoted text.

26. Anatoly Pinsky, "Subjectivity after Stalin," *Russian Studies in History* 58, no. 2–3 (2019): 79–88, here 80. Other works on socialist subjectivities include Epp Annus, "Rethinking Soviet Selfhood in the Era of the Anthropocene: From the Foucauldian Paradigm to the Naturecultural Theory of the Subject," *Slavic Review* 82, no. 2 (2023): 401–422; Arthur Clech, "Between Labor Camp and the Clinic: Tema or the Shared Forms of Late Soviet Homosexual Subjectivities," *Slavic Review* 77, no. 1 (2018): 6–29; Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 9–14; Ronald Grigor Suny, "On Ideology, Subjectiv-

ity, and Modernity: Disparate Thoughts about Doing Soviet History,” *Russian History* 35, no. 1/2 (2008): 251–258; Choi Chatterjee and Karen Petrone, “Models of Selfhood and Subjectivity: The Soviet Case in Historical Perspective,” *Slavic Review* 67, no. 4 (2008): 967–986; Anna Krylova, “In Their Own Words? Soviet Women Writers and the Search for Self,” in *A History of Women’s Writing in Russia*, ed. Adele Marie Barker and Jehanne M. Gheith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 243–263; Eric Naiman, “On Soviet Subjects and the Scholars Who Make Them,” *The Russian Review* 60, no. 3 (2001): 307–315; and Katrin Sieg, “Sex, Subjectivity and Socialism: Feminist Discourses in East Germany,” in *Genders 22: Postcommunism and the Body Politic*, ed. Ellen Berry (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 105–133. For criticism of subjectivities, see Aleksandr Ėtkind, “Soviet Subjectivity: Torture for the Sake of Salvation?,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6, no. 1 (2005): 171–186.

27. Pinsky, “Subjectivity after Stalin,” 80. On subjectivity in gender and queer studies, see especially Judith Butler, “Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All,” in “Depositions: Althusser, Balibar, Macherey, and the Labor of Reading,” special issue, *Yale French Studies*, no. 88 (1995): 6–26; Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 1–23; and Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 14–16.

28. Krylova, “The Tenacious Liberal Subject,” 120.

29. See Pence and Betts, “Introduction,” 17–21.

30. Joachim C. Häberlen, *The Emotional Politics of the Alternative Left: West Germany, 1968–1984* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 22.

31. On the latter themes, see especially Ned Richardson-Little and Lauren Stokes, “Bordering the GDR: Everyday Transnationalism, Global Entanglements and Regimes of Mobility at the Edges of East Germany,” *Central European History* 56, no. 2 (2023): 159–172; “Forum: What’s Next? Historical Research on the GDR Three Decades after German Unification,” *German History* 41, no. 2 (2023): 279–296; and Quinn Slobodian, ed., *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015).

32. For recent reviews of the literature, see Jens Gieseke, “After the Battles: The History of East German Society and Its Sources,” *German History* 36, no. 4 (2018): 598–620; Dierk Hoffmann, Michael Schwartz, and Hermann Wentker, “Die DDR als Chance: Desiderate und Perspektiven künftiger Forschung,” in *Die DDR als Chance: Neue Perspektiven auf ein altes Thema*, ed. Ulrich Mähler (Berlin: Metropol, 2016), 23–70; Stefanie Eisenhuth, Hanno Hochmuth, and Konrad Jarausch, “Alles andere als ausgeforscht: Aktuelle Erweiterungen der DDR-Forschung,” *Deutschland Archiv* (January 11, 2016); and Andrew Port, “Introduction: The Banalities of East German Historiography,” in *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler*, ed. Mary Fulbrook and Andrew I. Port (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 1–32.

33. Even seminal volumes on the GDR largely disregard the Honecker period. See Pence and Betts, “Introduction,” 22; and Port, “Introduction: The Banalities of East German Historiography,” 19–20.

34. For recent works covering the final decades of the GDR, see Marcia C. Schenck, *Remembering African Labor Migration to the Second World: Socialist Mobili-*

ties between Angola, Mozambique, and East Germany (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023); Sara Blaylock, *Parallel Public: Experimental Art in Late East Germany* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2022); Jeff Hayton, *Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock in East and West Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); Kyrill Kunakhovich, *Communism's Public Sphere: Culture as Politics in Cold War Poland and East Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022); Briana J. Smith, *Free Berlin: Art, Urban Politics, and Everyday Life* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2022); Julia E. Ault, *Saving Nature under Socialism: Transnational Environmentalism in East Germany, 1968–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Andrew Demshuk, *Bowling for Communism: Urban Ingenuity at the End of East Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020); Thomas Fleischman, *Communist Pigs: An Animal History of East Germany's Rise and Fall* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020); Ned Richardson-Little, *The Human Rights Dictatorship: Socialism, Global Solidarity and Revolution in East Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Tom Smith, *Comrades in Arms: Military Masculinities in East German Culture* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2020); Seth Howes, *Moving Images on the Margins: Experimental Film in Late Socialist East Germany* (Rochester: Camden House, 2019); Markus Wahl, *Medical Memories and Experiences in Postwar East Germany: Treatments of the Past* (London: Routledge, 2019); Eli Rubin, *Amnesiopolis: Modernity, Space, and Memory in East Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); and Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

35. Mary Fulbrook, "Conclusion: Structures and Subjectivities in GDR History," in *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler*, ed. Mary Fulbrook and Andrew I. Port (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 279.

36. Günter Gaus, *Wo Deutschland Liegt: Eine Ortsbestimmung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1983). For a recent and sophisticated concept of the private sphere, see Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

37. Alf Lütke, "Geschichte und Eigensinn," in *Alltagskultur, Subjektivität und Geschichte. Zur Theorie und Praxis von Alltagsgeschichte*, ed. Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1994), 139–153; Alf Lütke, ed., *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, trans. William Templer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Thomas Lindenberger, "Die Diktatur der Grenzen: Zur Einleitung," in *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur: Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR*, ed. Thomas Lindenberger (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999), 13–44.

38. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel initially posited a notion of *Eigen-Sinn* with the slave's development of consciousness or a "mind of one's own" and a "self-will" in the slave-master dialectic. See *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, foreword by J. N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 119, 121. Louis Althusser further worked out a broader notion of the subject as socially constructed—as he states, "ideology interpolates individuals as subjects." See *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (New York: Verso, 2014), 227.

39. Butler, "Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All," 6–13; and Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 12–16.

40. Evans, "Introduction: Why Queer German History?" 372.

41. Samuel Clowes Huneke, *States of Liberation: Gay Men between Dictatorship and Democracy in Cold War Germany* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022). See also Teresa Tammer, "Warme Brüder" im Kalten Krieg: Die DDR Schwulenbewegung und das geteilte Deutschland in den 1970er und 1980er Jahren (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2023); Maria Bühner, "The Rise of a New Consciousness: Lesbian Activism in East Germany in the 1980s," in *The Politics of Authenticity: Countercultures and Radical Movements across the Iron Curtain, 1968–1989*, ed. Joachim C. Häberlen, Mark Keck-Szajbel, and Kate Mahoney (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), 151–173; and Jennifer V. Evans, "Seeing Subjectivity: Erotic Photography and the Optics of Desire," *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 2 (2013): 430–462.

42. Freeman draws on Pierre Bourdieu's work on "chrononormativity," in Freeman, *Time Binds*, 3–4; on temporal shifts and "occasional disruptions" by queer subjects see 7 in the same work.

43. Jennifer V. Evans, *The Queer Art of History: Queer Kinship After Fascism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2023), 18–19.

44. On changed expectations following Honecker's ascension, see Stefan Wolle, *Die heile Welt der Diktatur: Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR 1971–1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1998), 40–48.

45. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, introduction and trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

Section One

Blurred Lines

*Locating Subjectivities between Ideology,
Practice, and Everyday Life*

The GDR as a ‘Post-Nazi Society’ *Preliminary Reflections*

Mary Fulbrook

As the editors point out in their introduction, “Queer time does not speak exclusively to the lives of queer people but rather to how individuals live nonnormative possibilities in a normative world.”¹ Throughout this volume, “queering” the history of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) is understood in this broader sense, while also intimating a distinctive methodological approach. Let me highlight three aspects in particular that are of relevance here.

First, the notion of queering is used to highlight the multiplicity of temporalities, in contrast to supposedly “straight” time with a clear line of direction, and in contrast to teleological readings of the past with the alleged “benefit of hindsight,” in this case the *telos* of 1989. This issue has long garnered attention across different theoretical traditions: in the oft-repeated phrase about the “nonsimultaneity of the simultaneous,” in critiques of other teleological interpretations (such as the Whig theory of history in Britain), and in pleas to be aware of the relative openness of history even if some developments would appear less likely than others. Theoretically aware historians would also generally agree that the overall research question determines the selection criteria for what is relevant; thus, the overwhelming initial interest in the GDR’s collapse was understandable in its immediate aftermath. But over the following decades, the focus has widened to other aspects of life under “real-existing socialism,” and in this context, particularly the “simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous” both across society and *within* individuals, as people lived in a multiplicity of temporalities, lifeworlds, and potential or aspirational futures, without prior knowledge of the ways certain routes forward would foreclose and others open up.

Second, the approach highlights questions around non-normative subject formation; specifically, constructing lived alternatives to a dominant normativity in any particular sphere (as, for example, heteronormativity with regard to sexuality). In the broader interpretation, then, queering relates centrally to questions that have long been at the heart of some approaches to GDR history, and indeed also other regimes, including Nazi Germany: In what ways do the structural and ideological parameters of life, the practices, policies and institutions embodying dominant norms, affect and partially shape those seeking to make their lives within intrusive regimes that significantly narrow the range of the permissible? How do people change by attempting self-realization in circumstances not of their own choosing? And what are the longer-term implications of how they variously engage with, perform, adapt, subvert, or even internalize and normalize, dominant norms? In this approach, people are conceived not as discrete individuals existing in some sense outside of history but rather as intrinsically relational selves, with subjectivities informed by ever-shifting webs of interpersonal relationships—even if intrinsic aptitudes, past experiences, internalized moral codes, and so on constrain and pattern what is possible (individuals are not infinitely malleable). Moreover, this approach breaks down rigid distinctions between “state” and “society” since asymmetrical interactions mutually affect what is possible, but to varying degrees, given the often-radical unevenness of power relations and resources.

Thirdly, the concept of queering draws attention to the multiple perspectives from which objects may be viewed, the potential for looking at things from new angles, and the need for awareness of positionality. The implication—clearly evident in some of the post-1989 controversies—is that the position of the observer may color evaluations and inhibit more open analysis of the past. This, too, is a question that has long been debated in different terms (as in repeated controversies on objectivity and value freedom), but needs constantly re-posing in one form or another.

This chapter, by focusing on former Nazi perpetrators who were brought to trial in the GDR as late as the 1980s, throws a spotlight on subjects who may not instantly appear to be the obvious focus of any queering of history, nor the kinds of actors who might be held to have constructed “alternative socialist subjectivities.” Yet, ironically, this is precisely what many former Nazis in the GDR effectively did. In their attempts to build new lives in the self-proclaimed “antifascist state,” those previously implicated in Nazi crimes often transformed themselves into apparently model socialist citizens. When significant former perpetrators were later uncovered and brought to trial,

their often impeccable records of commitment to socialist ideals and activities, particularly in the sphere of work, seemed extraordinary. Some individuals had evidently succeeded, for nearly forty years, in constructing and sustaining radically new “socialist” identities. Such self-transformation was probably never complete; yet it seems to have been extraordinarily successful in some cases. We can safely assume that these were merely the tip of a far larger iceberg, given widespread complicity in Nazi crimes in ways large and small. Former Nazis not only adjusted their outward behaviors and their life stories for others but also significantly altered their own outlooks and practices. This radical refashioning of the self seems in some cases, as we shall see, to have been so complete that even their own children had little or no inkling of their Nazi past.

Moreover, focusing both on those who had lived through the Nazi era—and particularly those who had become embroiled in Nazi violence or tainted by complicity—and also on the following generations who grew up within the GDR serves to reveal intergenerational tensions and to illuminate how people are shaped not only by present challenges but also by the sometimes hidden or repressed legacies of the past. Particularly in a century of radical regime changes punctuated by massive collective violence, a generational approach is vital.²

Viewing the GDR diachronically in this way provides a different perspective from approaches that treat the country’s history synchronically and concentrate primarily on relations between “state” and “society” in a communist dictatorship. To explore GDR history rather in terms of multiple temporalities, alternative subjectivities, and specifically as a post-Nazi society can highlight some underlying currents and reverberations of the past that may paradoxically have contributed to societal stability and the formation of “socialist sensibilities” even in the final decade of the GDR’s existence, when its official legitimization as an “antifascist state” was facing significant challenges.

The Double Lives of Good Citizens – Under Nazism and Communism

What evidence do we have of the lives and attitudes of those who had previously been active Nazis and subsequently lived under communist rule? By the early 1970s, with the reformulation of relations with West Germany and international recognition of the GDR, it seemed evident to most East Germans that, however much they might dislike the only too evident physi-

cal restraints, material shortages, and repression by the Ministry for State Security (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*; MfS or Stasi), they had to make their lives as best they could. Even convinced former Nazis amended everyday practices to the challenges of the social and political structures of real-existing socialism under Honecker. People who had lived through the Nazi period as adults, including those who had been variously implicated in Nazi crimes, adjusted at least their outward behaviors, playing according to the rules of the new regime in the GDR. Those former Nazis who managed to evade detection—whether guilty of crimes on the scale of local denunciations and exploitation of forced laborers, or involvement in more distant atrocities—could, if they wished, keep their heads down and silently assent to the effective exoneration afforded by the antifascist myth.³ Some former Nazis found that taking on more active roles affirming commitment to the building of socialism assisted their transformation. A few who engaged in significant personal refashioning even seem to have come to believe their own narratives, or to have converted to such an extent that they barely remembered or could recognize themselves in a Nazi past. While ambivalent subjectivities are never entirely accessible to later researchers, patterns of self-representation do suggest widely varying degrees of transformation. (Indeed, the same could be said of the earlier transformation of many Germans into apparently ardent Nazis. For some, with the development of a new habitus in 1930s Germany, seeing the world in nazified and racialized terms became effectively “second nature”; it was then easier to see the victims of Nazi persecution as “other” in the war against “Judeo-Bolshevism.”⁴)

Quite what the scale of this double transformation might have been is hard to assess. A crime on the scale of the Holocaust, with more than six million victims across Europe, had required many perpetrators and accomplices in an array of roles. The numbers of those who had in some way sustained the Nazi regime and the machinery of mass murder can be calculated in various ways: the thousands who were in the notorious *Einsatzgruppen*, or the SS troops who were ideologically primed to kill, or the specialists running the extermination camps; the tens of thousands of “ordinary men” called up in police battalions charged with shooting Jewish civilians at point-blank range, and the hundreds of thousands (perhaps between a quarter of a million and three-quarters of a million) of Wehrmacht soldiers on the eastern front who facilitated or participated in the mass murder of Jews and “partisans”; the many hundreds of thousands of civilians who assisted in expropriations, deportations, ghettoization, or the administration of occupied territories; and the millions who benefitted in one way or another from

the exploitation of forced labor or the removal and murder of Jews. Collaboration and complicity were to be found across Europe, varying according to local conditions; but in Germany, participation in the Nazi project was closely tied with a sense of identity as a member of the National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community). This was inevitably severely challenged in the conditions of total defeat in 1945, and even more so when those former Nazis who lived in eastern Germany, and who had so recently fought against the "Judeo-Bolshevik" enemy, found they had to adapt to living under communist rule. Even so, many successfully integrated into the East German regime, often rising up the ranks of communist organizations.⁵

Many people had, of course, only been small cogs in the Nazi regime, conforming only to get through in some way; and their main concern after 1945 was again a matter of personal survival and rebuilding their lives. The variably stringent denazification procedures and the numerous small trials of the early postwar years highlighted just how many had been implicated in practices of discrimination and persecution during the Nazi era. But, as in the West, the vast majority of GDR citizens during the course of the 1950s were effectively exonerated, both in official representations of historical culpability and in the cessation of trials for minor offences. The often apparently seamless rehabilitation and integration into the newly founded "antifascist state" of the many hundreds of thousands who had previously been in some way complicit under Nazism remains to be explored in more detail.

Those who had been more actively involved in larger crimes and whose past became exposed only relatively late in the history of the GDR were, of course, far from typical. Yet their cases, precisely because they were both more extreme and explicitly laid bare in court proceedings, strikingly illuminate what must have been far wider strategies of adjustment and integration into a new regime. To highlight a few examples from the extreme end of the spectrum can reveal much about the capacity for self-transformation and integration within a radically new regime.

Perpetrators and Changing Communities: The Nonsimultaneity of the Simultaneous

Trials as late as the 1980s provide insights into the postwar lives and apparently shifting subjectivities of former Nazi perpetrators, as contrasted with the official myths about heroes, victims, and villains highlighted in official ideology, education, and memorial sites.

The case of Heinz Barth, who after the war returned to his native Gran-

see, a small town less than forty miles north of Berlin, still encircled by its well-preserved medieval walls, illuminates not only judicial processes in the GDR but also aspects of the wider community in which the Nazi past continued to reverberate. Barth was arrested in 1981 and, following a show trial mounted in 1983 with a view to maximum publicity gains for the GDR in contrast with the West, was sentenced to life imprisonment; after unification he was, in fact, released in 1997 on grounds of ill health and died back in Gransee ten years later, at the age of eighty-six. The trial focused both on his involvement in war crimes in the Czech locations of Klatovy and Pardubice, following the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich in 1942, and the murder of 642 inhabitants and destruction of the village of Oradour-sur-Glane in France in June 1944, although the Oradour case was given more prominent attention in the GDR press.⁶ For this last crime, Barth in fact had been sentenced in absentia to death by a military tribunal in Bordeaux in 1953—but by this time, he was living quietly back in his hometown, conveniently covering up his SS past. Barth's life and that of others in the small community of Gransee, which had a population fluctuating around six thousand inhabitants, vividly illustrate some of the changes in the GDR over the decades from Nazism through communism. Specifically, the wider history of this community before, during, and after the Nazi period illuminates the radical structural changes to which members of the local population had accommodated themselves by the Honecker period; and the presence of a well-known Nazi in their midst illuminates the complex simultaneity of both awareness of past perpetration under Nazism and yet outward commitment to new communist institutions and practices. This is indeed a coexistence of a multiplicity of subjective times in a single community. While the Gransee/Barth case is, of course, unique in its particulars, the wider implications are relevant across the GDR under Honecker.

Barth was born in Gransee in 1920. Typically for a member of this "first Hitler youth generation," he grew up in the shadow of the Depression and the collapse of Weimar democracy, and like others in this area, he greeted the appointment of Hitler with enthusiasm. Locals later remembered the Nazi Storm Troopers' (*Sturmabteilung*; SA) celebratory marches on Hitler's appointment as chancellor in January 1933. In the national elections held under politically highly constrained conditions on March 5, 1933, when the National Socialist German Workers Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*; NSDAP) nationally garnered some 44 percent of the vote, the result for the Nazis and their allies in the predominantly Protestant electoral district of Gransee was around 71 percent.⁷ In the view of the 1983 East German court

judgment, Barth was socialized in the supposedly typical petit bourgeois right-wing values of the time, including commitment to the “concepts of fulfilment of duty, heroism and loyalty” that were “ideologically misused by the fascists.”⁸ At the age of twelve, he joined the Nazi youth organization (*Jungvolk*) in 1932, before Hitler was appointed chancellor, and for his early membership and subsequent active engagement in the Hitler Youth (*Hitler Jugend*; HJ) was awarded the Golden HJ Badge. In mid-1938, he joined the paramilitary National Socialist Motor Corps (*Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps*; NSKK), and on the historically significant date of November 9, 1939, at the age of nineteen, he became a member of the NSDAP.⁹ It is highly likely that, given his record in the HJ and membership of the NSKK, Barth had already been engaging in Nazi violence in his hometown a year earlier. There was no synagogue in Gransee and so no religious building to set ablaze during the night of November 9–10, 1938, later known as Kristallnacht. But there was a Jewish family by the name of Michaelis living on the main street right in the center of town. That night, Raphael Michaelis, along with his wife and mother, were torn from their home, and their possessions were not merely thrown out onto the street—as happened across the Reich—but their furniture, clothing, and prized objects were lit on fire and burned in full view of local people. The Michaelis were later deported to Theresienstadt, where their traces disappear.¹⁰ It is more than likely that the then eighteen-year-old Barth, already a Nazi activist, would have been actively involved in this violence. It is also almost certain, given the central location of the Michaelis’ house and the small size of the local community, that the violent attack on their home and the burning of their property would have been the subject of much discussion.

Other individuals of Jewish heritage in the Gransee community were also visible victims of Nazi persecution at this time. The case of the Katharinenhof, owned by the Veit Simon family, presents a notable example. Katharina Veit Simon had, from 1912, run a fruit farm at her estate in the Katharinenhof on the outskirts of the town, where she lived with her sister Eva, an accomplished artist; both had been born deaf and dumb, but with the support of their well-to-do German-Jewish family in Berlin, they were able to pursue their careers. In 1938, the Veit Simons were forced to sell the house and fruit farm at a knock-down price; they, too, like the Michaelis, were eventually deported to Theresienstadt and subsequently murdered in Auschwitz.¹¹ During the war, gangs of slave laborers were brought to work on the now “aryanized” estate from the nearby women’s concentration camp of Ravensbrück, located at the edge of Fürstenberg, the next station north on the local railway line. Meanwhile, around the corner was a large hospital

complex that also accommodated Nazi police and SS schooling courses in a euphemistically entitled “agricultural training center” (*Bauernhochschule*), as well occasional “away-day” training for SS medical personnel.¹² It was in this context of all-encompassing racism and violence that Barth grew up; like others of his generation who internalized the norms of Nazism, he must have seen the changing nature of the local community in these ways as both “normal” and justifiable.

Barth, an enthusiastic supporter of Nazism, rapidly rose from the Reserve Police through the ranks of the SS, until he held positions with sufficient responsibility in the mass murders of civilians to earn him promotion to SS-Obersturmführer and finally the award of an Iron Cross, Second Class. In 1944, as a result of war injuries, he had to have one leg amputated and was also left with a stiff shoulder, so he was hardly able to adopt a simple disguise. He briefly evaded retribution by hiding in Schleswig-Holstein (a nest of former Nazis at the time) for a few months in 1945, and he omitted his former SS membership on his new identity papers in the British zone. In June 1946, newly married, he returned to his native Gransee to embark on a new life, again systematically altering his curriculum vitae to leave out all mention of his previous SS career as well as NSDAP membership.

For more than a third of a century, Barth appears to have become a model GDR citizen, raising two children and rising to a senior position in the Konsumgenossenschaft Gransee, the local consumer cooperative. By all accounts, he distinguished himself by his “commitment and energy in both his professional life and societal activities.”¹³ This might, had his Nazi past not been uncovered, have been chalked up as evidence of a fully supportive GDR citizen, indeed a committed member of what I have called a “participatory dictatorship.”¹⁴ He made use of the available structures and opportunities to build himself a very acceptable postwar life. Barth’s past crimes might have been on the more extreme end of the Nazi spectrum, but hundreds of thousands of others had in one way or another been complicit in Nazism; they, too, would no doubt have been equally quiescent and apparently model GDR citizens without their past resurfacing.

What did local people make of Barth’s return? The native population of Gransee did not change much over the years: the biggest demographic fluctuation came with the influx of some two thousand or more refugees and expellees from territories further east at the end of the war, but many of these individuals soon moved on toward the West or were settled elsewhere within a few years. Barth reintegrated very easily, and soon became a well-respected work colleague and member of the local community. Those inhabitants with

whom Barth had grown up were certainly familiar with his prewar record as an ardent Nazi youth activist; and in his postwar life, with his amputated leg, he made little effort to disguise his personal identity, seeking to cover up only the specifics of his war-time crimes. Similarly, the traces of the previously Jewish-owned fruit farm eventually disappeared, as a typically GDR production cooperative took over the enterprise, felled the fruit trees and ploughed over the fields. By the 1970s and 1980s, children of former Nazis were more likely to be interested in the acquisition of western jeans or pop music than in what had become of former Jewish residents, or what their parents had done in the war. Some were far more conformist; Barth's own son had become sufficiently imbued with the values of the GDR that he even volunteered to become a border guard.

Ironically, it was the son's active commitment to real-existing socialism that led to his father's undoing. Barth's identity as an Oradour perpetrator was discovered only when the Stasi carried out a background check on the son's family as part of the application process for a posting to a highly sensitive location on the Cold War border with the West.¹⁵ It was also, curiously, Barth's son who personally approached the top East German prosecutor, Friedrich Wolff, to request his help in defending his father.¹⁶ The son must have felt deeply conflicted as the commitments of different temporalities became simultaneously present: clearly he was sufficiently committed to GDR ideals to volunteer to serve on the state's fortified border, and yet, apparently, he was equally concerned about his father's welfare to make every effort to acquire the services of the state's top lawyer in defense of a known Nazi.

A similarly illuminating example is that of Henry Schmidt. In 1987, more than forty years after the end of the war, former SS-Obersturmführer Henry Schmidt was put on trial in Dresden. Schmidt had participated in the activities of the Einsatzgruppen in Poland at the outbreak of war and had received training in the concentration camps of Ravensbrück and Sachsenhausen. From April 1942 to February 1945, he played a role in expropriating, isolating, and concentrating some 985 people of Jewish descent in so-called Jews' houses and camps in Dresden, and then in deporting at least 723 Jews to Theresienstadt and Auschwitz, where the majority were murdered. Although dubbed the Eichmann of Dresden for his role as director of the "Jewish affairs section" (*Judenreferat*) of the police headquarters, Schmidt had, like Barth, been able to live openly in the GDR under his own name for more than four decades. He worked for some years in Altenburg (where other former Nazi perpetrators such as Rudolf Zimmermann also lived), for which he was simi-

larly awarded with honors such as the Activists' Pin for his productivity; he also engaged in honorary work for the Workers' Housing Cooperative (*Arbeiterwohnungsbaugenossenschaft*) and the local fire service.¹⁷ He enjoyed a reputation as a "good, reliable, citizen."¹⁸ All this was counted in his favor during the judgment at his trial, but weighing against his valuable service as a GDR citizen was the fact that, when required to give details about his past, he had lied, claiming that under Nazism he had worked only in civilian administration or for the Organization Todt.¹⁹

How did those who knew him react? Schmidt's wife had certainly known the details of his past, having met him during the Nazi period, and presumably relatives, neighbors, and friends from that time also knew about his former role; but his children, apparently, knew nothing and had been able to grow up in ignorance of their family's Nazi legacy. On the first day of the trial, Schmidt's wife committed suicide. How his children reacted to their father's past conduct—presumably with growing awareness after his arrest the previous year—is not clear.

For most members of the second generation—children of former Nazi perpetrators or fellow travelers—there was generally little to arouse suspicions about what members of their own family might have been involved in just a few decades earlier. The silencing of the Nazi past, and the acquisition of "antifascist" myths in their formal schooling, arguably sheltered them from the burden of guilt and shame with which many members of the second generation in West Germany grappled in public at this time. It is in this wider context—the omnipresence of memories of Nazism among the parental generation and the radical transformations in politics, property ownership, social relations, and public cultures of remembrance after 1945—that isolated acts of apparent "resistance" to communist rule must be set.²⁰ But these cases also shed light, more surprisingly, on conformity and even apparently active commitment to the GDR's structures and practices.

Could Barth and Schmidt be held to have developed "socialist subjectivities," or merely conformed to new standards and expected behaviors, just as they had already under Nazism? Arguably, much of the conformity evident in the GDR—whether clearly constrained or apparently more willing—needs to be set against a background of shifting accommodation to changing circumstances. Moreover, many of those who made the transition from Nazism to communism were already practiced performers, having learned the slogans and gestures of support for Hitler even if they had emerged from non-Nazi backgrounds in the Weimar period. Clearly, we need to explore further both the conditions and character of varieties of outward conformity and

compliance in repressive regimes—whether willing, enthusiastic, or constrained, ambivalent.

As the cases of Heinz Barth and Henry Schmidt demonstrate, there were still adults active in 1980s East Germany who had played a sufficiently significant role supporting Nazism to warrant investigation and ultimately conviction. Moreover, these two men were far from the only GDR citizens who had been involved in persecution and violence during the Nazi period. The identities of many other former Nazi perpetrators—including others involved in the crimes at Oradour-sur-Glane for which Barth was sentenced, for example—were known to the Stasi. But for some, there was insufficient evidence for a certain conviction. And for most, it was deemed in the state's interests to use these people as unofficial informants—prevailed upon, either through blackmail or an appeal to their need for atonement, to spy on their fellow citizens—rather than bringing them to trial. To do this would have meant potentially undermining the official reputation of the GDR as the “better Germany,” entirely cleansed of its Nazi past. Moreover, by becoming Stasi informers, these former Nazi perpetrators were functionally sustaining the GDR (as, previously, individuals who had been ambivalent about aspects of Nazism nevertheless performed their allotted roles, effectively contributing to the escalation of systemic violence). Do we see former Nazis in the GDR as developing “socialist subjectivities,” becoming model citizens, engaging in self-realization in some way?

At lower levels, there are innumerable cases in the investigation files, including lists of people who were subsequently pardoned, or had their cases dropped, and who never appeared in court.²¹ And across the country, there were far greater numbers of people who had been involved in persecution, denunciations, profiting, and facilitation of acts of perpetration. Quite a few had been brought to trial in the early postwar years, but minor trials soon petered out with amnesties and rehabilitation in the 1950s. Ultimately, only a tiny minority of the hundreds of thousands of former members of Hitler's *Volksgemeinschaft* who had been actively complicit in the Nazi system were actually ever brought to court.

How many former Nazi supporters, sympathizers, fellow travelers, or more active perpetrators went on to lead unremarkable lives as “good and reliable” GDR citizens is impossible to tell. What tales were told in their families, and how the second generation grew up—whether totally ignorant or dimly aware of a potentially difficult family heritage or exposed to behavioral and emotional consequences without articulated narratives about the past—is also difficult to ascertain. What does become clear, however, is the

simultaneous prevalence of multiple forms of subjectivity in the later GDR, often shaped both by and in reaction to a family past of which some were more explicitly aware than others.

Interpersonal Subjectivities: (National) Socialist Subjectivities and Generational Transmission

In this wider context, what was the impact of the Nazi past on the development of “socialist subjectivities” among younger East Germans? Nazism was officially presented as having been effectively dealt with in the GDR: Nazism had allegedly been carried by monopoly capitalists, Junker landowners, and militaristic imperialists; socioeconomic and political transformation after the war had supposedly removed the roots of fascism; and over time, it was claimed, former Nazis had been sentenced or had fled to the West. The millions of ordinary workers and peasants who had been swept up in the war, including in the Wehrmacht on the eastern front, had been merely innocent pawns, blinded by ideology or mobilized by those in power. In this view, younger East Germans could officially feel guilt-free, celebrating the lives of communist opponents of Hitler, mourning dead antifascist heroes, and relieved of the need to grapple personally with the past in their own families.

When a Nazi past occasionally surfaced through legal interrogations, it was filtered through distinctive forms of socialization, discourse, and interpretation. Subjectivities were formed in relation to the experiences of living in the GDR within a family context that both sustained, but was also to some extent at odds with, official GDR views. Rudolf Zimmermann’s family provides a good example of the emergent multiplicity of perspectives and discourses. Like Barth and Schmidt, Zimmermann was an apparently upright GDR citizen amassing the accolades of energetic worker and committed citizen—even consciously trying to “work off” his sense of guilt—and bringing up his four children as good East Germans, until his arrest and trial in the late 1960s. He had kept his own struggles with his memories and his conscience to himself, although memories of this past clearly affected the family, and his wife and mother-in-law appear to have had rather more critical views of the GDR in private. The responses of Zimmermann’s son are illuminating: when I interviewed him in the summer of 2016, he was surprised by the revelations about his father’s Nazi past. At the time of the father’s arrest in 1966, the son had been seven years old. He vividly remembered the way the Stasi had searched the house and interrogated neighbors. He knew that his father had been sentenced to life imprisonment, clearly a

serious sentence, and he was only able to visit him rarely and under highly restricted conditions. Yet he did not think of him as a Nazi or in any way guilty of having murdered numerous Jews. His mother had told the family that her husband's life sentence was an example of "Stasi show trials" and "GDR injustice."²² Living with these stories, essentially rooted in subterranean criticism of the GDR on the part of a mother who had been socialized in the Nazi era, and despite the family's subsequent commitment to "building socialism," the son was able to grow up entirely unwracked by the mixture of unwarranted guilt, shame, and self-doubt that seems to have plagued many West Germans of the second generation.

Much of the research in this area has been carried out in the aftermath of unification by oral history interviewers and social psychologists.²³ The official myth that Nazism had been effectively overcome and that few or no Nazis remained in the GDR seems to have allowed younger generations of East Germans to be less emotionally involved with the past of the parental generation. In that respect, the generational conflicts of West Germany in the 1970s and 1980s found little direct counterpart among young adults coming to maturity at this time in the East, where of course, conditions for expressing controversial views were quite different. They seemed often to have a greater understanding of the ways their parents had accommodated themselves to the challenges of living under dictatorial conditions and did not challenge or even fully explore their stories in the privacy of the home.

Even in families who seemed to be utterly committed to the East German present, contributing actively to sustaining the communist system, the shadows of a suppressed Nazi legacy in the family could have lingering consequences, even if they were less clearly articulated. Ines Geipel's investigation of the reverberations of her own family past, precipitated in part by her reflections while caring for her younger brother as he lay dying of cancer, provides an extraordinary example.²⁴ The Geipel family in the 1970s and early 1980s appeared to be model GDR citizens. Ines Geipel and her brother only discovered through the opening of the Stasi files after unification that their father had for twelve years been a senior informer for the Stasi, including postings in the West to spy on former GDR citizens who had fled. Ines Geipel was herself a highly successful GDR athlete who participated in international competitions. But in the mid-1980s, she became increasingly critical of the regime; seeking to flee to the West, she finally left in the summer of 1989. Following the collapse of the GDR, Geipel spoke up against the misuse of drugs in GDR competitive sports, controversially returning her medals and campaigning on behalf of other victims of enforced doping. In contrast

to this distinguished pro-communist record of father and daughter (until the 1980s), Geipel's grandparents on both sides had been committed Nazis. One grandfather was involved in the administration of the Reich Commissariat East based in Riga, where some twenty-seven thousand Jews were murdered and buried in mass graves during two massive "actions" in late November and early December 1941. The violence sustained and justified in Nazi ideology by the grandparental generation and the experiences of Geipel's father, a "war child" turned Stasi informant, were played out in the domestic sphere during Geipel's childhood—although Geipel only hints at the details, even while emphasizing the overwhelming significance of this repressed past. Psychic wounds were expressed not in words but in physical aggression, overshadowing her life and that of her younger brother Robby. He was never able explicitly to address the significance of the family's Nazi past but intimated its importance to her during his last weeks. This was a past that lived on with major long-term psychological and psychosomatic consequences, perhaps precisely because it was not explicitly addressed during the 1970s and 1980s, when Robby and Ines Geipel were young.

If we look at the GDR through the intimacies of multiple subjectivities, intergenerational transmission, and family dynamics, we gain a more complex picture of the Honecker era. But the different aspects, including the changing official representations and the immediate—material, political, social, economic—challenges of the present, need to be thought through together with these more shadowy legacies.

The antifascist myth could not hope to retain its potency forever. It is one thing to proclaim to rousing music, amid the rubble of postwar Berlin, that one is building the new on the ruins of the past—"Arisen from the ruins, And facing toward the future" (*Auferstanden aus Ruinen, Und der Zukunft zugewandt*), as the national anthem had it—and quite another actually to deliver on the promise. Ideology could not entirely make up for reality; but people had to come to terms with what lives were possible under the circumstances. Younger generations were increasingly affected by socialization and life experiences entirely within the GDR. By the 1970s and 1980s, we can really only talk about the diversity of subjectivities. How much of this was a matter of "socialist subjectivities" would need further investigation in a wider range of milieus, as well as more intensive investigation of individual transformations in behavior and self-constructions over time.

We need to bear these complexities in mind when looking at the changing emphases of the Honecker era. Even if the overt narratives of communist heroism were not swallowed uncritically and even if the prevalence of anti-

fascist imagery in public spaces was not always matched by reassessments in the private sphere, the public discourses nevertheless had an impact. Yet so, too, did the crumbling infrastructure and economic decline so evident from the later 1970s. The emergence of new forms of political activism, both under and increasingly beyond the protective umbrella of the Protestant churches, would, in the context of changes in other communist states in the later 1980s, lead to the demonstrations that played such a significant role in the fall of the Wall and the ultimate collapse of communist rule. Even if we do not want to engage in teleological readings of 1989, we cannot ignore the conditions that would facilitate challenges to the rule of the Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*; SED) and the ultimate collapse of the GDR. The activism of the later 1980s was largely spearheaded by people who, as young adults, were acutely aware of the impossibility of any viable future for their own children if no fundamental reforms were initiated. Nevertheless, they were only a small and disproportionately active minority. While many East Germans clearly shared the frustrations of those who dared to demonstrate, the majority had found ways of living within East German society by this time, while a few had gone in a quite different political direction, contributing to the small circles of neo-Nazis that would later garner so much attention.²⁵ The peaceful demonstrators who came out to march in the autumn of 1989, reclaiming their right to speak in the slogan "We are the people!" (*Wir sind das Volk!*), and "We are staying here," in the hope of an improved version of a more democratic socialism, were far from the only subculture in the later GDR.

Concluding Reflections

In exploring the GDR as both an "antifascist state" and a "post-Nazi society," it is important to bring together analyses of historical developments and changing political and socioeconomic structures, on the one hand, with explorations of intergenerational transmission and changing subjectivities in light of a significant past, on the other. The examples selected here, highlighting cases of former Nazis who were later exposed, may serve to indicate the multiple currents that ran simultaneously, some more visibly than others, as the outward history of the GDR, with its failing economy and politically insecure state, was lived through by people with personal or family experiences of a Nazi past. Multiple, nonsimultaneous "times" and subjectivities overlapped temporally in ways that are not readily rendered in a straight historical narrative of events—important though that is too.

More specifically, the longer-term impact of Nazism is not so easily dismissed simply by reference to the passage of time, which, incidentally, no one would think of doing when talking about the legacies of slavery and slave ownership, post-colonialism, or post-socialism.²⁶ Further research would be required to investigate this more fully. Issues include, for example, critical responses to official ideology while yet adopting and, to some extent, internalizing public terminology; continuities and changes of personnel in key institutions (including the police, the military, and educational institutions, as well as economic and political organizations); behavioral changes in conforming to new expectations and structures, and the development of a new habitus; shifts in attitudes and opinions; and changing relations between different communities—or indeed the very sense of community belonging—over time. Furthermore, a generational approach is key not only to understanding radically different historical cohorts but also to exploring family dynamics and tensions that played a role in sociopsychological transformations. The conflicted subjectivities of those with both ties of family affection and loyalty, on the one hand, and new ideological commitments, on the other, may help us understand some of the longer-term consequences of both Nazism and communism for successive generations under these demanding regimes.

There are, moreover, interesting questions to explore around changing social relations at a grassroots level. Smaller trials in the early years of the GDR reveal the sheer extent of denunciations that had taken place under Nazism—a phenomenon already widely studied by historians of the Third Reich, but which clearly did not go away in the postwar decades as people still had to face charges or explain away awkward facets of a compromised past. To what extent did local and personal animosities fester in the localities? And how far were already well-rehearsed practices of denunciation transformed into the very different structures and practices of surveillance orchestrated by the ever-growing Stasi? It is clear that the Stasi consciously co-opted former Nazis as informers, rather than exposing them to potentially embarrassing trials. But more widely prevalent mutual suspicions and tense interpersonal relations warrant further investigation at a micro level. Even while focusing on only prominent cases, I have sought here to direct attention to those significantly wider numbers of East Germans who had been complicit or involved in acts of perpetration under Nazism. Entirely other perspectives would unfold if we turned, instead, to the experiences and subjectivities of those who had been variously persecuted, whether on grounds of “race,” heredity, or allegedly “asocial” behavior under Nazi rule. There is a growing literature on these topics, particularly on Jews in the GDR; rather

less on those who were not professing Jews but were nevertheless persecuted on grounds of “race,” including those of mixed descent (*Mischlinge*), or because of behavior that did not conform to Nazi norms, such as same-sex relationships among men. The interactions among these different communities, as individuals sought to negotiate new lives under radically altered circumstances, clearly inflected the range of interpersonal subjectivities that developed over time.

These questions cannot be pursued further here. But it is clear even from these preliminary reflections that there was a deeper, hidden side to the history of the GDR: a history that may perhaps best be captured in approaching the GDR not only as an “antifascist state,” a communist regime, an instance of real-existing socialism, but *also* as a ‘post-Nazi society’ with reverberations across generations through the Honecker era and beyond.

These cases of former Nazis and good citizens are distinctly queer, in the broader sense of the term. We do not actually know how many former Nazis may, to borrow an apposite term here, have “remained in the closet” throughout the communist regime and how many may have genuinely experienced inner transformation, with real commitment to the new ideology; and these cases may serve to challenge our perspectives on GDR history. Even those who appeared to live quietly for decades within the parameters of official norms may have had deeper reasons for behavioral conformity and self-transformation; or anti-communists before 1945 may have turned into state-sustaining workers under real-existing socialism. Moreover, not everyone who deviated in some way from the official line may have been nurturing alternative forms of “socialist sensibility” or views of the future.

More generally, historical exploration of subjectivities under dictatorial circumstances may require considerable skills of empathy for a range of subjectivities as well as a heightened awareness of complexity and ambivalence, rather than sympathy for any particular marginalized identities or potentially idealized alternative sensibilities. Exploring patterns of normativity, compliance, and constrained conformity in this way, as well as the simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous may, indeed, provide valuable clues to understanding both the stability and the potential for transformation of dictatorial regimes.

Notes

1. Scott Harrison, Jeff Hayton, and Katharine White, “Beyond the Black Hole: 1989 and the Narration of East German History,” in *Socialist Subjectivities: Queering East Germany under Honecker*, ed. Scott Harrison, Jeff Hayton, and Katharine White (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2025), 5.

2. For my own approach, see Mary Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives: Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011; 2017, in 2 vols.).

3. See for example, Alan Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999); and for some wider eastern European perspectives, Kata Bohus, Peter Hallama, and Stephan Stach, eds. *Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism: Remembering the Holocaust in State-Socialist Eastern Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2022).

4. See, for example, the case discussed in Mary Fulbrook, “East Germans in a Post-Nazi State: Communities of Experience, Connection, and Identification,” in *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler*, ed. Mary Fulbrook and Andrew I. Port (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 33–55. See also Mary Fulbrook, *Bystander Society: Conformity and Complicity in Nazi Germany and the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

5. See, for example, Dietmar Remy and Axel Salheiser, “Integration or Exclusion: Former National Socialists in the GDR,” *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 35, no. 3 (2010): 9–21; and Heinrich Best and Axel Salheiser, “Shadows of the Past: National Socialist Backgrounds of the GDR’s Functional Elites,” *German Studies Review* 29, no. 3 (2006): 589–602.

6. Lfd.Nr.1009a, Stadtgericht Berlin, 07.06.1983, reprinted in *DDR-Justiz und NS-Verbrechen. Sammlung Ostdeutscher Strafurteile wegen Nationalsozialistischer Tötungsverbrechen*, ed. C. F. Rüter, L. Hekelaar Gombert, and Dirk Welmoed De Mildt (Munich: K. G. Saur, 2002), I: 277–291. For East German newspaper clippings on this and other 1980s trials, see Bundesarchiv Berlin (hereafter BArch), DO 1/32778. See also Henry Leide, *NS-Verbrecher und Staatssicherheit. Die geheime Vergangenheitspolitik der DDR*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 131–142; and Gary Bruce, “From Perpetrator to Cold-War Pawn: The Atrocities and Trial of Heinz Barth,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 29, no. 3 (2015): 374–399.

7. Gary Bruce, *The Firm: The Inside Story of the Stasi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 23. The “first Hitler Youth generation” is discussed further in Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives*. For Barth’s self-assessment as elicited in Stasi interrogations, see Bruce, “From Perpetrator to Cold-War Pawn.”

8. Lfd.Nr.1009a, Stadtgericht Berlin, 07.06.1983, 279. See also the account by Barth’s defense counsel, Friedrich Wolff, *Verlorene Prozesse* (Berlin: Verlag Das Neue Berlin, 2009), 176–196.

9. Stadtgericht Berlin, 279.

10. There is now a plaque on this building. It is close to the local history museum, which, when I visited in August 2022, contained little that even referenced the Nazi period, let alone these incidents.

11. “Die Geschichte des Katharinenhofes in Gransee,” <http://www.santarius.de/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Der-Katharinenhof-in-Gransee.pdf> (accessed June 11, 2023).

12. For names of individuals in the SS and police forces who attended the Gransee BHS, see https://www.pedocs.de/volltexte/2018/15155/pdf/Harten_2017_Weltanschauliche_Schulung_der_SS_und_der_Polizei.pdf (accessed June 11, 2022).

13. Stadtgericht Berlin, 280.

14. Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).
15. Bruce, "From Perpetrator to Cold-War Pawn," 382.
16. Wolff, *Verlorene Prozesse*, 176.
17. On Zimmermann, see Mary Fulbrook, *Reckonings: Legacies of Nazi Persecution and the Quest for Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
18. Beate Meyer, "Der 'Eichmann von Dresden.' 'Justizielle Bewältigung' von NS-Verbrechen in der DDR am Beispiel des Verfahrens gegen Henry Schmidt," in *Deutsche, Juden, Völkermord. Der Holocaust als Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Jürgen Matthäus and Klaus-Michael Mallmann (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006), 275–291.
19. BArch, DP 3/1614; BArch, DP 3/1615; and Horst Busse and Udo Krause, *Lebenslänglich für den Gestapokommissar. Der Prozeß gegen den Leiter des Judenreferats bei der Dresdener Gestapo, SS-Obersturmführer Henry Schmidt, vor dem Bezirksgericht Dresden vom 15. bis 28. September 1987* (Berlin: Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1988). Discussed further in Fulbrook, *Reckonings*, 330–332. See also "Henry Schmidt," <http://www.chemnitzgeschichte.de/pers-kat-liste-top/240-henry-schmidt> (accessed June 11, 2023).
20. Cf. also Gary Bruce, "Resistance and Daily Life in East Germany: District Gransee as 'Place,'" *German History* 40, no. 2 (2022): 239–257.
21. Cf. Leide, *NS-Verbrecher und Staatssicherheit*.
22. See Fulbrook, *Reckonings*, 425–429.
23. Cf., for example, Dan Bar-On, *Legacy of Silence: Encounters with Children of the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Gabriele Rosenthal, ed., *The Holocaust in Three Generations: Families of Victims and Perpetrators of the Nazi Regime* (London: Cassell, 1998); Sabine Moller, *Vielfache Vergangenheit. Öffentliche Erinnerungskulturen und Familienerinnerungen an die NS-Zeit in Ostdeutschland* (Tübingen: Edition Diskord, 2003); Olaf Jensen, *Geschichte machen. Strukturmerkmale des intergenerationellen Sprechens über die NS-Vergangenheit in deutschen Familien* (Tübingen: Edition Diskord, 2004); and Dan Bar-On, Konrad Brendler, and A. Paul Hare, eds. *"Da ist etwas kaputtgegangen an den Wurzeln . . ." Identitätsformen deutscher und israelischer Jugendlicher im Schatten des Holocaust* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1997).
24. Ines Geipel, *Umkämpfte Zone. Mein Bruder, der Osten und der Hass* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2019).
25. Cf. Gordon Charles Ross, *The Swastika in Socialism: Right-Wing Extremism in the GDR* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovac, 2000); and Jeff Hayton, "Krawall in der Zionskirche: Skinhead Violence and Political Legitimacy in the GDR," *European History Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (2015): 336–356.
26. Cf. Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery, "Thinking between the Posts: Post-colonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51, no. 1 (2009): 6–34.

Treating East German Subjects *Doctors and Patients with Alcohol Addiction in Late Socialism*

Markus Wahl

People with alcohol addiction often find themselves marginalized within society. Indeed, their alcohol consumption and subsequent behavior distances them from what is considered normal societal standards. As Scott Harrison, Jeff Hayton, and Katharine White outline in the introduction to this volume, they might be said to shape and experience queer time. In the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the very existence of people with addictions posed a threat to the state's master narrative that such social problems did not exist under socialism. Nevertheless, this chapter aims to explore how people partaking in what was deemed deviant behavior could still participate in and live autonomous lives as members of socialist society. In other words, life under socialism took on various forms, both aligning with and departing from the normative expectation of the state. People with alcohol addiction, for example, may have departed from the normative trajectory of socialist life, even as they still believed in—and worked for—their vision and version of socialism.

The following pages provide insights into the dynamism of socialist institutions. They explore local variations of socialist society through the relationships and experiences of doctors and their patients with alcohol addictions. According to socialist ideology and authorities' beliefs, addiction as a social issue in the GDR could only be a remnant of the capitalist past. The denial that it was also a socialist issue led to the systematic neglect of people with alcohol dependency. Authorities in the GDR—like their counterparts in the Soviet Union, as Christian Werkmeister has recently shown—focused solely on the subsequent and possibly criminal or “asocial” behavior

of those under the influence of alcohol, such as slandering the state.¹ Consequently, people who fell into these categories would have departed from socialist society through their own fault and by their own choice, since the reasons for their failure could not lie in the social conditions in the new state. Nonetheless, this chapter shows, as alcohol consumption and case numbers of addiction steadily increased in the 1960s and beyond, doctors and patients created local initiatives through which they tried to improve the situation of people with alcohol addiction and address the danger presented by alcoholism at workplaces and in communities. In doing so, they created their own form of socialism.

When Erich Honecker took over state leadership in 1971 and initiated an ideological shift toward satisfying individual consumer needs instead of focusing solely on the collective, there was also an observable change in social mechanics. Therefore, I argue that a specific pattern of socialist negotiation emerged in the treatment of alcohol addiction. Rather than dictating a uniform set of policies, the state instead relied on local solutions in an otherwise centralized society, creating a path for doctors, patients, and authorities to tackle social issues in their respective geographic areas and medical specialties. This new situation followed the official recognition and practice of psychotherapy in the GDR in the 1970s, a shift focusing on improving the lives of citizens in the present as part of the new party doctrine.² East Germans used this limited freedom to change their local versions of socialism for the better. This chapter thus illustrates another aspect of GDR history that further differentiates—or queers—our understanding of a strictly centralized East German society and its healthcare system.³

People such as Hubertus Windischmann, the chief doctor of the addiction clinic within the District Psychiatric Hospital Brandenburg, provide evidence for this lived but limited freedom, as he was someone who both internalized socialist normativity and sought to tailor it to fit the needs of patients under his care.⁴ In this way, he is a perfect example of David J. Rothman's observation that directors attempted to shape their institutions according to their beliefs and, in doing so, as Carla Yanni concludes, "create a microcosm of their vision of a proper society."⁵ For Windischmann, such a microcosm would have represented his subjective vision of an ideal (socialist) society. The central hypothesis of this chapter is that—while ideological claims indeed had an impact—the everyday conditions in and outside of medical institutions in the GDR depended mainly on locality: the people in charge, the mentality among the medical staff, patients' local reputation, and their perception, as well as their behavior in the clinic. With the help of

patient files, diaries, letters, pictures, petitions, and eyewitness accounts, this chapter shows that medical care and new methods and therapies developed alongside international trends, such as group therapy and self-aid groups.

To examine patients' and medical personnel's experiences, initiatives, and subject positions within the healthcare system in East Germany, I pursue four interdependent lines of inquiry that inform the following analysis. Patients and medical personnel are at the center of my analysis, with particular emphasis on how their subjectivities were shaped by (1) the experiences of socially constructed disease concepts, (2) the treatment thereof, (3) the conditions of medical institutions, and (4) their experiences in the workplace or social environment. Here, East German subjectivity is defined by how state ideology influenced patients' self-conception and medical personnel's views about alcohol addiction and how these understandings played out in local situations.⁶ This somewhat generic idea of "socialist subjectivity" combines the second and third versions of Anatoly Pinsky's definition in the Soviet context.⁷ It views the patient with alcohol addiction as a construct of political and cultural discourse. Such an approach allows an exploration of the social location of people with alcohol addiction and the way they narrated their space in socialist society. This chapter provides insight into these concerns by examining individuals at the psychiatric hospitals in Brandenburg an der Havel and Arnsdorf near Dresden after Honecker came to power in 1971.

Alcoholism and the East German State

After finishing his specialist medical training in psychiatry and neurology in 1963, Hubertus Windischmann (born 1931)—a Fulbrookian "1929er"⁸—became the chief doctor of the psychiatric ward for men with 780 beds in the District Psychiatric Hospital Brandenburg in 1970. In the previous decade he had already been tasked with treating people with alcohol addiction as a result of the shortage of medical personnel caused by domestic labor fluctuations and the escape of doctors to the West (prior to the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961).⁹ When the psychiatric hospital's medical director decided to establish a separate clinic for alcohol and drug addiction in Brandenburg in 1975, Windischmann thus took over as the head of this facility.¹⁰ He was part of a new generation, influenced by knowledge of the inhumane psychiatry in the Third Reich and new approaches for social psychotherapy.¹¹ During the 1970s and 1980s, he became one of the leading reformers in treating addictions in the GDR.¹² However, the path to change, not least in Brandenburg,

was hampered by the ideological narrative that had existed about alcoholism since the foundation of the East German state.

The GDR's official narrative stated that, unlike under capitalism, people no longer needed the intoxicating effects of alcohol under socialism.¹³ Accordingly, an individual suffering from alcohol addiction was quickly stigmatized as a "social deviant" or an asocial. This designation, which originated from nineteenth-century societal and scientific developments, had a long tradition in many other countries. The idea that the collective was more important than the individual resulted in societies evaluating humans based on their work performance. Everyone who failed to adhere to societal norms was quickly denounced as "asocial" and even a parasite.¹⁴ This attitude persisted far into the twentieth century across different ideological and political regimes. Since the GDR was founded on work and political performance, with those who failed to contribute productively being ostracized, one saw a lack of specialized medical provisioning for people with addiction during the first decades of the new state.

At the same time, the pervasive drinking culture at the local level and in East German companies showed resistance to state attempts to create "abstinent socialist personalities."¹⁵ In 1979, the construction worker Konrad B. summarized his experiences drinking in his working environment at a meeting of abstinent-living alcoholics in the District Psychiatric Hospital Brandenburg:

I drank alcohol for twenty-five years, as a worker in the heat of the glass industry and as a mechanic in structural engineering. . . . Every day: not one, but over twenty schnapps, over twenty beers. . . . I did not feel like an alcoholic because we all drank at the construction site. We came down from the scaffolding and went to the pub because we had to live in the public sphere. The barracks and the construction site were no real or reasonable home—no real life. My marriage broke over this.¹⁶

In this description of the working atmosphere, the amount of alcohol was viewed as "normal." Given this socially accepted habitus, Konrad B. did not perceive himself as addicted to alcohol and thus did not change his behavior. His example exposes the blurred borders between "healthy," normative, or socially accepted, and "sick," nonnormative, or "asocial" alcohol consumption, which always depended on the social context. In the GDR, the intake of alcohol in public, at work, and in private places was tolerated as long as it supposedly reinforced socialist ideals of a collective. This inherent contradic-

tion between condemning alcohol abuse but enforcing alcohol-heavy social gatherings existed in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union as well, pointing to broader similarities among socialist states. In all three nations, peer pressure among colleagues and friends and the traditional ideals of masculinity also prevented a change in drinking habits.¹⁷

This drinking culture marginalized everyone who forwent alcohol. Therefore, abstinence was a challenging undertaking, and people with alcohol addiction lived two phases of queer time in this respect: first, when they drank more than socially accepted; and second, when they tried to adopt abstinence for the rest of their lives. In both instances, their drinking behavior was nonnormative. Of course, ignorance about the nature of alcohol dependence as a disease, as well as the social exclusion of people who developed an addiction, was not strictly an East German phenomenon. It represented traditions of the social, cultural, and medical concept of alcohol abuse in Germany and beyond: those suffering from addiction lost control and thus consciously removed themselves from society.¹⁸

The year 1968—three years before Honecker took over leadership—was decisive for the GDR in the fight against alcohol abuse and criminality. Alongside the introduction of the new penal code, the socialist vanguard issued a law regarding the admission of the mentally ill to medical institutions, as well as regulations that tasked local councils and companies with educating citizens who were considered at risk of becoming criminals.¹⁹ On the one hand, any transgression of societal norms, such as drunk driving, failing to come to work, so-called “asocial behavior,” or criticizing the socialist government while in a drunken state, was further criminalized. Additionally, state organs increased their opportunities to hospitalize “social deviants” for a definite or indefinite period, even against their will, all in the name of protecting the individual and society. On the other hand, the responsibility of tackling these social issues fell on local authorities and experts. This partially explains why doctors and patients were able to adopt their own initiatives. Above all, however, they used the annual “socialist competitions” between institutions to improve the situation of people with alcohol addiction in their area under the existing laws.

Alcohol, Therapies, and Socialisms

As shown, the state narrative affected the socially constructed concept of illness by condemning it as a moral failure—people with addictions were “dysfunctional socialist citizens.” However, the change of leadership from Walter

Ulbricht to Honecker in 1971, with its shift toward individualization within political, social, and economic programs, also enabled doctors to see patients with so-called deviant behavior as more than just “social outsiders.” Instead, they could now officially devote themselves to the problems of the individual in socialist society. This shift within the state and at the expert level was, first, due to a generational change among doctors and authorities as well as the national and international development of new therapy methods, which promised better results in treating mental health issues.²⁰ Second, the local level was often far removed from state doctrine. For example, the official dismissal of psychoanalysis and the propagation of Pavlovian sleep therapy in the 1950s hardly had any impact on doctors’ practice.²¹ Treatment within psychiatric hospitals always mirrored the East German *Zeitgeist*, which was not limited solely to the GDR or socialism. In the following section, this chapter focuses on aversion therapy in contrast to other therapy methods in the psychiatric hospital of Arnsdorf compared with Brandenburg. It shows different understandings of medical conditions in the context of socialist ideology and thus demonstrates the establishment of different forms of socialism within doctor-patient relationships.

After disulfiram was discovered in the 1940s to create medically induced alcohol intolerance, the international medical field celebrated this drug as the first “cure” for alcoholism.²² As in other countries at the time, East German hospitals often lacked specialized treatment for patients with addictions, relying on aversion with disulfiram or apomorphine as the primary therapy until the 1970s.²³ The so-called “alcohol tests” or *Probetrunk*—a euphemism for aversion therapy—involved controlled exposure of patients to the side effects of these drugs when combined with alcohol. These included nausea, vomiting, and general discomfort, which, under medical supervision, doctors intentionally provoked to condition their patients.²⁴ This method to “cure” alcohol addiction and even male homosexuality was widespread in Europe and beyond during the 1950s and 1960s.²⁵

In East Germany, moralizing people’s behavior with alcohol addiction, instilling guilt and shame, was also an essential part of the “tests” to educate patients and change their habits, revealing the prejudices of the medical personnel.²⁶ In the psychiatric hospital of Arnsdorf during the 1970s, the chief doctor accused his patients of moral failures during the tests to increase the effect of aversion therapy. As the patient Susanne J., who was thirty-one years old and a production worker, wrote in her self-reflection about alcohol addiction in 1974, he blamed her for neglecting her son and thus her role as a mother.²⁷ She had to undergo five “alcohol tests.” By contrast, Manfred

F., who had a university degree, was a member of the socialist party, and showed acceptance of his disease, escaped aversion therapy completely.²⁸ This gendered and moralizing application of treatment methods—to say nothing of doctors' self-perceptions as both practitioner and educator of their patients—is also valid for other, stigmatized medical conditions, such as sexually transmitted diseases.²⁹ Despite the analytical issues of using patient files and ego documents as sources (especially since patients often try to show improvement to medical staff and thus cannot be considered wholly objective), they nonetheless indicate for our purposes the differences in the use of aversion therapy according to patients' age, gender, social background, and behavior.³⁰

Windischmann and his collective in Brandenburg, by contrast, abandoned mandatory aversion therapies at the end of the 1960s. His observations and experiences at the psychiatric clinic in Prague in 1967 under the supervision of Jaroslav Skála—the most prominent doctor of alcohol addiction in Czechoslovakia—prompted his reconsideration of these practices. Afterwards, Windischmann rejected the forced use of apomorphine on his patients and described the test as “inhumane treatment.”³¹ Instead, he advocated the voluntary prescription of disulfiram after reaching informed consent to support and secure patients' abstinence, especially in the initial phase after their release.³² He implemented his idea of treatment in line with international developments and his interpretation of how to practice humane socialism in his medical institution. However, not all of his colleagues in the field shared his opinion. In other hospitals, such as Arnsdorf, where a dedicated ward for addiction was created in 1965, “alcohol tests” remained part of the standard therapy until the end of the GDR.³³ During the 1970s, the doctor in charge there made it clear to his patients that they could not refuse aversion therapy. The declaration of voluntary consent to this treatment, which was included in almost all patient files, was, therefore, a farce and was often not even signed by the patients.³⁴

In addition to differences in the therapeutic plans between locales, views on alcohol addiction as a disease could also vary significantly within an institution. In the District Psychiatric Hospital Brandenburg, for example, the medical director Siegfried Schirmer claimed in 1979 during his opening speech at the first conference of the therapeutic clubs for abstinent-living people with alcohol or drug addiction that the “abuse of intoxicating substances is a phenomenon that does not correspond to socialism and is virtually contrary to our social order.” Sticking to the state narrative, he concluded

that “abuse and addiction are always and first and foremost consequences of personal guilt and human failure.”³⁵

The medical director’s statement contradicted Windischmann’s views. However, the latter described Schirmer as a pragmatist in a high position. Despite his official speeches, Schirmer always backed Windischmann’s ideas—vocalizing socialist norms to protect and support local initiatives that benefitted his institution even if they caused disputes with party officials.³⁶ In this context, another reading of his above statement illustrates the struggle in changing mentalities. While the treatment of alcohol addiction improved from the 1970s onwards, the state could not officially acknowledge its existence since it would undermine the narrative that socialist society was superior to the capitalist one. As such, Schirmer’s statement was the product of his gatekeeper position, which facilitated leeway and change at the local level while following the party line in his public speeches.

In Brandenburg in the 1960s and in Arnsdorf by the end of the 1970s, the focus of alcohol therapy gradually shifted from aversion therapy to group and individual psychotherapy and differentiated work therapy, alongside the continued prescription of disulfiram.³⁷ In Arnsdorf, the reason for the change was the appointment of a new doctor in 1980, Hans-Dieter Koritsch, who had a different understanding of alcohol as a disease and the usefulness of aversion therapy. Like Windischmann, he believed in the importance of a “disulfiram secured abstinence,” and under him, “alcohol tests” became voluntary.³⁸ This change reveals how the socialist reality for patients often depended on those responsible for their care—as they imposed subjective ideas of socialist normativity and introduced new forms of therapy. Accordingly, with Koritsch’s departure to the West in the second half of the 1980s, the therapeutic plans in Arnsdorf shifted once again, and doctors there returned to undertaking alcohol tests upon patients. Hasso Engel—district representative for the care of alcohol and drug addicts and psychotherapist who led and organized therapeutic groups in Dresden during the 1980s—criticized this move during a meeting of the Dresden bureau for fighting addictions in 1987.³⁹ This reversion to older therapeutic plans was not unique to Arnsdorf. The persistence of traditional attitudes among medical personnel was also evident in other psychiatric hospitals, like Großschweidnitz.⁴⁰ Petitions from this institution and from Arnsdorf reveal that a generational change and a shift in therapeutic methods among the staff had not yet occurred since medical personnel trained in the “old psychiatry” still dominated these institutions.⁴¹

In conclusion, as Engel stated at a different meeting in 1987, for the whole Dresden district, “differences in the quality of care . . . do not always seem to be of an objective nature.”⁴² In this quote, Engel reveals that the doctor-nurse-patient relationship in psychiatric hospitals had various outcomes given the subjective understanding of alcohol addiction and subsequent medical and social treatment of patients. Therefore, the application of therapies and patients’ experiences frequently depended on whether those responsible on-site were willing and able to reform and improve the treatment.

Conditions in Psychiatric Hospitals and Local Initiatives

In addition to the mentality of the people in charge, the conditions in—and the layouts of—psychiatric hospitals in the GDR often hampered the fulfillment of new social psychiatry practices. In 1970, over 60 percent of East German medical institutions had been built before 1900 and state funds had to be used to maintain their often outdated facilities, such as their heating systems.⁴³ The required upgrades, however, were delayed or even prevented by the limited availability of finances, materials, and labor in the GDR.⁴⁴ For this reason, alcoholics were accommodated in eight- to ten-bed rooms in some institutions alongside other patients with various mental illnesses even in the 1970s and 1980s. This situation negatively impacted the experiences of all patients in the hospital and made differentiated treatment almost impossible.

In addition to the structural deficits, working and living conditions in the psychiatric clinics of the GDR were characterized by a persistent shortage of staff. The result was that patients with alcohol addiction became a vital labor pool for cleaning and cooking as well as working in the boiler room and gardening in the clinics. Without these free workers, some clinics would reportedly have struggled with daily routines.⁴⁵ As Windischmann admitted in one of his articles, clinics often used “sober” patients with alcohol addiction in psychiatric hospitals for jobs that had little to do with the original intention of work therapy.⁴⁶ The situation was similar in Arnsdorf. But from the end of the 1970s onward, there seems to have been an increased attempt to find a “sheltered working place” for patients outside the clinic in the surrounding businesses depending on their training and abilities. For these patients, obtaining contracts with potential future employers was intended to facilitate the transition from therapy to aftercare and everyday life.⁴⁷ In this context, the support offered by companies and the understanding built with colleagues about the nature of the disease were decisive factors for abstinent-living patients’ successful reintegration. As shown in the first

section, these were not always achieved given the nonnormative behavior of the “alcohol-refusing” new colleague in an often alcohol-friendly social setting.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, work therapy remained a key tool in treating people with alcohol addiction, and most jobs were located within the psychiatric institution’s walls.

In Brandenburg, Windischmann also used his patients and the help of members from the therapeutic group in his district to improve conditions at the clinic for alcohol and drug addiction after 1974.⁴⁹ As mentioned, by using existing programs and laws to his advantage, he was able to create his vision of a new reality on-site. The most important method he used was the annual socialist competition between institutions to improve their work performance and conditions. Windischmann created a “socialist collective” with his patients and entered this competition yearly. Retrospectively, he argued that this was the only way to achieve results without conflict with the authorities: “They [local Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*; SED) officials] did not even realize that in the socialist competition, they were always confronted with things from me that they could not take back because it was part of the competition.”⁵⁰ Even if Windischmann’s statements are recollections made over forty years later, they illustrate how, for people under socialist conditions, local negotiation strategies were an essential aspect of carving out individual subjectivities. In this case, he used socialist normativity, his social status as an expert, and state ideological campaigns to improve conditions for patients in his clinic.

Windischmann’s patients put up new walls in the rooms and changed the layout to reduce their size from ten to three beds—a rare exception compared with the conditions in other hospitals at the time, as pictures show.⁵¹ Another part of Windischmann’s strategy involved creatively employing the resources at his disposal: if he needed a painter, for example, he would bring in an outpatient with the required skills by prescribing, on Friday, a “crisis intervention” that would be conducted over the weekend. Patients could thus receive inpatient therapies, for which they otherwise would have had to wait until regular admission to the hospital given the limited bed capacity. Simultaneously, they could offer their skills to improve conditions in Windischmann’s clinic, which he then categorized as work therapy.⁵² He consciously used the labor, skills, and informal connections of his patients, who often were trained artisans, to skip the waiting times and shortcomings of the planned economy to achieve short-term change and his vision for his clinic.⁵³ While this course of action retrospectively appears problematic from an ethical, medical, and social perspective, the inherent unofficial trade in

services was common in the GDR—especially for medical provisions, not least for procuring Western pharmaceuticals.⁵⁴

However, improving conditions in the clinic for alcohol and drug addiction also generated criticism by colleagues. They, as well as local officials and the population, mockingly called the clinic “Hotel Hubertus,” as people with mental illnesses still had to stay in rooms with ten or more other patients.⁵⁵ Thus, doctors and patients of other wards viewed the improvements as an undeserving preference within the psychiatric hospital.⁵⁶ These reactions among the social and political environment provide insights into both the success of Windischmann’s local initiative and the prevalent mentality toward patients with alcohol addiction among everyday citizens.

In the end, the patient collective under Windischmann’s leadership received an honorary plaque for its achievements.⁵⁷ Moreover, state officials used his clinic as a flagship for international delegations and students.⁵⁸ In many ways, the Brandenburg clinic exemplifies the unexpected “freedom” of people in charge if they had superiors, like Schirmer, who backed their initiatives and were willing to support initiatives that tested and pushed the limits of socialist normativity to create their versions of socialism. Windischmann’s efforts show that he did not believe the GDR would end and thus created a “cushioned niche” for his endeavors. This comfortable situation—as he quickly became a well-respected doctor in East Germany—increased his leeway, enabling him to establish one of the first patient clubs for abstinent-living alcoholics in the GDR.⁵⁹

Patient Clubs and Conferences after 1979

As late as 1985, a member of the Brandenburg Therapeutic Club attempted to gain official recognition for their medical condition at a meeting with representatives from the Ministry of Health (*Ministerium für Gesundheitswesen*) in Berlin but was unsuccessful. One ministry representative claimed, “This disease will never be accepted as a socially determined phenomenon.”⁶⁰ Given the state’s persistent denial of addiction as a social problem, state-run counseling centers for people with addictions were nonexistent in the GDR’s first decades. Moreover, self-aid organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) were unable to establish branches in East Germany until 1988.⁶¹ Government officials perceived patient organizations as unnecessary in a state healthcare system and even viewed them as potentially oppositional and system-critical groups.⁶²

Nevertheless, some tolerated exemptions like the so-called Evangelic Working Group for the Prevention of Addiction Dangers (*Evangelische Arbe-*

itsgemeinschaft zur Abwehr der Suchtgefahren; AGAS) had been active since 1960. As an institution of the Protestant Church, it was an indirect successor of the internationally acting Blue Cross, which had been forbidden in East Germany since 1945.⁶³ As a general strategy, the state unofficially accepted and relied on the church's support in social questions, such as disability and, in this case, alcohol addiction as a way of dealing with issues the SED neither had the funding nor ideological inclination to confront.⁶⁴ However, formal and informal groups and their activities under the protective roof of the church always remained a thorn in the state's side and thus often became targets of state security observations.⁶⁵

Despite the state's refusal to establish self-aid groups, Windischmann and other doctors and psychologists in similar positions across the GDR followed the international developments. For example, the British social psychiatrist Maxwell Jones' "therapeutic community" stressed the importance of group therapy for patients after their hospital release.⁶⁶ This concept influenced the establishment of groups of like-minded people to support each other, which evolved again locally—in fact, a statewide directive only materialized in August 1989 despite lengthy debates within the Ministry of Health since the beginning of the decade.⁶⁷ In general, newly formed therapeutic clubs were supposed to establish mutual support and a trusted and safe atmosphere for people with addictions to address their problems. This philosophy was, indeed, a crucial part of the work of already existing Protestant groups. However, at their first conference in 1979, club representatives stressed their pro-state character, their integration into the socialist healthcare system, and the vital inclusion of state medical personnel in their work—positions that set them apart from Christian organizations and AA.⁶⁸ By avoiding the word self-aid, members of these clubs hoped to avert conflict with state officials and sought to keep their work in line with socialist expectations. In this way, they contributed to shaping their socialist vision and tried to protect their therapeutic groups from being shut down by local and state officials.⁶⁹

The clubs' overall aim was to remove moral judgment surrounding relapse by including families and colleagues of the affected people in group activities as well as by educating the broader public by organizing local events such as the annual Dresden Club Talks, established by Engel.⁷⁰ Initiators of the clubs also encouraged people with alcohol addiction to "come out" with their queer socialist lifestyles in their social and work environments. The aim was to promote a change in social mentality by giving positive examples—refusing anonymity to their members which was crucial to

other organizations like AA. At the meeting in Brandenburg in 1979, Konrad B. expressed his desire to be recognized as a valuable member of the socialist society again. After years spent drinking twenty shots of liquor and twenty beers a day, he wanted to prove that abstinent-living alcoholics could be at the forefront of socialism. He even claimed that because of his abstinence, he had become a full-fledged “socialist personality” and was now part of “progressive circles.”⁷¹ In this way, Konrad B.’s example shows how he wanted to leave behind his existence as an alcoholic and the temporal incongruity associated with it to recover as a respected citizen within his social environment—his reality of socialism.

At the 1979 Brandenburg conference, many clubs complained about fluctuating memberships and a lack of support from local officials. Subsequently, their influence on a broader scale was diminished.⁷² The biggest problem was the state never legalized these groups. They remained in the gray zone and depended on local and state officials’ goodwill until the end of the GDR. On the one hand, this situation often led to confrontations and scandals, such as district officials’ refusal to allow a convention of doctors and members of therapeutic clubs in Magdeburg in 1980.⁷³ On the other hand, it opened opportunities for medical staff, patients, and local officials to establish and test different versions of therapeutic groups and other forms of mutual support for abstinent-living alcoholics after their stay at the hospital.⁷⁴ Jaroslav Skála was in a comparable position in Prague to Windischmann in Brandenburg. He also used his influence and social position to introduce modern therapies and even created a safe haven for partially persecuted psychiatry reformers after the upheaval of 1968.⁷⁵ One could say that these reformers made an altered reality in which patients could experience a different kind of socialism—one in which recovered (or recovering) alcoholics could be reintegrated into the project of socialism.

The 1979 conference, where members of therapeutic clubs, patients, and doctors met and shared their experiences in their work, represented a milestone for the treatment and aftercare of people with alcohol addiction in the GDR. However, this step forward was accompanied by challenges given state officials’ hesitance, ignorance, and fears. The conference was possible only because Windischmann had increasingly treated high-ranking functionaries and members of ministries at his clinic by the end of the 1970s. Some patients were willing to use their knowledge of the state apparatus to circumvent obstacles and confront state officials with a *fait accompli*.⁷⁶ As with socialist competitions, Windischmann, his patients, and others used existing rules to serve their ends, illustrating how leeway, improvisation,

and “controlled” deviance—even “subversive” behavior, as Adéla Gjuričová showed for Skála in Prague—at the local level transformed a supposedly strict centralized system.⁷⁷

Windischmann was in a privileged position in Brandenburg: he was an expert with a good reputation and a high social status. Therefore, he had the means to pursue his vision for the clinic with unconventional methods; and in so doing, he helped create his own form of socialism. The examples in this section reveal the limitations of the state’s reach, which allowed for some degree of deviation and even defiance at the local level. However, authorities granted the latter only if the local initiative corresponded to socialist values, ensured demarcation from the West, and provided benefits for the state. For people with addictions, officials recognized the need for therapeutic groups during the 1980s but avoided addressing the issue publicly. In a handwritten note during the Ministry of Health’s internal discussions on the legal status of these clubs in 1988, one official stated, “It seems to me that we are not making any progress here!”—an observation met with a simple “Correct!” from his colleague.⁷⁸

Conclusion

The state’s persistent denial of the existence of alcoholism under socialist conditions affected the policies and resources available to treat and provide aftercare for people with alcohol addiction in the GDR. The issue of alcohol abuse nonetheless intensified and became particularly noticeable in the 1970s. Admitting that there were more and more alcoholics in the country would have undermined the legitimacy of the official narrative, especially toward the West. State denial, however, left a vacuum, which was increasingly occupied by doctors, officials, and patients at the local level who utilized newfound leeway to create their own versions of socialism at the grassroots level. The urgency of the problem, international medical developments, and the failures of outdated treatments led people to experiment with new therapy methods, often against the wishes of state officials. The central figure of this article, Hubertus Windischmann, repeatedly tested the ideological limits, which led to multiple severe warnings from—and controversies with—his superiors.

Nonetheless, he and others were not opposed to the state, nor should their actions be construed as oppositional to state socialism. Despite the fact that these doctors often refused to join the socialist party, they actively participated in mass organizations and thus fulfilled their socialist duties.

As Gjuričová has argued about Skála and his colleagues in Prague, it was a “sophisticated exploitation of the complex combination of multiple and fluid identities and loyalties [that] enabled leading psychiatrists to maximize the political chances of their political survival, to secure funding for their projects and to shape their specialist field.”⁷⁹ Her conclusion also applies to Windischmann and shows the existence of a specific socialist negotiation pattern during the Honecker years. It illustrates a decentralized vision and practice of socialism, with carved-out space for the emergence of a healed and rejuvenated East German alcoholic subjectivity. The attempt to integrate people with alcohol addiction into socialist society helped queer the normative expectations and assumptions undergirding the GDR.

As this chapter demonstrates, changes in the situations of people with addictions always depended on the attitudes and commitment of the medical personnel on-site. With the help of unofficial networks, local experts and their patients procured material and labor to improve the conditions of a hospital. For example, they also forged official letters to other hospitals, bypassing ministerial censorship, in an attempt to compile a record of the existing patient clubs in East Germany. These stories often did not leave a paper trail. Windischmann states in his 1990 article, “We did not receive written rejections, only rebukes per telephone!”⁸⁰ Interestingly, much of the leeway for local doctors disappeared after 1990 with the reunification of Germany as new private healthcare providers frowned upon such “typical” developments in a dictatorship with a planned economy.⁸¹ While the socialist vanguard was reluctant to address alcoholism, doctors and patients at the local level often compensated for the lack of attention and found ways to improve—creating their version and vision of socialism.

Notes

1. Christian Werkmeister, “‘A Society that is Sinking Ever Deeper into a State of Chronic Alcohol Poisoning’: Medical and Moral Treatment of Alcoholics in the Soviet Union, c. 1970–1991,” in *Alcohol, Psychiatry and Society: Comparative and Transnational Perspectives, c. 1700–1990s*, ed. Waltraud Ernst and Thomas Müller (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022), 372.

2. Michael Geyer, ed., *Psychotherapie in Ostdeutschland: Geschichte und Geschichten 1945–1995* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 243.

3. See, for example, Markus Wahl, ed., *Volkseigene Gesundheit: Reflexionen zur Sozialgeschichte des Gesundheitswesens der DDR* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2020).

4. Mary Fulbrook, “The Concept of ‘Normalisation’ and the GDR in Comparative Perspective,” in *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961–1979: The “Normalisation of Rule”?*, ed. Mary Fulbrook (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 1–30.

5. David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), 154; and Carla Yanni, *The Architecture of Madness: Insane Asylums in the United States* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 11.

6. For a discussion of subjectivities in socialist countries, see Anatoly Pinsky, "Subjectivity after Stalin," *Russian Studies in History* 58, no. 2–3 (2019): 79–88; and Mary Fulbrook, "Conclusion: Structures and Subjectivities in GDR History," in *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler*, ed. Mary Fulbrook and Andrew I. Port (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 277–290. For the critics of using "subjectivities," see Aleksandr Ètkind, "Soviet Subjectivity: Torture for the Sake of Salvation?," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6, no. 1 (2005): 171–186.

7. Pinsky, "Subjectivity after Stalin," 80.

8. Mary Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives: Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 291–308, 488–489.

9. Patrick Major, "Going West: The Open Border and the Problem of Republikflucht," in *The Workers' and Peasants' State: Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht 1945–71*, ed. Patrick Major and Jonathan Osmond (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 190–209.

10. Hubertus Windischmann and Erni Kallenbach, "Konzeption der Vergrößerung der Spezialklinik für Alkoholranke" (Referat, I. Krankenhauskonferenz, Berlin, May 10, 1982), 3.

11. For more information on the generational change in GDR psychotherapy, see Geyer, *Psychotherapie in Ostdeutschland*, 90, 144, and 243.

12. For Windischmann's publications, see Hubertus Windischmann, "Alkoholkrankheit, Alkoholmißbrauch": *Gedanken zur Prävention und Rehabilitation*, ed. Präsidium der URANIA (Leipzig: URANIA, 1989); Hubertus Windischmann, *Ein Gläschen in Ehren . . .* (Berlin: VEB Verlag Volk und Gesundheit, 1989); Hubertus Windischmann, "Die nachgehende Betreuung Alkohol- und Drogenkranke," *Das Deutsche Gesundheitswesen* 31, no. 12 (1976): 538–541; and Hubertus Windischmann, "Zur Problematik stationärer Alkoholentziehungskuren in psychiatrischen Krankenhäusern," *Das Deutsche Gesundheitswesen* 22 (1967): 2239–2242.

13. Bundesarchiv Berlin (hereafter BArch), DQ 1/21817, "Dämon Alkohol: Wer ist ein wirklicher Held?" (March 20, 1960), n.p.

14. Jasmin Brötz, "Alcohol, Abstinence and Rationalisation in Germany, c. 1870s–1910s," in Ernst and Müller, *Alcohol, Psychiatry and Society*, 196–204; Sven Korzilius, "Asoziale" und "Parasiten" im Recht der SBZ/DDR (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005); and Adéla Gjuríčová, "A Cradle of Psychotherapy: Treatment of Alcohol Addiction in Communist Czechoslovakia, c. 1948–1989," in Ernst and Müller, *Alcohol, Psychiatry and Society*, 340.

15. Thomas Kochan, *Blauer Würger: So trank die DDR* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2011), 97–99. A similar pattern can be found in Czechoslovakia and the Slavic and Baltic regions of the Soviet Union. See Gjuríčová, "A Cradle of Psychotherapy"; and Werkmeister, "A Society That Is Sinking."

16. Name anonymized. Hans-Joachim Wenzel and Hubertus Windischmann, eds., *Dokumentation: Erfahrungsaustausch abstinent lebender Alkohol- und Drogen-*

kranker in der DDR, Bezirksnervenklinik Brandenburg 4. u. 5.5.79 (Brandenburg: Bezirksnervenklinik Brandenburg, 1979), 110.

17. BArch, DQ 1/21817, "Dämon Alkohol: Wer ist ein wirklicher Held?" (March 20, 1960), n.p.; Gjuríčová, "A Cradle of Psychotherapy," 336–338; and Werkmeister, "A Society That Is Sinking," 356–358.

18. Kochan, *Blauer Würger*; Gundula Barsch, *Von Herrengedeck und Kumpeltod: Die Drogengeschichte der DDR, Band 1: Alkohol—Der Geist aus der Flasche* (Geesthacht: Neuland, 2009); and Brötz, "Alcohol, Abstinence and Rationalisation in Germany," 187–191.

19. "Strafgesetzbuch der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik -StGB- vom 12. Januar 1968," *Gesetzesblatt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, Teil I, no. 1 (January 22, 1968): 1–48; "Gesetz über die Einweisung in stationäre Einrichtungen für psychisch Kranke vom 11. Juni 1968," *Gesetzesblatt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, Teil I, no. 13 (June 14, 1968): 273–276; and "Verordnung über die Aufgaben der örtlichen Räte und der Betriebe bei der Erziehung kriminell gefährdeter Bürger vom 15. August 1968," *Gesetzesblatt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, Teil II, no. 93 (September 6, 1968): 751–753.

20. Geyer, *Psychotherapie in Ostdeutschland*, 243–244.

21. Geyer, *Psychotherapie in Ostdeutschland*, 28.

22. Jens Hald and Erik Jacobsen, "A Drug Sensitising the Organism to Ethyl Alcohol," *The Lancet* 252, no. 6539 (December 25, 1948): 1001–1004; and Hans-Dieter Koritsch, "Die Rolle des Disulfiram in der Entwöhnungsbehandlung Alkoholabhängiger," *Zeitschrift für ärztliche Fortbildung*, no. 76 (1982): 454.

23. For the use of aversion therapy for people with alcohol addiction in Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, see Gjuríčová, "A Cradle of Psychotherapy," 338; and Werkmeister, "A Society That Is Sinking," 368.

24. Koritsch, "Die Rolle des Disulfiram," 454–57.

25. Kate Davison, "Cold War Pavlov: Homosexual Aversion Therapy in the 1960s," *History of the Human Sciences* 34, no. 1 (2021): 89–119; Gjuríčová, "A Cradle of Psychotherapy"; and Werkmeister, "A Society That Is Sinking."

26. Hans-Ulrich Strack, *Rosa Nacht und schwarzes Licht: Leben mit Alkohol. Berichte* (Berlin: Der Morgen, 1989), 218.

27. Name anonymized. Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden (hereafter HStA-D), 10820/955, "Bericht der Patientin" (June 26, 1974), n.p.

28. Name anonymized. HStA-D, 10820/1011, Krankenakte (1979), n.p.

29. For more information on gendered treatments of sexually transmitted diseases, see Steffi Brüning, *Prostitution in der DDR: Eine Untersuchung am Beispiel der Städte Rostock, Berlin und Leipzig von 1968 bis 1989* (Berlin: be.bra wissenschaft, 2019); Markus Wahl, *Medical Memories and Experiences in Postwar East Germany: Treatments of the Past* (London: Routledge, 2019); and Florian Steger and Maximilian Schochow, *Traumatisierung durch politisierte Medizin: Geschlossene Venerologische Stationen in der DDR* (Berlin: MWV, 2015).

30. Markus Wahl, "Ich weiß, daß die Kur sehr hart wird . . .': Die Anwendung der Aversionstherapie bei Patienten mit Alkoholabhängigkeit im Bezirkskrankenhaus für Neurologie und Psychiatrie in Arnsdorf in der DDR, 1966–1981," in *Psychiatrie in*

der DDR: Beiträge zur Geschichte, ed. Ekkehardt Kumbier (Berlin: be.bra wissenschaft, 2020), II: 229–242.

31. Windischmann, “Zur Problematik stationärer Alkoholentziehungskuren,” 2241–2242. Author’s interview with Hubertus Windischmann on November 25, 2019.

32. Walter Haak, Hans-Joachim Wenzel, and Hubertus Windischmann, ed., *2. Erfahrungsaustausch abstinent lebender Alkohol- und Drogenkranke in der DDR* (Brandenburg: Bezirksnervenlinik Brandenburg, 1981), 31–39.

33. HStA-D, 10822/11846, “Medizinische Betreuung von Alkoholkranken” (April 14, 1978), n.p. See also Thomas Metan and Boris Böhm, *100 Jahre Krankenhaus Arnsdorf: Von der Königlich Sächsischen Pflgeanstalt zum Fachkrankenhaus für Psychiatrie, Psychotherapie und Neurologie* (Dessau-Roßlau: HOTEX Verlag Thomas Metan, 2012), 72.

34. See, for example, HStA-D, 10820/925, Krankenakte (1971), n.p.

35. Wenzel and Windischmann, *Dokumentation*, 4.

36. Interview with Windischmann.

37. Hubertus Windischmann, “Gruppentherapie bei Alkoholkranken,” *Zeitschrift für ärztliche Fortbildung* 64, no. 6 (1970): 285–288.

38. Koritsch, “Die Rolle des Disulfiram.”

39. HStA-D, 10822/12048, “Protokoll, Kreisstelle für die Betreuung Alkohol- und Arzneimittelabhängiger, Rat der Stadt Dresden” (February 5, 1987), n.p.

40. See, for example, HStA-D, 10822/11860, “Ärztlicher Direktor Oertel an Rat des Bezirkes Dresden, Bezirksarzt Jänke” (January 17, 1986), n.p.

41. HStA-D, 10822/11864, “Eingabe 28 Patienten und Patientinnen an das Ministerium für Gesundheitswesen” (July 20, 1977), n.p.; and HStA-D, 10822/11864, “Antwort Ärztlicher Direktor an das Ministerium für Gesundheitswesen” (October 16, 1977), n.p.

42. HStA-D, 10822/12048, “Ergebnisse der Beratung zu Problemen der Betreuung alkoholkranker Bürger im Bezirk zur Vorlage beim Bezirksarzt” (February 26, 1987), n.p.

43. See, for example, BArch, Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (hereafter MfS), ZAIG, 1852, “Inf. über einige Probleme im Bereich des Gesundheitswesens der DDR” (November 5, 1970), Bl. 5–6.

44. Wiebke Janssen, “Medizinische Hochschulbauten als Prestigeobjekt der SED: Das Klinikum Halle-Kröllwitz,” *Deutschland Archiv* 45, no. 4 (2012): 703–712.

45. HStA-D, 10822/12005, “Arbeitstherapie in einem Psychiatrischen Fachkrankenhaus—Analyse und Probleme” ([1984]), n.p.

46. Windischmann, “Zur Problematik stationärer Alkoholentziehungskuren,” 2240.

47. See, for example, HStA-D, 10820/1033, Krankenakten (1981), n.p.

48. BArch, DP 1/2485, “Bericht über die ersten Erfahrungen seit Inkrafttreten des Strafgesetzbuches seit der Durchsetzung der Verantwortung der Leiter der Staats- und Wirtschaftsorgane für die Verhütung von Straftaten” (November 26, 1969), n.p.

49. Windischmann and Kallenbach, “Konzeption der Vergrößerung der Spezialklinik,” 4.

50. Interview with Windischmann.

51. Privataarchiv Hubertus Windischmann (hereafter PA HW), Bezirksnervenklinik Brandenburg (hereafter BNB), Suchtklinik, MS, Patient, Bilder Nr. 1–4.

52. Interview with Windischmann.

53. According to the *Brigadetagebuch* (Brigade Diary) of the clinic for alcohol and drug addiction in Brandenburg from 1978, of the total number of new patients, the percentage of artisans was always around 50 percent. PA HW, BNB, Suchtklinik, MS, Personal, Nr. 1, “Arbeitsprogramm zum Ehrentitel ‘Kollektiv der sozialistischen Arbeit’” (1978), Bl. 42, 47, and 51. A similar pattern is recognizable in the psychiatric hospitals in Arnsdorf and Großschweidnitz. See Hans-Dieter Koritsch, “Patienten einer Alkoholkrankenstation im psychiatrischen Krankenhaus,” *Zeitschrift für ärztliche Fortbildung*, no. 76 (1982): 394.

54. Harald Dehne, “Consumption and Consumerism in the German Democratic Republic,” in *Everyday Life in Mass Dictatorship: Collusion and Evasion*, ed. Alf Lüdtke (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 147–162; and Kochan, *Blauer Würger*, 248–249. For the procurement of Western pharmaceuticals, see Markus Wahl, “Doing Drugs in Socialist East Germany: Gendered Prescription and (Ab)use of Pharmaceuticals in the GDR, 1949–1989,” *Social History of Alcohol and Drugs* 35, no. 2 (2021): 287–326.

55. Interview with Windischmann.

56. See, for example, the statement of Windischmann’s superior in 1979, in Wenzel and Windischmann, *Dokumentation*, 5.

57. PA HW, BNB, Suchtklinik, SW, Nr. 2, “FDGB, Gewerkschaft Gesundheitswesen, Überreichung der Ehrentafel an das Kollektiv der Klinik für Alkohol- und Drogenkranke, Brandenburg” (October 5, 1978), Bl. 1.

58. Interview with Windischmann.

59. Other important early forms of the therapeutic clubs were established in Stollberg and Magdeburg. HStA-D, 10822/12048, “Eine Betrachtung zum ‘StoK’ anlässlich seines zweijährigen Bestehens am 3.12.1981” (n.d.), n.p.

60. PA HW, BNB, Suchtklinik, SW, Nr. 1, “Skizze zum Gespräch am 12.6.1985 in Berlin” (June 16, 1985), Bl. 4–5.

61. Gerlinde Pokladek, “Und es gab sie doch—Suchtkrankenhilfe in der DDR,” in *Der Geist der deutschen Mäßigkeitsbewegung: Debatten um Alkohol und Trinken in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, ed. Karl Wassenberg (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2010), 99–113; and Hubertus Windischmann, “Zur Geschichte der Abstinenzbewegung in der DDR,” in *Therapeutische Gemeinschaften für süchtige Menschen in Europa: Referate der Europäischen Konferenz der Therapeutischen Gemeinschaften, Berlin 6.-9. Juni 1990*, ed. Reinhold Beß, Horst Brömer, and Annette Schaeffer-de-Gooijer (München: Röttger, 1991), 91–101.

62. For example, state officials denied multiple requests by people with diabetes to establish a patient association during the 1960s. See, for example, BArch, Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (hereafter MfS), ZAIG, 1852, “Inf. über einige Probleme im Bereich des Gesundheitswesens der DDR” (November 5, 1970), Bl. 5–6.

63. Sigurd Kasischke, *Die Geschichte der AGAS: Evangelische Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Abwehr der Suchtgefahren* (Lüdenscheid: Blaukreuz-Verlag, 2013).

64. Sebastian Barsch, *Geistig behinderte Menschen in der DDR: Erziehung—Bildung—Betreuung* (Oberhausen: Athena, 2007), 106–111.

65. See BArch, MfS, HA XX/4, 2452, “Information” (July 24, 1974), Bl. 29.

66. Ekkehardt Kumbier and Kathleen Haack, "Die Therapeutische Gemeinschaft und das Arzt-Schwester-Patient-Verhältnis in der Psychiatrie: Zwischen therapeutischen Anspruch und sozialistischer Realität," in *Volkseigene Gesundheit: Reflexionen zur Sozialgeschichte des Gesundheitswesens der DDR*, ed. Markus Wahl (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2020), 111–134; Wenzel and Windischmann, *Dokumentation*; and Haack, Wenzel, and Windischmann, *2. Erfahrungsaustausch abstinent lebender Alkohol- und Drogenkranker in der DDR*.

67. See, for example, the internal debates among state departments initiated by a petition requesting a directive from the state regarding therapeutic groups' financial, legal, and insurance situation between 1987 and 1988 in BArch, DQ 1/12676 "Bemühungen abstinent lebender Alkoholabhängiger aus Lößnitz und aus Brandenburg um therapeutische Gemeinschaften Suchtkranker" (1987-1988), n.p.

68. Wenzel and Windischmann, *Dokumentation*, 5, 8.

69. For example, the fourth conference in 1985 was canceled because of a dispute with a representative from the Ministry of Health.

70. Wenzel and Windischmann, *Dokumentation*, 59–60; and HStA-D, 10822/12048, "Einladung zum 7. Dresdener Klubgespräch, Mittelabhängigkeit und Suizidalität" (May 17, 1985), n.p.

71. Wenzel and Windischmann, *Dokumentation*, 119.

72. Wenzel and Windischmann, *Dokumentation*, 119.

73. PA HW, BNB, Suchtklinik, SW, Nr. 2, "Brief Dr. Volker Kielstein an Dr. Barleben, Hauptabteilung II im Ministerium des Gesundheitswesens" (September 17, 1980), Bl. 5–7.

74. Windischmann, "Zur Geschichte der Abstinenzbewegung in der DDR."

75. Gjuričová, "A Cradle of Psychotherapy," 338–347.

76. See the letter and invitation to the conference, received by the medical director of Großschweidnitz: HStA-D, 10822/11888, "Einladung zur Arbeitstagung am 4. und 5. Mai 1979" (July 28, 1978), n.p. Interview with Windischmann.

77. Gjuričová, "A Cradle of Psychotherapy," 332.

78. BArch, DQ 1/12676, "Handschriftliche Notiz" (January 14, 1988), n.p.

79. Gjuričová, "A Cradle of Psychotherapy," 345.

80. Windischmann, "Zur Geschichte der Abstinenzbewegung in der DDR," 98. Emphasis in original.

81. For the similar post-1990 situation in Czechoslovakia, see Gjuričová, "A Cradle of Psychotherapy," 347–348.

Producing Culture, Producing Socialism *An Apparatchik and a Singer-Songwriter in the Haus der jungen Talente*

Katharine White

Philipp Dyck was in his early twenties when East Germany hosted the Festival of Political Songs (*Festival des politischen Liedes*) as part of its Tenth World Festival of Youth and Students in 1973.¹ Dyck had been studying in Leipzig but returned to East Berlin on the eve of the festival with a singing group that included international students learning German at the Herder Institute. He recalled the transformation of East Berlin's city center into a stage for the rock singers, agitprop groups, and folk artists that the festival organizers had invited to perform. Dyck loved music, pointing to East Germany's home-grown, sing-along Hootenanny Klub and the rise of the state-sponsored singing movement (*Singebewegung*) that allowed amateur musicians such as himself to perform. He loved music so much that, in the 1980s, he became head of the twenty or so comrades responsible for orchestrating the cultural affairs of the Free German Youth (*Freie Deutsche Jugend*; FDJ).² Among his many tasks, Dyck oversaw a host of cultural programs—including youth concerts and festivals—tapping artists predominantly from the East but also special invitees from beyond the German Democratic Republic (GDR).³

Dyck spent most of his youth in East Berlin, leaving only to pursue a university education and eventually his doctorate. During his studies, he had the opportunity to travel across the Eastern Bloc and worked for a short stint with an international brigade in the Soviet Union. While abroad, he listened to his fellow comrades' illegal radio station—affectionately referred to as Radio-Hooligan—that played music brought over from the West, piping out everything from the Beatles to the Rolling Stones. Perhaps it was the

comradery formed through the Western music that inspired his decision to take part in a strike during his time in the international student brigade—as he noted, it was the only strike he ever participated in. In the end, Dyck was not much of a rebel type. Instead, he assumed a vital role in orchestrating the East German cultural production process by working behind the scenes and within the system as a cultural producer.⁴



Bettina Wegner's life trajectory was quite different from Dyck's, though she, too, played an integral part in the East German cultural production process. Wegner was born in 1947 in the western part of Berlin and moved with her parents, who were devout communists, to East Berlin shortly thereafter. In her youth, she joined the Young Pioneers and the FDJ, with aspirations of becoming a member of the Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*; SED). As one of the singers and songwriters who founded the Hootenanny Klub in the mid-1960s, she dedicated her late teens to creating a folk music scene in East Berlin. Yet although Wegner was committed to advancing the state's cultural agenda, she quickly found herself among East Berlin's outcast musicians and artists. The initial shift in her career might be traced back to 1967, when she cut ties with the Hootenanny Klub after it was rebranded as the FDJ's Oktoberklub (in honor of the Bolshevik Revolution). Roughly a year later, Wegner protested the Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia by disseminating flyers on the streets of East Berlin.⁵ She was promptly arrested and sentenced to sixteen months in prison, though she received a reduced term provided she "go into production" (*Bewährung in die Produktion*) at an electrical plant. The subsequent period of compulsory factory work ended her professional studies in theater school; moreover, it changed her.⁶

Despite the authorities' heavy-handedness, Wegner chose neither to "drop out" nor apply for an exit visa to the West, as others did at the time. Instead, she returned to pursue a career as an independent singer and songwriter, taking evening classes at the state's Central Studio for Performance Arts.⁷ As a freelance artist, Wegner remained determined to perform her music in front of East German audiences. In the mid-1970s, she applied for permits to organize a series of events in East Berlin's House of Young Talents (*Haus der jungen Talente*; HdjT), among other state venues. Although she received permission to host the events, she repeatedly ran afoul of the cultural authorities because of the unorthodox nature of the performances

that unfolded. And yet Wegner turned time and again to state venues as a laboratory to bring her own vision of the artistic creative process into the folds of the state's cultural production machine.

If we were to reduce the socialist world to simple binaries, Dyck and Wegner might be portrayed as the archetypes of party apparatchik versus repressed dissident. But such labels elide the circumstances through which these two individuals fashioned and refashioned their own subject positions.⁸ Rather than reify such dichotomies, this chapter focuses on the unstable situational realities that Dyck and Wegner found themselves in and the performative ways they responded.⁹ There were differences in how Dyck and Wegner *oriented* themselves to the world; but such differences were not due to an innate sense of being, so much as how they forged their own "crooked" paths of self-making.¹⁰ For Dyck, the present seemed intrinsically tied to the expected socialist future—a lifepath that required ideological perseverance, rigor, and personal sacrifice. Meanwhile, Wegner lived for occasional moments of spontaneity, creativity, and combustion intrinsic to artistic breakthrough. When examined side by side, we can begin to parse out their incongruent ways of being—each marked by a queer temporality (with queer referring here to nonnormativity or heterogeneity).¹¹ Put another way, by placing them in the same analytical frame, we gain insights into how Wegner and Dyck manufactured their complex subject positions not in spite of, but in relation to, one another.¹²

While Dyck and Wegner may have crossed paths, there is no indication that the two knew each other, and they certainly kept very different company.¹³ And yet they frequented some of the very same spaces. Their proximity to each other is key, particularly as *space* ties people to one another even when *time* separates them. This chapter uses East Berlin's House of Young Talents as a spatial focal point—that is, as a lived space where we see East German culture actually being produced.¹⁴ Both Wegner and Dyck took part in this process, laying claim to the HdjT in their highly dissimilar ways. In turn, the cultural production process assumed an elastic, malleable, and ever-shifting character as they inflected it with new meanings each and every day. This chapter thus rejects the notion that East German official culture was stale, static, or in a perpetual state of decline.¹⁵ Instead, it underscores the extent to which individuals transformed the cultural production process through their own array of improvisational and impassioned subjectivities. By tracing the lives of Wegner and Dyck, we uncover not only the relational existence of two individuals, but also the multidirectional pull that existed at the very heart of producing culture, and even producing socialism.

Envisioning Socialist Culture

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the leaders of the East German SED were in the midst of reckoning with the fact that global youth unrest—from hippy culture and international protest music to the crackdown in Prague and the escalation of the war in Vietnam—had left a mark on young people in the GDR.¹⁶ After years of failing to repress what they could not control, party leaders shifted gears: if they could not halt the influx of Western music and the long-haired, self-styled hippy trends that had taken hold of the younger generation of East Germans, they might as well try to place them on center stage. By appropriating elements of the international music scene, at least then they could control the vetting process of who would be granted the right to perform in clubs and performance halls, while limiting the potential for unrest among the audiences.¹⁷

The shift in the GDR's cultural policies corresponded to both the transnational influences of the post-1968 world and the rise of Erich Honecker as the head of the SED in 1971. At the SED's Eighth Party Congress, Honecker promised a future socialist state that would be less restrictive for art, music, and culture. In his own words, there would be "no more taboos." While the window of "no more taboos" is often considered to have been short-lived—symbolically ending in 1976 with the forced expatriation of singer and songwriter Wolf Biermann—it nonetheless ushered in lasting changes in the cultural realm.¹⁸ As Briana Smith points out in her chapter, the post-Biermann era even saw the rise of a "new pioneer spirit" among some artists who "used participatory and interactive art to (momentarily) animate alternatives in the present."¹⁹ This occurred at least partially because of the continued commitment on the part of the FDJ to support new types of youth programs that drew large audiences and stirred fervent participation. As a closer look at the singing movement makes clear, the Honecker era was marked by the shared ideals and disparate visions of East German musicians and ideologues, such as Wegner and Dyck; moreover, it was the give-and-take between them that generated the diverse subjectivities and varying potentialities that came to exist in places such as the HdjT.



The East German singing movement had modest beginnings. Before Wegner took to the streets posting flyers in opposition to the invasion of Czechoslovakia, she had channeled her creative energy into co-founding the informal

Hootenanny Klub in the mid-1960s. The Hootenanny scene was inspired by a combination of influences from its Appalachian roots, to the folk music that had gained popularity in New York City's nightclubs, to the transcending figure of Perry Friedman—the banjo-strumming Canadian singer and songwriter who had resettled in East Berlin. For Wegner, the Hootenanny sing-along concept was appealing because it provided the spontaneity that she yearned for in the East German cultural production process.²⁰ Wegner thrived on the performative potential and the extemporaneous engagement that the stage offered. And for a brief moment, East German cultural functionaries seemed to accept the Hootenanny Klub—with its connections to protest music in the United States and beyond—for what it was.

By design, the Hootenanny Klub had a relaxed atmosphere with performers such as Wegner taking the stage to sing music that begged audience participation. They met regularly at East Berlin's *Klub Internationale*, where musicians made guest appearances on the GDR's radio and television programs. They also invited international guests: in 1967, Pete Seeger went on tour in the GDR, playing in conjunction with the Hootenanny Klub at various venues. His visit was possible only because he enjoyed at least the nominal support of East German cultural functionaries. In fact, the East German Amiga record label produced an album of Seeger's live performances from his GDR tour for distribution to a wider audience. As Dyck recalled, they had all sung popular songs by Seeger—songs that reflected the sentiments of the international protest music that the East German functionaries were now laying claim to as well.²¹

Despite the success of Seeger's visit, the informal Hootenanny scene's connections to the US proved to be a double-edged sword. In the months following his tour, the SED Central Committee reinforced its campaign to "combat Western tendencies in certain cultural institutions" with the curtailment of "Americanization tendencies in the cultural field."²² The campaign marked a second wave of repressive measures that extended back to the hard-line policies of the Central Committee's infamous Eleventh Plenum in 1965.²³ Wegner and her fellow singers and songwriters were informed shortly thereafter that the Hootenanny Klub would be renamed the Oktoberklub and repackaged as the FDJ's official singing movement. For Wegner, the state's decision to regulate the informal scene was tantamount to a death sentence for the spontaneity that made the Hootenanny movement what it was. As other young singers and songwriters embraced the Oktoberklub, she could not help but feel a sense of resentment and betrayal.²⁴ Disillusioned, she left the singing movement just as it became part of the other side of the culture

production process—the side that fell more firmly under the purview of FDJ cultural functionaries, eventually including Dyck.

In 1968, the distinction between singers and songwriters, such as Wegner, and those who participated in the Oktoberklub became all the more pronounced. While Wegner sat in jail for protesting the Warsaw Pact invasion, the Oktoberklub performed Hartmut König's version of "Tell Me Where You Stand" (*Sag mir, wo du stehst*) at an FDJ-organized concert just days after the crackdown on the Prague Spring. As Beate Kutschke notes, "Clearly drawing on Pete Seeger's protest song, 'Which Side Are You On?', the strophes of 'Sag mir, wo du stehst' not only commanded its listeners to resolutely devote themselves to the official political purposes (including the support of the invasion of Czechoslovakia), it also urged closet sceptics to denounce themselves."²⁵ Wegner had already decided where she stood, and it landed her in prison, followed by a probation period on the factory floor.

The late 1960s, when Wegner refused to join the Oktoberklub and protested the invasion of Czechoslovakia, thus emerges in sharp relief. At the time, Wegner had already established close ties with East Berlin's alternative milieu—she had a child with the writer Thomas Brasch, who was also arrested in 1968 for anti-state agitation. Yet, in taking a stand against the state, Wegner's subject position came to be defined as more firmly oppositional—recognizing, as Joan Scott does, that "it is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience."²⁶ As Wegner later noted, "My foundational experience was to have a five-month-old child—and enter jail at age twenty."²⁷ Wegner's life had taken a detour from socialist normative expectations—she was an unmarried, single mother standing trial in a state where traditional conceptions of marriage, family, and work reigned.²⁸ In her own way, Wegner had defied these responsibilities—flouting societal rituals and gender roles. Perhaps unsurprisingly, her actions would have long-term repercussions—raising her profile, sidelining her work, and redefining her life trajectory in ways she could have little anticipated.²⁹

But Wegner was still young, and her struggle to find meaning, connectivity, and a sense of fulfillment as a singer and songwriter in the GDR was far from over. While her stint on the factory floor resulted in her dropping out of theater school, she remained brash and resolute when it came to producing her own music via a process of creative exchange with other musicians, intellectuals, and audiences. Much like Kyrill Kunakhovich's discussion of East German dissident-writer Gert Neumann in his chapter, solidarity with fellow socialists seemed to be a source of solace for Wegner; being a cultural producer in the

GDR meant being part of a collective.³⁰ It was just a matter of time before she would seek out new opportunities to redefine her subject position by taking the stage at the HdjT alongside fellow East Germans.

Meanwhile, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Oktoberklub helped establish the groundwork for the formation of thousands of amateur singing groups across the GDR. Despite the breadth of the Oktoberklub's programming, its impact on shaping East German youth culture and the broader singing movement often goes unappreciated.³¹ The Oktoberklub enjoyed easy access to state venues, television coverage, the DT-64 youth radio, as well as the Amiga record label, all of which allowed it to launch the careers of numerous popular musicians in the GDR. In addition, the group regularly hosted informal Friday-night concerts in the cellar of the HdjT, creating a scene not unlike what Wegner had envisioned for the Hootenanny Klub—with young people clapping, singing along, and enjoying music together. The appeal of these informal events stemmed from the Oktoberklub's ability to generate a give-and-take that allowed for a mix of artistic inspiration, cultural exchange, and the connectivity that young people craved.³²

In the early 1970s, East German cultural functionaries further raised the Oktoberklub's profile with the founding of the annual Festival of Political Songs. Each year the festival brought together thousands (in its early incarnation) to tens of thousands (in its latter years) of amateur and professional musicians from across the GDR and around the world to sing alongside the Oktoberklub on East German stages in the HdjT and elsewhere.³³ As Dyck recalled from his university days, many international students studying in the GDR participated in the festivals' amateur groups. He elaborated, "I had good friends from the solidarity ensemble who came from African countries—Tanzania, South Africa; but also from many other countries [in] Latin America . . . [forming bonds] especially through music."³⁴ Still in his early twenties, Dyck embraced the interactive process of performing political music with international youth as a meaningful expression of solidarity.

Yet for Dyck, there was more to these events than reveling in the spontaneity of the moment or the embodied experience of taking to the stage alongside other artists. In my conversation with him, he seemed to have been earnest in his desire to transform East German society through ideologically informed exchange; he can be seen below asking a question at a podium discussion on "The Working Class and their Art" in the HdjT at the 1972 Festival of Political Songs (see Figure 3). The opportunity to engage intellectually, as well as produce political music with fellow East Germans and international youth, was an experience that would shape his life trajectory in very differ-



Figure 3. Philipp Dyck at the Festival of Political Songs, 1972. (Credit: Bundesarchiv Bild 183-L0214-0031—Vera Katscharowski)

ent ways than Wegner's. For him, such events aligned with the unfolding of an almost predictable socialist future that fell in step with the temporal cadence of his own life.

Of course, not everything about the festivals was planned or ran smoothly. As Lutz Kirchenwitz, a founding member of the Oktoberklub and the director of the Festival of Political Songs, later reflected, "The festival was for many a 'leftist creative island' (*linke kreative Insel*), a free space, where things could be tried out that up to that point had not been possible in the GDR (political fairs, festival newspapers, and HdjT nightclubs, for example). Periodically there were naturally conflicts: songs were forbidden, posters not approved, festival newspapers censored, for instance. But nonetheless the festival was able to develop an aesthetic that was different from the typical FDJ jubilee."³⁵ Right up until the end of the GDR's existence, young people continued to show up and wait in long lines to attend the various festival performances. They especially gravitated to the events at the HdjT; as Kirchenwitz noted, it was a scene all its own with music, discussions, and activities that lasted late into the night.³⁶

For Wegner, the singing movement's ability to bring together prominent international musicians, amateur singers, and large audiences had been unimaginable at the outset. On the occasions when she managed to evade the police by squeezing her body into the crowds at the Festivals of Political Songs, she was in awe at the spontaneity that singers brought to the stage. As she reflected, "There was an atmosphere similar to when we began it all, only now there were people from around the world there."³⁷ And yet, the GDR functionaries had sidelined Wegner in the cultural production process: not only did they require performance permits and a thorough review process of the songs that East German artists performed, they also regulated who could attend the festivals. Wegner was one of many repeatedly denied access. For her, the festivals proved to be a source of profound cognitive dissonance: while she recognized that they offered an important experience of interactive exchange for some, they did not do so for her.³⁸

With time, East German cultural functionaries also recognized that the Festival of Political Songs had inherent flaws. As Kirchenwitz acknowledged in his recommendations to the SED Central Committee in the early 1980s, the singing movement had devolved into a problematic situation ideologically. He explained that although the music remained an important symbol of socialist internationalism, there was a "contradiction between the societal significance of the political song and its place in the everyday cultural life of the GDR." As he further noted, "the constantly renewed demands on singing clubs" meant that in the FDJ, "there's hardly any spontaneous singing" at all.³⁹ In the 1970s, the Oktoberklub's popularity waned considerably, at least partially because of such developments. Despite the continued swell of young people who clamored for the international festivals, only 5 percent of young East Germans admitted to liking the Oktoberklub.⁴⁰

Reading between the lines, Kirchenwitz was pointing out one of the reasons that artists such as Wegner had distanced herself from the movement—namely, the state's control over the scene deprived it of a certain creative impulse, whereby art and music might be ideologically driven or they might be forms of self-expression, but they were not necessarily both. In Kirchenwitz's recommendations to the Central Committee, he proposed that the singing return to its roots—pointing to the tradition of the timeless "Wandervogel illusion"—a reference to the youth singing groups of the early 1900s that wandered the countryside. He also suggested that the singing movement be realigned to focus on issues of contemporary relevance for young East Germans—changes that Wegner likely would have welcomed.⁴¹

Despite the movement's shortcomings, East German cultural functionaries, including Dyck, continued to believe in the importance of supporting

cultural events of this nature right up until the end of the GDR. After he became Secretary of Culture in the Central Council of the FDJ, Dyck had few opportunities to strum his guitar alongside international students. Rather, his greatest contributions were solidified behind the scenes through his commitment to ensuring the political-ideological agenda for the GDR's cultural programs over the long term. Dyck's days were undoubtedly filled with planning for party congresses, Central Council planning meetings, high-level discussions with artists, as well as endless reams of paperwork. And yet, it was the signatures that he placed on documents that allowed cultural production to proceed. For Dyck, such actions held real import. As one of the party vanguard, he seemed to do all he could to ensure the vitality and longevity of the GDR's cultural process.⁴² In this way, his vision and the subject position he assumed remained in line with what might be rendered as a normative, linear, almost predictable unfolding of the expected socialist future. By contrast, Wegner continued to test the limits of her existing socialist temporality—in the words of Jack Halberstam, she seemed bent on “squeeze[ing] new possibilities out of the time at hand”—that is, until she found herself forced to leave the GDR permanently.⁴³

Producing Socialist Culture

During the period corresponding to Honecker's declaration of “no more taboos,” Wegner was hard at work reinventing her career through a series of musical events and philosophical debates that attracted writers, musicians, and young people alike (see Figure 4). Wegner and her co-organizers named the events *Eintopp* (stew or stewpot) since a bit of everything was to be included, with elements of poetry, music, and live readings.⁴⁴ Wegner had not intended for the performances to be open acts of defiance to the state; in fact, she applied for and received authorization to hold the programs monthly at the HdjT beginning in 1974. By seeking out the HdjT rather than an apartment or a less conspicuous bar or youth club, Wegner clearly hoped to make the events a prominent part of East Berlin's cultural scene. And yet, she resisted the formality of the state's usual terms for publicly staged performances: the musicians and writers would not be vetted, the programs would not be pre-planned, and the discussions would go largely unscripted. Indeed, Wegner hoped to utilize the informal atmosphere of the HdjT with its many clubs, music events, and disco nights as a space for improvisation and creative engagement.

According to Wegner, the first year of *Eintopp* events proved successful with 200 to 250 attendees at most performances—rendering them “a



Figure 4. Bettina Wegner, mid-1970s (Credit: Saltzman, Public domain)

dominant feature of the cultural life of [the] capital.”⁴⁵ She chalked up the accomplishment to the fact that the events followed the ideas laid out at their conception while also adhering to the spirit of the recent SED party congresses—including the Eighth Party Congress in 1971 when Honecker had called for increased artistic diversity.⁴⁶ Each of the *Eintopp* programs featured a mix of music performances, readings, and open discussions with well-known East German musicians and writers such as Christa Wolf, Stefan Heym, Volker Braun, Hermann Kant, and others. Frank Hörnigk, who helped organize the events and was also a SED party member, noted that many critical intellectuals had enjoyed an almost dialectic relationship to the party during this period; as he later reflected, “I believe that the oppositional history of the GDR has to include currents and oppositional platforms

within the Party itself. Whether I can count myself as a part of these currents is another question, but I really believe they were an essential dimension.”⁴⁷ For him, *Eintopp* symbolized an important new direction for the East German cultural agenda in the mid-1970s; moreover, it was one that involved critical input from intellectuals within and beyond the party.

But the SED’s commitment to cultural diversity as outlined in the Eighth Party Congress had limits. The challenges of organizing an event like *Eintopp* become apparent in the subsequent back and forth that ensued between Wegner and the cultural functionaries. The HdjT leaders were not exactly pleased by Wegner’s unconventional approach; in turn, she was annoyed by their constant meddling. In a letter Wegner wrote at the end of 1974, she pointed out that when she had first approached the HdjT leaders about staging the *Eintopp* events, she had stressed that they must have an “experimental and discussion-focused character.”⁴⁸ According to her, the functionaries had agreed, granting her creative license over the events, while they would provide financial and technical assistance. Yet, as she made clear in her correspondences, the functionaries were now angling for increased supervision over the events. In her frank style, she reiterated to the SED district leadership that she refused to allow them to turn *Eintopp* into another “program number,” where “everything and everyone is determined from the outset.”⁴⁹ Wegner suggested that the cultural functionaries should instead hold a more formal event of their own.

If Wegner is taken at her word, her correspondence suggests that she did not see the leadership’s proposed programs as at odds with the informal events that she hoped to organize at the HdjT; rather, she believed that an open dialogue around literature, culture, and music belonged in the same space as the more formal ideological event—though the two had different purposes. Wegner went on to outline a series of points for how she hoped to proceed with *Eintopp*, offering to meet the cultural functionaries halfway to avoid the imposition of unnecessary censorship measures.⁵⁰ The archival file does not contain a response from the authorities, but Wegner’s subsequent correspondences with HdjT leaders demonstrate that the events remained a source of contention.

Despite Wegner’s efforts, HdjT leaders expressed reservations when it came to renewing her contract. At least initially, the HdjT’s director, Klaus-Peter Kosanke, had been willing to entertain Wegner’s proposed measures for a contract extension in 1975. Yet, in June, he pointed out that the lack of vetting of the *Eintopp* performers continued to result in a confrontational atmosphere that failed to allow for differences in perspective from audience

members.⁵¹ In late July 1975, Kosanke formally terminated Wegner's contract, reporting that *Eintopp* exhibited characteristics of "counter-revolutionary groups" (*konterrevolutionären Gruppen*) that could no longer be tolerated.⁵² Clearly, the program had crossed a line in the minds of the authorities—its artistic engagement now reeked of ideological dissent.

Wegner was discouraged; and yet she did not give up on her vision. Instead, the advisory commission for the *Eintopp* events chose to work the system. They turned to the Ministry of Culture in September 1975, submitting a formal petition (*Eingabe*) requesting a reversal of the HdjT leadership's decision. They argued that the abrupt curtailment of the events was unjustified and pointed out that it contradicted the nature of SED chief ideologue Kurt Hager's remarks at the FDJ Cultural Conference that year. According to them, Hager had declared, "Young people should increasingly shape their intellectual and cultural lives themselves," stipulating that "patronizing and petty paternalism" was "incompatible with our youth."⁵³ From their perspective, *Eintopp* was perfectly aligned with Hager's call for greater autonomy in the realm of young people's cultural-intellectual development. In addition, they noted that Kosanke had failed to fulfill his responsibilities by cutting off communication with the *Eintopp* advisory group. As they put it, "the current leadership of the HdjT does not have the necessary sense of responsibility (and the personal qualities) to take on such an important function."⁵⁴

While the letter to the Ministry of Culture could be interpreted as an exercise in performative protest, Wegner and the other *Eintopp* contributors seemed to believe that they were filling a cultural niche in the HdjT's agenda. To a certain degree, they also seemed to believe that they could convince the cultural functionaries to reconsider Wegner's contract on ideological grounds. As they put it in their petition, if only Kosanke would hold office hours, then they could resume their dialogue over the terms of the *Eintopp* contract. Or if the functionaries at the Ministry of Culture would take their petition seriously, then perhaps Kosanke's decision could be overturned. For them, the system—like the *Eintopp* events—seemed to contain a degree of elasticity. Such elasticity captured the extent to which they believed that passionate, creative, and at times frictional exchange were intrinsic to producing culture under state socialism.

In the end, the HdjT leadership did not renew Wegner's contract. Yet Wegner remained steadfast in her desire to perform her music publicly. During the subsequent years, the ongoing struggle with the authorities—perhaps more than anything else—came to define her subject position as she engaged in a flurry of cultural undertakings. In 1975–1976, Wegner applied for and

received a contract to stage another series of performances known as *Kramladen* (general store or junk store) on the outskirts of Berlin; however, the events were eventually banned for similar reasons as *Eintopp*. Thereafter, she performed at various youth clubs, universities, and other state venues, though she found it difficult to book events under her own name. In January 1977, for instance, she sang alongside the group MTS in the Berlin club-restaurant Friendship only after making numerous concessions to the authorities, including not having her name appear on the program flyer. With roughly eighty-five people in the audience, Wegner nonetheless used the MTS event to sing some of her more provocative pieces, reinforcing her refusal to compromise when it came to her lyrics.⁵⁵

In reports on the performance, the Ministry for State Security (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*; MfS or Stasi) characterized Wegner's music as deliberately causing "ideological confusion and pessimism." The Stasi summed up her performance as a "destructive critique of socialism in the GDR, without concern for causes and context, but rather with a bourgeois appearance and outlook on life."⁵⁶ By this point, the Stasi had become a permanent fixture in Wegner's life. This was largely the case as Wegner's falling out with cultural functionaries at the HdjT occurred just before Biermann's forced expatriation. Wegner had openly protested the state's actions against Biermann, all but guaranteeing the MfS's decision to place her under increased surveillance.⁵⁷ Like many others in the GDR, Wegner had little ability to contest the Stasi's presence in her life. She and her partner did submit a complaint with a state lawyer when Stasi personnel searched their apartment in 1976, but it was a recourse with obvious limitations.⁵⁸

Wegner nonetheless remained determined to revamp her professional career. In September 1977, she wrote to Kurt Hager, underscoring that in the previous year it had become nearly impossible for her to perform publicly. In her forthright style, she expressed a sense of urgency, signing off with the plea, "Since all my attempts to change this situation have failed, I see this letter to you as my last chance."⁵⁹ In the following months, she engaged in a back-and-forth with the SED authorities over her performance ban. A common thread running through the letters was Wegner's conviction that she had something to offer them, and they, her. She claimed that she could not imagine a future in which she did not perform in the GDR, "otherwise she would have been gone long ago."⁶⁰ It was as if Wegner's "constantly diminishing future creat[ed] a new emphasis on the here, the present, the now," to again turn to the words of Halberstam.⁶¹ Meanwhile, the temporality she

inhabited was an increasingly strange one—out of sync with the socialist world around her.

In 1980, the authorities provided Wegner with a passport, hoping she would leave of her own volition. But although Wegner traveled on singing tours to the West, she always returned. When she found that the art galleries, restaurants, clubs, and even the Protestant churches in the GDR would no longer let her take the stage, she channeled her frustrations into her music, including in her most well-known song “Kinder” (Children), which was part of an album she recorded in 1979, titled *Sind so kleine Hände* (Such Small Hands). The song undoubtedly had many influences: the fear of an impending European missile crisis and its impact on innocent young people, the GDR feminist movement’s reaction to the missile crisis, and Wegner’s own personal experience as a mother.⁶² Yet, more than anything else, the struggle with the East German cultural authorities had come to define Wegner’s lifework in ways that profoundly influenced her music. We see this in “Kinder,” which ends with the lyrics “Clear and straight people, it’s a nice goal. People without spines, we already have far too many.”⁶³ Wegner eventually found that she had little choice but to move West: her departure came after the authorities leveled trumped-up accusations of foreign currency offenses against her, forcing her to accept an exit visa in 1983. As she herself recognized, her ability to work the system—to find common ground with cultural functionaries who relied on artists to bring a certain verve to the production of socialist culture—had long since disappeared.



While Dyck had no direct bearing on Wegner’s fate (as far as I know), it is easy to imagine him digging in against Wegner on the side of the cultural functionaries. Upon becoming head of the FDJ’s cultural affairs in the 1980s, he made sure that HdjT events ran smoothly, without risk of provocation. In 1984, just one year after Wegner was forced to move West, he advised strongly against the West German rock singer Udo Lindenberg showing up as a private citizen at the HdjT out of fear that it would unleash chaos.⁶⁴ Dyck loved music—one could imagine that he listened to some of the artists who were refused stage access at various times; however, as the FDJ’s Secretary of Culture, he was committed to safeguarding the future of the organization’s cultural production process. In this respect, Dyck carved out a subject position through the protocols he enforced—the very type of protocols that left Wegner desiring something different out of what state socialism was and might have been.



Figure 5. Left to right: Eberhard Aurich, Mikis Theodorakis, Hartmut König, and Philipp Dyck, 1989 (Credit: Bundesarchiv Bild 183-1989-0115-030—Robert Roeske)

While cultural functionaries such as Dyck limited what types of events took place in official spaces such as the HdjT, the East German cultural production process remained far from static or in a perpetual state of decline. In the 1980s, the GDR would host a range of musicians, including well-known performers from the West such as Bruce Springsteen and Bob Dylan alongside prominent East German artists, who would continue to stretch the East German cultural agenda in unanticipated ways.⁶⁵ For state functionaries, such as Dyck, reconciling these artistic performances with their ideological agenda was undoubtedly challenging; and yet Dyck held an unwavering faith in the future of the GDR and its cultural mission. He can be seen in Figure 5 with Mikis Theodorakis, whose music formed the refrain of the resistance to the right-wing junta in Greece, at an FDJ festival in 1989. As Dyck would later recall with a hint of regret, he had been planning for yet another epic concert in 1990—one that would never take place but continued to contain the promise of an unrealized socialist future long after the GDR disappeared.⁶⁶

It is worth noting that during the fortieth anniversary celebration of the GDR's founding (the same day that Honecker and Gorbachev can be seen watching the military parade in the introduction to this volume), Dyck was written up in a Stasi report for supporting an open appeal titled "Resolution by Entertainment Artists." According to the report, Dyck claimed he would have the resolution printed in the state's youth newspaper *Junge Welt*, if the Committee for Entertainment Arts did not respond to it.⁶⁷ Dyck's threat was a small act of defiance; nonetheless, it was one that landed him in the Stasi files alongside prominent East German civic activists. Given the history that subsequently unfolded, it is tempting to read this moment as indicative of a change in Dyck. Perhaps, unlike Honecker, he took seriously Gorbachev's message that "life punishes those who come too late."⁶⁸ But Dyck himself would dispel such ideas, later reflecting, "Of course, I also had hope right up until the end . . . that the GDR could somehow be saved."⁶⁹ Instead, the GDR collapsed, shifting Dyck's subject position in fully unpredictable ways, as it would for all East Germans.

Conclusion

Across the many geographies of coterminous presents that existed alongside socialism's collapse, engagement with the GDR's cultural production process was not a uniform experience. Rather it meant different things to different people as they navigated the making of their own subjectivities during the late socialist period. In tracing the evolving subject positions of Wegner and Dyck, this chapter teases out some of the very real tensions that existed at the heart of cultural production in places such as the HdjT. At the same time, it makes clear how the spectrum of subjectivities that cultural producers assumed rendered the system far from static or in a state of perpetual decline. This was apparent with Dyck, who remained steadfast in his commitment to investing the FDJ's work with ideological import and meaningful forms of artistic exchange right up until the GDR's dissolution. And we see this with Wegner, who reinvented herself time and again on the stage of the HdjT and elsewhere, in the pursuit of effervescent moments of spontaneous engagement with fellow socialist artists and her audiences. Ultimately, it was the crooked paths, disparate visions, and incongruent elaborations of individuals such as Dyck and Wegner that shaped the ever-shifting and even dialectic nature of what it meant to produce culture in the GDR.

Notes

1. This chapter builds on research funded by the German Academic Exchange Service, the American Historical Association, and the George Washington University. All views expressed in this chapter are mine and do not reflect those of any entity or institution with which I am affiliated.

2. Author's interview with Philipp Dyck on November 11, 2014. Translations are my own.

3. On the FDJ and singers and songwriters in the GDR, see Lutz Kirchenwitz, *Folk, Chanson, und Liedermacher in der DDR: Chronisten, Kritiker, Kaisergeburtstagssänger* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1993); Ulrich Mähler and Gerd-Rüdiger Stephan, *Blaue Hemden—Rote Fahnen. Die Geschichte der Freien Deutschen Jugend* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1996); Hagen Jahn, "Jugend, Musik und Ideologie. Zur Geschichte der FDJ-Singebewegung," *Hallische Beiträge zur Zeitgeschichte* 12 (2002): 5–24; David Robb, ed. *Protest Song in East and West Germany since the 1960s* (Rochester: Camden House, 2007); and Gerd Dietrich, *Kulturgeschichte der DDR, Band II: Kultur in der Bildungsgesellschaft 1958–1976* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018).

4. Interview with Dyck. "Cultural producer" refers here to those engaged in any aspect of socialist cultural production.

5. Bundesbeauftragter für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (hereafter BStU), Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (hereafter MfS), HA IX, 25453, Flugblatt von Bettina Wegner (n.d.), Bl. 194. This archive was transferred to the Bundesarchiv Berlin in 2021 with the signature BArch replacing BStU. However, since I completed the research for this chapter before the transfer, I have kept the original signature.

6. Peter Wensierski, "DDR-Widerstandssikone Bettina Wegner: 'Menschen ohne Rückgrat gibt es schon genug!,'" *Der Spiegel* (October 1, 2015), <https://www.spiegel.de/geschichte/ddr-widerstandssikone-liedermacherin-bettina-wegner-a-1055416.html> (accessed January 2024). See also the docufilm *BETTINA*, directed by Lutz Pehnert (solo:film GmbH, 2022).

7. Wensierski, "DDR-Widerstandssikone."

8. Anna Krylova, "The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 1 (2000): 120.

9. See Judith Butler's work applied to late socialism by Alexei Yurchak in *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 18–20.

10. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 16–17.

11. On queer temporality, see especially Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 1–21. For applications in German history/studies, see Jennifer V. Evans, "Introduction: Why Queer German History?," *German History* 34, no. 3 (2016): 376–378; and Kyle Frackman and Ervin Malakaj, "Introduction: Approaches to Queer Temporalities in German Studies," *Monatshefte* 114, no. 3 (2022): 353–362.

12. I am thankful for conversations with Ari Joskowicz about writing relational versus comparative histories, though he applies the concepts differently. See his

work *Rain of Ash: Roma, Jews, and the Holocaust* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023).

13. Few scholarly works mention Dyck. On mid-level functionaries, see, for example, Esther von Richthofen, *Bringing Culture to the Masses: Control, Compromise and Participation in the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009). Scholarly works on Wegner are also scant, though she appears in 1968 literature; see Anna von der Goltz, "Attraction and Aversion in Germany's '1968': Encountering the Western Revolt in East Berlin," *Journal of Contemporary History* 50, no. 3 (2015): 553–554. On the lack of scholarly attention to female singers and songwriters, see Dietmar Elflein, "In Germany after the War: Broadening the Discourse on the *Liedermacher*," in *The Singer-Songwriter in Europe: Paradigms, Politics and Place*, ed. Isabelle Marc and Stuart Green (New York: Routledge, 2016). Wegner has been frequently in the German media, especially since the docufilm *BETTINA*.

14. On lived space, see Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 33, 38–39.

15. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 6. On rethinking East German official culture, see Briana Smith, *Free Berlin: Art, Urban Politics, and Everyday Life* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2022); Andrew Demshuk, *Bowling for Communism: Urban Ingenuity at the End of East Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020); Kyrill Kunakhovich, *Communism's Public Sphere: Culture as Politics in Cold War Poland and East Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2023); and Katharine White, "East Germany's Red Woodstock: The 1973 Festival between the 'Carnavalesque' and the Everyday," *Central European History* 51, no. 4 (2018): 585–610.

16. See Timothy Scott Brown, *Sixties Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 9–33.

17. See Marc-Dietrich Ohse's discussion of "repressive tolerance" toward youth in *Jugend nach dem Mauerbau: Anpassung, Protest und Eigensinn (DDR 1961–1974)* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2003), 304.

18. David Robb, "The GDR 'Singebewegung': Metamorphosis and Legacy," *Monatshefte* 92, no. 2 (2000): 199.

19. Briana Smith quotes art historian Eugen Blume's idea of a "new pioneer spirit," in "Art, Participation, and Play in 1980s East Berlin," in *Socialist Subjectivities: Queering East Germany under Honecker*, ed. Scott Harrison, Jeff Hayton, and Katharine White (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2025), 210.

20. "Hootenanny '66—Podiumsgespräch," *Musik und Politik* (February 27, 2016), <https://www.musikundpolitik.de/archive/interviews/hootenanny-66-podiumsgespraech/> (accessed March 23, 2023).

21. Interview with Dyck.

22. Kirchenwitz quotes the Central Committee's 1967 directive in "Hootenanny '66."

23. Folk music was not the Plenum's focus but was nonetheless impacted. For background, see Ohse, *Jugend nach dem Mauerbau*, 97–108; Michael Rauhut, *Beat in der Grauzone: DDR-Rock 1964–1972; Politik und Alltag* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1993), chapter 3; and Günter Agde, ed., *Kahlschlag. Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965. Studien und Dokumente* (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch, 1991).

24. “Hootenanny ’66.” See also Wegner’s recollections in *BETTINA*.
25. Beate Kutschke, “Anti-Authoritarian Revolt by Musical Means on Both Sides of the Berlin Wall,” in *Music and Protest in 1968*, ed. Beate Kutschke and Barley Norton (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 202.
26. Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991): 779.
27. Wegner is quoted in the Robert Havemann Society online publication “Youth Opposition in the German Democratic Republic,” https://www.havemann-gesellschaft.de/fileadmin/robert-havemann-gesellschaft/ausstellungen/Jugendopposition_ENG_web_130807_01.pdf (accessed January 5, 2024).
28. As Larissa R. Stiglich notes, “Mothers typically experienced the so-called double burden (*Doppelbelastung*) of their responsibilities as workers and as the spouse performing the bulk of parenting and other domestic labor.” See “Showing Up for Socialism: *Eingaben* in Eisenhüttenstadt during Late-Stage Socialism,” in *Socialist Subjectivities: Queering East Germany under Honecker*, ed. Scott Harrison, Jeff Hayton, and Katharine White (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2025), 179. Wegner’s lighter prison sentence likely resulted from her motherly obligations.
29. See Wegner’s sister’s reflections in Anna von der Goltz, “Making Sense of East Germany’s 1968: Multiple Trajectories and Contrasting Memories,” *Memory Studies* 6, no. 1 (2013): 57–59.
30. Kyrill Kunakhovich, “‘What German Thought Cannot Express’: Gert Neumann Reads Adam Michnik,” in *Socialist Subjectivities: Queering East Germany under Honecker*, ed. Scott Harrison, Jeff Hayton, and Katharine White (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2025), 127–146.
31. Robb, “The GDR ‘Singebewegung,’” 199.
32. Jobst Bürkle recalls the appeal of such events in “Junge Talente,” *Telegraph Archive* 3 (1999), <https://telegraph.cc/archiv/telegraph-3-1999/junge-talente/> (accessed January 5, 2024).
33. On the festival’s history, see Kirchenwitz, *Folk, Chanson, und Liedermacher*, 67–71.
34. Interview with Dyck.
35. Kirchenwitz, *Folk, Chanson, und Liedermacher*, 69.
36. HdjT, “Festival des politischen liedes: Ein Gespräch mit Organisator Lutz Kirchenwitz,” <https://www.hdjf.org/festival-des-politischen-liedes/> (accessed January 5, 2024).
37. “Hootenanny ’66.”
38. “Hootenanny ’66.”
39. BStU, MfS, HA XX, 5709, “Betr.: Freie Deutsche Jugend—Zentrale Beratergruppe der Abteilung Kultur des Zentralrates der FDJ für die FDJ-Singebewegung” (November 4, 1981), 555, 557; and Kirchenwitz, *Folk, Chanson, und Liedermacher*, 67–68.
40. Robb, “Political Song in the GDR,” 232–233.
41. “Betr.: Freie Deutsche Jugend”; and Kirchenwitz, *Folk, Chanson, und Liedermacher*, 77–80.
42. Interview with Dyck.
43. Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place*, 2.

44. The authorities suggested changing the name to *Eintopp* to avoid Nazi-era connotations associated with *Eintopf*. Landesarchiv Berlin (hereafter LAB), C Rep. 121, Nr. 445, Untitled letter by Wegner (October 28, 1974), 2.
45. Untitled letter by Wegner (October 28, 1974), 2.
46. Untitled letter by Wegner (October 28, 1974), 2.
47. "Frank Hörnigk," in David W. Robinson, ed. and trans., *Under Construction: Nine East German Lives* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2004), 64.
48. Untitled letter by Wegner (October 28, 1974), 2.
49. LAB, C Rep. 121, Nr. 445, letter by Wegner to the SED district leadership, Writers' Association of the GDR (November 25, 1974), 2.
50. Letter by Wegner (November 25, 1974), 3–5.
51. LAB, C Rep. 121, Nr. 445, "Aktennotiz über die Beratung mit dem 'Besucherbeirat des Eintopp'" (June 19, 1975), 1–4; and LAB, C Rep. 121, Nr. 445, "Aktennotiz den 'Eintopp' betreffend" (July 25, 1975), 1–3.
52. LAB, C Rep. 121, Nr. 445, "Eingabe: Publikumsbeirat der Veranstaltung 'Eintopp'" (September 20, 1975), 5. Wegner did not sign the petition, though she seemed to help craft it.
53. "Eingabe" (September 20, 1975), 3.
54. "Eingabe" (September 20, 1975), 6.
55. Akademie der Künste-Ost (AdK-O), Schlesinger 213, Abteilung XX, "Information über eine Veranstaltung in der Clubgaststätte 'Freundschaft' am 5.1.1977 mit der Gruppe 'MTS' und der Liedermacherin Bettina Wegner" (n.d.), 1–2.
56. "Information über eine Veranstaltung," 1–2.
57. BStU, MfS, ZAIG, 2749, "Dossier über die Sängerin Bettina Wegner-Schlesinger" (October 31, 1977), n.p. See <https://www.ddd-im-blick.de/jahrgaenge/jahrgang-1977/report/dossier-ueber-die-saengerin-bettina-wegner-schlesinger/> (accessed March 23, 2023).
58. AdK-O, Schlesinger 632, Wegner and Klaus Schlesinger submitted complaints to the state lawyer, Dr. Glaesner, on October 2, 1976.
59. AdK-O, Schlesinger 231, "Bettina Wegner an Herr [Kurt] Hager" (September 24, 1977), n.p.
60. AdK-O, Schlesinger 231, "Aktennotiz über ein Gespräch mit Bettina Wegner am 1. Dezember 1978" (December 5, 1978), 2.
61. Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place*, 2.
62. Wensierski, "DDR-Widerstandsikone."
63. Wensierski, "DDR-Widerstandsikone." Lyrics translated liberally to capture meaning.
64. BArch, Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv, DY 24/14107, "Aktennotiz über ein Gespräch mit Michel Geissmair am 19.1.1984—Über der Gruppe 'BAP' und Udo Lindenberg und die DDR-Tournee" (n.d.), 38–41.
65. Michael Rauhut, *Rock in der DDR, 1964–1989* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2002), 106.
66. Interview with Dyck.

67. BStU, MfS, HA XX/AKG, 1494, "Einschätzung der Lageentwicklung im künstlerischen Bereich sowie in den Massenmedien der DDR" (October 7, 1989), 156.

68. See Scott Harrison, Jeff Hayton, and Katharine White, "Beyond the Black Hole: 1989 and the Narration of East German History," in *Socialist Subjectivities: Queering East Germany under Honecker*, ed. Scott Harrison, Jeff Hayton, and Katharine White (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2025), 1.

69. Interview with Dyck.

Desire, Sex, and Surveillance *Queer Methods and the Stasi's Files on the East German Military*

Tom Smith

Researching East Germany's armed forces, I often encounter reminders of how queerness can be overlooked in memories around straight-centered institutions, when people remain incredulous or advise that "back then it wasn't an issue." Josie McLellan has also commented on straight East German interviewees' lack of awareness about queer compatriots.¹ As decades of scholarship have shown, however, queerness was widely discussed and negotiated by queer and straight people throughout the lifetime of the German Democratic Republic (GDR).² Straight people spent time and effort developing policies and processes within the state's institutions to understand, limit, and regulate queer sexuality, although archives often say more about what institutions failed to know. Queer East Germans were active participants in socialist institutions, shaping them in small, everyday ways. They may even have intended for traces of queerness to recede from view. As José Esteban Muñoz reminds us, the ephemeral nature of queer evidence has often had a protective function.³ Against the backdrop of the GDR's heterosexual norms around how lives unfold, queer methods allow insights into traces of intimacy and community in official documents, showing soldiers developing queer East German subjectivities and life trajectories through their military service.

The East German National People's Army (*Nationale Volksarmee*; NVA) is an important example of how, in the words of this volume's introduction, "individuals live nonnormative possibilities in a normative world."⁴ Queer soldiers experienced repression in the NVA, but the army was also the context for fashioning everyday queer lives. Soldiers' petitions describe

first realizing their queerness in the army, developing relationships, gaining a political understanding of queer identities, and planning queer futures together.⁵ Elsewhere in GDR society, activists created explicitly queer spaces and communities, including the Homosexual Interest Group Berlin, groups around the Protestant Church, the Sonntags-Club, documentary writing, and amateur film.⁶ The NVA, by contrast, shows how queer East Germans developed identities and affiliations across their everyday lives, including in such an avowedly straight institution. While many found their sexuality at odds with military service, queer soldiers developed relationships, friendships, and community within and beyond the barracks. For some, the military's homosocial environment even enabled soldiers to engage with East German institutions from specifically queer subject positions, with their queer affiliations, military training, and commitment to socialism reinforcing one another.

As an institution, the NVA remained distrustful of queerness and targeted soldiers for being gay. Historians of the army often describe queerness as "an absolute taboo" or "not an issue," while showing how widely it was discussed.⁷ The NVA was consolidated from militarized police units in 1956, with compulsory military service from 1962. Conscription meant that almost all gay men spent at least eighteen months in the NVA, while many enlisted for longer to access higher education or other privileges and some developed military careers. Although consensual sex between adult men was initially criminalized in the GDR under §175 of the Penal Code, from the late 1950s cases were rarely prosecuted. That paragraph was rescinded and gay sex largely decriminalized in 1968, so that homosexuality in Honecker's East Germany was rarely a matter for the courts, with the exception of prohibitions against gay or lesbian sex with minors established by the replacement §151. Yet, as Samuel Clowes Huneke has shown, decriminalization coincided with a burgeoning interest in queerness by the Ministry for State Security (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*; MfS or Stasi) under the presumption that gay men had Western contacts and were susceptible to outside influence.⁸ Ex-soldiers' life-writing suggests it was common to be questioned by Stasi officers: the NVA had a denser concentration of informants, so-called unofficial collaborators (*inoffizielle Mitarbeiter*; IMs), than almost any other part of society.⁹ Investigations into queerness in the military continued after 1968, with men dismissed for being gay or prosecuted under other laws.¹⁰ The NVA therefore represents an extreme example of the barriers and contradictions experienced by queer East Germans even long after decriminalization.

A culture of discomfort around queer identities and sexualities persisted

into the army's final months, showing that queerness remained a focus for the institution even after a 1988 court ruling gave homosexuality equal legal standing with heterosexuality. This discomfort is exemplified by the contradictory guidelines issued by the Ministry for National Defense soon after the ruling, which officially stated that gay men had the right to serve in the NVA.¹¹ As Huneke argues, this significant step put it ahead of most world militaries.¹² However, the guidelines also outlined a process within the law for denying queer soldiers' right to serve, instructing commanders not to approve new applications from gay men and to dismiss existing members if complications arose, although cautioning that they must specify a reason other than homosexuality. This statement of rights that also bolsters procedures for exclusion was "nonperformative" in Sara Ahmed's terms: Ahmed argues with reference to institutional antiracism policies that a lack of change "is not a failure of intent or even circumstance, but it is actually what the speech act is doing."¹³ The ministry guidelines formalized the belief that for gay men, "because of the particularities of military life, a civilian career path is more appropriate."¹⁴ Major General Dieter Teichmann's accompanying memo blocked written dissemination of the guidelines, maintaining strict control over publicity. In one copy, marks in red pencil show that its recipient grasped the message that so-called complications could and should still lead to dismissal.¹⁵ These contradictions show that the NVA presumed the presence of queer soldiers in the ranks and spent significant resources trying to understand and control their sexual practices and identities.

This chapter analyses files from Main Department (*Hauptabteilung*; HA) I, the Stasi section tasked with surveillance of the armed forces. Many hundreds of documents show the NVA's preoccupation with queerness. Some sprawl over hundreds of pages; in others, isolated references point obliquely to queer subjectivities. Researchers access the files in anonymized form through a case worker: mine went to great lengths to facilitate my work, but the collection is vast and the NVA used terms such as "homosexuality" imprecisely.¹⁶ Scholars have also drawn attention to willful falsehoods and incompleteness in Stasi documents and advised caution when using them.¹⁷ The HA I files document queer people's lives in the NVA on a much larger scale than other sources, but also played a role in the oppression they faced. The HA I recruited queer soldiers as IMs in line with Stasi research and policies, as well as their friends, families, comrades, and superiors.¹⁸ Officers gathered evidence through methods that were illegal even in the GDR, such as monitoring letters and phone conversations. And they dismissed soldiers for their sexuality, even after GDR law expressly prohibited such discrimination.

My approach to sources uses close reading methods and is indebted to scholars who theorize the complexity of queer experience and refuse to take institutional or archival norms for granted.¹⁹ Scholars of East Germany have drawn on queer theories, especially by Muñoz and Ann Cvetkovich, to show how queer-authored archives disrupt institutional logics.²⁰ The HA I files also show soldiers using institutional channels by turns to describe or obfuscate their queer affiliations, putting pressure on the NVA's and Stasi's avowed heterosexuality. However, these institutional sources designed to observe and control require different approaches than queer-authored archives. I draw on Ahmed's queer theory of institutions and archive theories by Saidiya Hartman and Lisa Lowe, who analyze racializing and colonial sources against the grain, address power relations, and read for voice, repetition, euphemism, and other narrative features.²¹ Hartman and Lowe read institutional documents as evidence of processes designed to create and shape knowledge, which in turn reveal their own failures and incompleteness. As Ahmed writes, "To put the 'doing' back into the institution is to attend to how institutional realities become given, without assuming what is given by this given."²² While HA I sources construct straightness as a given and queerness as alien to the military, they also presume the existence of queer soldiers and show their capacity to develop queer socialist subjectivities and bridge their military and civilian lives. The files represent and re-voice queer narratives and are unsettled by anxieties about proof and the boundaries between NVA and civilian spheres. They show that East German men negotiated individual queer life trajectories that included and influenced even those institutions charged with delineating straight socialist masculinities.

"If You Can Put It Like That": Narrative Voice

The shifting use of narrative voice in HA I reports shows the NVA's discomfort and conceptual difficulties with queerness and provides glimpses of how queer lives unsettled the institution's story about itself. Most reports are heterogeneous, shifting between third-person report and first-person testimony, IM reports quoted or paraphrased, interrogation testimony, transcripts, letters, and other evidence. Interrogations are frequently recounted in the first person, with shifts in voice usually clearly marked and quotations set apart from third-person text, yet the language used in first- and third-person sections to describe queer sex and desire is almost indistinguishable. Soldiers' descriptions are re-voiced in the HA I's bureaucratic register, either by soldiers themselves or the files' authors. This language shows the Stasi's

attempts to control how gay sex is presented, but its jarring contrasts show the unsettling effect of queer subjectivities on the HA I and NVA.

One example is the investigation of a gay Border Guard officer, Andreas A., who absconded to West Berlin.²³ Andreas enlisted for a fixed term as an officer but in 1978 was transferred to a desk job on suspicion of planning to flee to West Germany. He later did desert in 1979 and joined his boyfriend in West Berlin, who was also working for Western intelligence services. Later in 1979, Andreas returned to the GDR and was kept there against his will and interrogated over many years, with serious consequences for his mental health. Huneke has used Andreas's case to show the Stasi's growing association between gay men and espionage in the 1970s. He points to Andreas's widespread gay networks within and beyond the military to suggest that he used intelligence services for his own ends.²⁴ Andreas's files also show sexual and romantic relationships as common and widespread within the Border Guard, and their shifting use of narrative voice suggests the difficulties these queer affiliations posed for the authors of reports.

Reports on Andreas's interrogations show officers' fascination with sexual details, which they record in a euphemistic, bureaucratic register. For example, one report describes Andreas's relationship with another officer, Bernd B., apparently from his own perspective:

In this room of B.'s, intimate homosexual relations occurred over the course of three quarters of an hour. Here B. was the active partner. We undressed, went to bed and [redacted]. Here an orgasm occurred for him, for me no orgasm was forthcoming.²⁵

The interview is in the first person, as if giving Andreas's words, in contrast to third-person documents that speculate on his motives. Interrogators' questions have been edited out so that the transcript reads as if Andreas volunteered intimate details. Yet the disjuncture between the sexual descriptions and the stilted register is uncomfortable. The interview describes Andreas's desires in the first person as "tendencies" (*Neigungen*), while sex is described as "intimate homosexual relations." Repetition of the impersonal construction "something occurred" (*es kam zu etwas*) creates a bureaucratic tone and the formulations with *bei* denied the men grammatical agency. Sex acts are described at length, using euphemisms that are common in the HA I files but sound stilted and formal: for example, "onanism," "to satisfy oneself," and "to have anal intercourse" (*anal verkehren*). The bureaucratic tone bears a trace of the interrogation setting, which was often physically and psychologically

violent. It places Andreas's experiences at a distance and makes visible how the HA I actively shaped the documentation. Yet this jarring language also makes clear that Andreas's words are missing, and this queer silence hints at his actions' disruptive effect on the Border Guard.²⁶

Documents like the reports from Andreas's interrogation demand sensitivity to voice and perspective. Hartman has explored methods for using institutionally authored sources for glimpses into marginalized people's experiences. Analyzing interviews with people who had been enslaved in the United States, she focuses on formal elements, including "the artifice of direct reported speech when, in fact, these interviews were transcribed non verbatim accounts."²⁷ Hartman's work on the link between voice and power raises questions about first-person passages in Stasi documents: in Andreas's files, the first-person perspective marks descriptions of sex as evidence while obscuring the Stasi's role in eliciting and shaping that evidence. This technique positions gay sex as something alien to the military—even though Andreas and other soldiers were having sex in military installations—and implies that it would have remained invisible without first-person testimony. Hartman also emphasizes the importance of authorship: unlike her sources, Stasi reports were usually collectively and anonymously authored, although there are some traces of Andreas's own authorial input, albeit under duress. Some of Andreas's statements are in his handwriting, suggesting that typewritten transcripts were produced by HA I operatives. In the latter, Stasi influence on first-person descriptions is clear from the invasive sexual detail: Andreas's handwritten statements do not contain such information. Yet he shows an attempt to use the military's formal register for his own ends, as he was initially promised a return to West Berlin if he cooperated. Even where Andreas's words are mediated, as in the above example, traces of awkwardness and sexual inexperience remain. Such insecurities unsettle the NVA's and Stasi's disciplinary and frequently pathologizing image of queerness.

Andreas's file depicts a committed soldier who was also open about his queerness. His parents describe their son enjoying his service and enlisting voluntarily for longer than required. Their statements would have been shaped by the need to clear their names and their son's, but this did not prevent them from directly criticizing the Border Guard for causing Andreas's distress by transferring him to an administrative position.²⁸ The witness testimony shows that queer people in border regiments could and did meet in private and have sex. Andreas talked openly to his roommate about weekend trips to Berlin's Schönhauser Allee, known for its gay subculture.²⁹ He had a wide circle of gay and bisexual friends and lovers, whose voices occasionally demonstrate the

strength of their emotions and intimacy. In one transcript, Andreas's friend Christian describes how they would have sex regularly and that "a friendship developed out of these relations." Christian's understanding of "friendship" shows more nuance than most HA I documents, describing a connection both sexual and emotional.³⁰ In an abrupt outburst, he describes his frustration when Andreas meets another man: "Here I told him to his face that he would be degrading himself if he jumped into bed with every man."³¹ Although "here" (*dabei*) echoes the bureaucratic tone elsewhere in the transcript, the idioms "tell him to his face" (*auf den Kopf zu sagen*) and "jump into bed with every man" (*mit jedem Mann ins Bett gehen*) adopt a remarkably direct spoken register. Christian's sentence foregrounds his emotions: his care and love for Andreas are briefly audible, as are his hurt feelings, jealousy, and frustration. Christian's feelings are couched in a moralizing tone, partly reinforcing the Stasi's concerns about promiscuity: "A.'s frequently changing partners (*der häufige Partnerwechsel*) were also the reason for us breaking off our sexual relations."³² The formulation "häufige[r] Partnerwechsel" is unusual in spoken language and echoes the jargon "person with frequently changing sexual partners" (*Person mit häufig wechselnden Geschlechtspartnern*, or *HWG-Person*), used in GDR administrative contexts to pathologize sexually active women and gay men. Here, too, as Hartman writes, "there is no historical document that is not interested, exclusive, or a vehicle of power and domination."³³ Even if Christian's comments have been rewritten, the contrast between his frank outbursts and jargon shows a mixture of concern for Andreas, intense frustration, and a moralism that may have appealed to interrogating officers. Outbursts like this unsettle the transcript's otherwise uniform prose, making visible the Stasi's attempts to control the transmission of queer stories and showing that Christian's testimony retains a sense of queerness as a lived emotional reality.

In the mass of documentation around Andreas's desertion, there are even examples of a playful, queer use of language. Innuendo and suggestion may reflect the prurience of investigating officers, the awkwardness of queer soldiers speaking about sex in an official context under duress, or possibly a glimpse of a playful, even affirmative relationship to sexual identity. Dirk D., a junior cook, recalls his relationship with Andreas: "I also had a key to his room. When we met, he was primarily the masculine partner, if you can put it like that (*um das mal so ausdrücken zu können*)."³⁴ The intimacy of these men sharing a key suggests forms of queer domesticity beyond the file's primary interest in how they had sex. The second sentence begins with jargon: characteristic overuse of *bei* and the high register of "primarily" (*vorwiegend*). It is unsettled, though, by the sudden colloquialism "if you can put it

like that.” This final clause bears traces of spoken language and could even be an attempt at dark humor in what must have been a terrifying situation. From the document alone, it is impossible to tell whether Dirk himself used this phrase, a response to the absurdity of having to describe who had been active or passive, or whether it was chosen by a stenographer or typist taken aback by his candor. Either way, its directness exposes the lack of an official language for gay sex and confronts the intrusive voyeurism of interrogators, who asked this question frequently of gay NVA members.

Reading for queerness in the HA I files requires close analysis of their contradictions and disparities. Attending to narrative voice reveals traces not only of the conceptual difficulties and discomfort of Stasi officers writing up their reports, but also of the experiences behind these interrogations. Moments of disruption emerge when queer soldiers seek ways of emphasizing intimacy, companionship, and friendship. Even with the documents’ euphemistic and stilted style, they show glimpses of soldiers searching, under significant duress, for ways of describing their queer lives within the pressures and expectations of institutions.

“Poss. Homosexual Drives”: Pursuing Proof

Whereas the investigation into Andreas began under suspicion that he was planning to abscond, many other investigations were initiated solely to find out whether a soldier was gay. These files take for granted that queerness existed in the NVA but refuse to accept evidence that queer intimacies were part of some soldiers’ everyday military lives. The files create the idea that queerness is unknowable and therefore disruptive and dangerous, requiring incessant investigation. Lowe has discussed this feature of advanced bureaucracies in her work on Britain’s colonial administrations. Lowe shows how files “conjure what the colonial bureaucracy did not and could not know—its equivocation, ignorance, and incoherence—even as it performed the agency of an imperial will to know.”³⁵ As in the cases that Lowe analyzes, the HA I files reveal the limits of its attempts to comprehend, limit, and control queerness. Soldiers’ negotiations of subjectivity during their military service repeatedly frustrated the institution’s search for evidence. Cases rarely agreed on how queerness might be proved and while some soldiers were dismissed on little evidence, others remained under investigation despite numerous informants testifying to their queerness. Muñoz has argued that queerness exists in ephemeral ways as gossip or rumor rather than in documentary evidence, and the HA I files likewise show how this elusive quality shapes institutional archives like the Stasi’s.³⁶

Between 1977 and 1982, for example, a naval officer, Erik E., was investigated. A July 1977 report suggests that “the connections maintained by E. to male persons, particularly former NVA members, serve to satisfy poss. homosexual drives (*zur Befriedigung evt. homosexueller Triebe*) on E.’s part.”³⁷ Whereas investigators were interested in Andreas’s sexual acts, they pursued Erik on suspicion of “poss. homosexual drives.” The word “drives” shows how the language of psychoanalysis was mobilized to explain and pathologize queerness in East Germany.³⁸ It frames Erik’s desires as motivating him in uncontrollable ways that violate military standards of masculine self-control. The abbreviation “poss.” (*evt.*) is typical of the formulaic language of Stasi reports. Here, it suggests discomfort with writing about queerness. Even though Erik’s relationships were investigated precisely because they were perceived to be romantic or sexual, the writer felt the need to qualify “homosexual.” There are many possible reasons for this hesitation: whether the perceived seriousness of the allegation, discomfort with naming queerness, or a sense that even the medicalizing term “homosexual” was inappropriate in a formal register. Either way, the abbreviation encapsulates the doubt and discomfort around Erik’s supposed queerness.

Over five years, Erik’s files continue to demonstrate the Stasi’s difficulties in finding proof. In January 1978: “As it was not yet possible to clarify the political and ideological stance of E., the character of his connections to the West, or his personal connections to male persons in the GDR, further investigation of the above in the operative personnel investigation is required.”³⁹ In November, the aim remained: “Gathering evidence that E. is poss. operating as a homosexual.”⁴⁰ In January 1981, one IM admitted: “Regarding the rumors around his alleged inclination toward homosexuality, I was unable to find any confirmation.”⁴¹ The circular logic, that investigations must continue because no evidence could be found, left its mark on the expressions used. Lowe argues that such “rhetorical peculiarities,” especially “places where particular figures, tropes, or circumlocutions are repeated to cover gaps or tensions,” indicate archives’ structural difficulties accounting for intimacies that go against institutions’ attempts to project control and omniscience.⁴² The repetition of rumors around Erik exhibits the rhetorical strain that Lowe describes. In January 1980, Erik was described as “of an unstable orientation in his whole character and behavior” and showing “tendencies of a homosexual proclivity in how he presents himself to other people.”⁴³ One IM described Erik’s behavior as “that way inclined” (*dazu tendierenden Verhalten*) and said, “I myself consider his behavior downright unmilitary and ridiculous.”⁴⁴ The report ends by reiterating “the unstable behavior of

his whole character.”⁴⁵ In November 1982, after Erik’s service had ended, or perhaps had been terminated, this summary was echoed:

that he has an unstable orientation in terms of his character and behavior and that tendencies of homosexual proclivities are evident in how he presents himself toward other people, as a result of which his esteem and authority suffer significantly.⁴⁶

The 1982 report lifts phrases from earlier reports, without any evidence beyond the original conjecture. The focus had shifted from intangible, internal “drives” to external and visible qualities that were equally unspecific: “presentation,” “esteem,” and “behavior.” Those questioned seem convinced that they knew queerness when they saw it and, with no other proof, investigators decided that these impressions must suffice. Yet the circularity of the writing suggests discomfort with this logic. Repetitiousness is not unusual in Stasi documents, but this density of repetition is remarkable. In GDR psychological, medical, and administrative contexts, “unstable” (*labil*) was commonly used for the character of someone under suspicion, especially when their commitment to socialism was in question. *Labil* also has a queer valency, denoting something shifting and fragile. The repeated references to Erik’s “whole character” are vague yet totalizing, rendering specific details unnecessary. Variations on “tendencies” (*Tendenzen, Neigungen*) bespeak the authors’ discomfort and even frustration at the difficulty of removing a soldier who, the file suggests, was relatively open about his queerness.

Erik’s case is representative of dozens of investigations into queer soldiers’ lives and relationships. Noncommissioned officer Frank F., for example, was investigated over several years around the same time. The Stasi recruited his close comrade, Gerhard, as an IM and proudly noted that Frank had not left the base without Gerhard since investigations began. The reports describe their “trusting relationship,” and the two must have been genuinely close to have spent so much leave together.⁴⁷ Lowe’s work cautions that the structure of repressive institutions often obscures such intimacies, and we cannot know how this friendship affected, and was affected by, their involvement with the Stasi. Gerhard reported no evidence of Frank’s queerness, but it is impossible to know whether Frank was in fact straight, whether he concealed his sexuality from Gerhard, or whether Gerhard concealed Frank’s queerness from the Stasi. As in Erik’s case, Frank’s files demonstrate how investigations continued when queer identities could not be proven. The final report suggests “that investigation of F. in the operative personnel

investigation (*Operative Personenkontrolle*; OPK) be closed, but that on the basis of unclarified signs of homosexuality (in relation to his military function) he continue to be investigated in a targeted way in the operative files (*archivierter operativer Vorgang*; AOP) and kept under observation.”⁴⁸ This circularity reflects an important tension: intimacies between men were the explicit object of investigation, and Stasi officers exploited such intimacies by recruiting Gerhard, yet they ultimately failed to “clarify” or understand them. Gerhard and other IMs in fact presented Frank as a man committed to and enthusiastic about socialism and his military career, with one report summarizing: “F. possesses a positive political foundation and shows interest in his duties.”⁴⁹ This case is a reminder that not all soldiers were in the military against their will. Just as the women described in Scott Harrison’s chapter in this volume charted lesbian trajectories within their socialist commitments and work lives, for these soldiers, military service was an arena for developing specifically socialist, military gay subjectivities in ways that the NVA struggled to understand.⁵⁰

Lowe’s work on intimacies under colonialism and Muñoz’s work on queer evidence help to conceptualize queerness in the Stasi files. On the one hand, queerness is elusive and disappears into rumor and unexplained discomfort. On the other, these suspicions caused huge expense, with hours spent compiling reports, probably primarily by straight officers, monitoring Erik’s and Frank’s post, and tailing them when they leave base. As in Andreas’s case, there are signs that queerness was known about, taken for granted, and even playfully expressed. In Erik’s unit, he was nicknamed *Fräulein* by subordinates. The files interpret this nickname as evidence that his authority had been compromised. Yet, in another context, conscientious objectors who served as NVA construction soldiers have described how feminizing nicknames could also be affectionate, signaling homosocial or homoerotic bonds in playful ways.⁵¹ Above all, there is something queer about what Ahmed calls the “fainter trails” of elusiveness and ambiguity that Erik and Frank left in the historical record.⁵² Their evasiveness may not have been deliberate, or it may have been only a survival tactic, but by shaping the HA I’s ability to gather evidence of queerness they left a lasting mark on the NVA’s records.

“Hot Officers’ Boots”: Queer Desires beyond the Barracks

The NVA showed particular anxiety about soldiers whose queer relationships transcended boundaries between military and civilian life. While the boast that Frank never left the base alone implies that queerness resides out-

side the military installation, investigations into Andreas, Erik, and Frank show that queer intimacies rarely respected attempts to cut soldiers off from wider society. For career soldiers embedded in local communities and for conscripts anticipating a return to their civilian milieus, military and civilian lives were always entangled. HA I files show how queer soldiers based near East Berlin were drawn to its gay scene, and some investigations and later memoirs show that even straight officers were familiar with sites of queer connection in smaller towns, such as Frankfurt an der Oder and Zittau.⁵³ Assumptions about the transgressive or outside quality of queerness resonate with Ahmed's work on "the stranger," a figure created and invested with desire, danger, and possibility in ways that "constitute the boundaries of bodies and communities."⁵⁴ By locating queerness outside the NVA, the HA I attempted to delineate a heterosexual space and community, even as queer connections revealed these boundaries to be a fiction. The files show the NVA's anxiety about forms of desire directed at soldiers and their uniforms and about queer soldiers' skillful combination of strategies from civilian society and military training for navigating East German institutions.

The HA I frequently investigated suspected romantic or sexual connections between soldiers and civilian men, revealing concerns that movement between military and civilian environments could lead NVA soldiers to become objects of desire and compromise security. The NVA's worries were likely exaggerated, but HA I files do occasionally suggest that NVA uniforms were fetishized. One short, undated memo, possibly from 1989, describes the sale of NVA uniforms in West Berlin between Helge H. and a man named Ingo. The memo reads:

H. has on several occasions offered Ingo
 "some of our uniforms" (*Uniformen von uns*)
 "hot officers' boots" (*geile Offiziersstiefel*)

and

"belts"

for purchase. These articles are either sold on by Ingo in Berlin (West) or used for his own purposes.

It is known, for example, that Ingo bought a pair of officers' boots in size 41/42 from H. for a "fifty" for personal use.⁵⁵

The memorandum does not explicitly link this trade in NVA uniforms to queer or fetish cultures, but the adjective *geil*, meaning "cool" or "awesome" as well as "hot" or "sexy," casts the page in an ambiguous light. The nature of Ingo's "personal use" is left to the imagination, and I could not find further documen-

tation to explain the men's relationship. The memo hints: "H. is a member of an unnamed club, where he apparently met his West Berlin contact with first name Ingo." The mysterious nature of this club may indicate that the HA I had limited sources, perhaps a single intercepted letter: the memo states only that this information emerged "as part of operational activities." In the absence of certainty, the file sparks imagination and speculation. The memo demonstrates the tendency for queer eroticism to evade documentation, as Muñoz has discussed. A close reading reveals traces of eroticism while respecting the skill and agency of these men in evading surveillance as they connected over—and profited from—a shared interest in military uniform. The source suggests that the inventive cross-border links that shaped queer activism and espionage also extended to everyday sexual practices.

In investigations of queer civilians' connections with military personnel, the HA I usually did not find evidence of sexual relationships. Investigators faced soldiers with unblemished records, expertise in navigating institutions, and a clear sense of their rights as GDR citizens. For some, the skills they gained in the military and in queer circles seem to have been coextensive and facilitated expansive networks. One case from the 1970s gives insight into how these networks shaped soldiers' specifically East German queer subjectivities. A successful writer, Jörg J., hosted groups of NVA soldiers at his apartment. The soldiers, many of them officers, did not describe any sexual relationship with Jörg. Lieutenant Colonel Karl K. reported to the interviewing officer: "Our discussions related only to issues in literature, art, and theater, as well as creative and other personal issues."⁵⁶ He included a pointed reminder of Jörg's status:

I was aware or became aware that Mr. J. is in all respects a highly educated man, who is very progressive in his attitude to our state and is esteemed nationally and internationally for his artistic work, for which he was awarded the National Prize and other awards.

Jörg's success seems to have protected him and Karl: both were practiced in the official language used to praise contributions to the socialist project. The HA I could not prove that the soldiers were gay, but their alternative forms of community frustrated the Stasi to such an extent that investigators took the expensive step of bugging their telephones. As with Frank above, these examples show that while some queer East Germans came into conflict with the state's institutions, they were also subjects skilled in working with socialist discourse.

The men continued their friendships undeterred in ways that transcended boundaries between military and civilian society. Karl stated, for example, that Jörg met his friends “while carrying out forums, readings, and other events that he ran in the army installations of our NVA.”⁵⁷ Just as the NVA openly invited this queer writer onto bases as part of its cultural offering, Jörg invited soldiers to his apartment, met them in Berlin bars, and introduced them to each other. Through Jörg, soldiers also forged connections across NVA branches, regiments, and ranks. They used these friendships for material advantage: at one gathering, a member of the navy’s fishing fleet brought whiskey for the more senior Karl, who had secured him a Moskvitch, a sought-after Soviet-made car. Jörg and his friends also exercised agency as political subjects in more direct ways. For example, Jörg became involved when a younger officer, Lutz L., was dismissed after he returned late from leave after parties at Karl’s house and Jörg’s apartment. The summary of the phone taps describes Lutz’s anger and his determination to have the decision overturned, and he turned to Jörg and Karl for help. Jörg tried to use his influence to gain Lutz a place at the Transport Police School. They also petitioned Erich Honecker directly: “On February 27, 1974, L., J., and K. formulated a petition to Com. Erich Honecker in which they complained about L.’s dismissal.”⁵⁸ This is one of several petitions of this nature, showing that even in the early 1970s, when queer soldiers were frequently dismissed for homosexuality, they actively appealed to their rights under GDR law.⁵⁹ Lutz does not seem to have been reinstated, but their action shows that Jörg and Karl openly defended the younger man. Jörg’s file depicts close friendships that deliberately preserved ambiguity about men’s sexuality under questioning. These friendships cut across generations and military hierarchies and enabled forms of material, emotional, and professional support.

Conclusion

Queerness never became accepted or normalized in the NVA, but the HA I files document an army where soldiers developed queer East German subjectivities and where queerness was widely discussed and investigated. Proliferating documents show that queerness was part of many NVA members’ daily lives and that the army’s boundaries were porous and fluid. Despite the NVA’s hostility to men who deviated from heterosexuality, the hardships of military training provided most queer men with a detailed understanding of East German institutions. These skills shaped the ways in which they engaged with the state in their everyday lives and their interactions in turn

could put pressure on or shape institutions in small ways. This was especially true of queer soldiers who made their careers in the NVA but, as one former soldier's petition shows, queer conscripts and recruits would also go on to be students, workers, and artists, and some would be well connected in activist circles.⁶⁰

Reading the HA I archive with queer soldiers in mind provides a critical perspective on the NVA and its prejudices. The investigations channeled anxiety about the NVA's boundaries into a desire to mobilize queer soldiers against one another as informants. Detailed descriptions of sex also suggest voyeurism by some investigating officers. This was an organization suffused with homophobia, where many soldiers developed ambivalent and self-critical relationships to their sexuality. Although these concerns are often not legible in the files, the fear that permeated queer soldiers' lives occasionally becomes visible, as in this statement by career noncommissioned officer Martin M. of the Stasi's Guards Regiment in 1984:

If it comes out from all these investigations and incidents or if people find out that I am Homosexual [sic], I will be forced to submit a discharge request. Because you can imagine the gossip and teasing. It is probably obvious that it is impossible to fulfill my duties properly under these circumstances.⁶¹

This document reads like Martin's own words, with grammatical errors, irregular capitalization, and occasional spoken register. Elsewhere in the statement, he describes "disgust" (*Abscheu*) toward his own sexuality, which is reflected in his urgent, fearful tone. This passage is a reminder that these investigations dominated soldiers' lives and caused fear and shame. Those emotions are often not legible in the bureaucratic jargon of Stasi files, making for uneasy reading, with some feelings effaced by the documents and others perhaps deliberately concealed from posterity by queer soldiers.

A queer approach to such sources must therefore be sensitive to these ethical issues. Ahmed's queer phenomenology requires scholars to view marginalized figures not as outsiders, but as subjects and skilled participants within hostile institutions. Work by Hartman and Lowe challenges historians to linger over moments of disruption or incompleteness, the construction of voice, and evidence of discomfort or anxiety. The HA I files can be unreliable, shaped by falsehoods, prejudices, and stereotypes that are not always visible. But their style and language allow insights into the workings of the archive, the institution, and the people involved on both sides of investigations. A

queer approach to the HA I files underlines the importance of such reading practices in social and cultural history while also reminding queer scholars not to take our assumptions for granted when approaching these sources.

With these methods, it becomes possible to show that even such a homophobic and repressive organization as the NVA was a site where queer soldiers learned skills in navigating East German institutions and developed their understanding of their own queerness. Their roles in the NVA were not always ethically neutral: there were plenty of gay IMs, both open and closeted. For some, IM status may have initially protected them, but being outed still had consequences.⁶² In all likelihood, there were also queer soldiers working in more senior roles in the HA I, given that historians have documented high-ranking gay Stasi officers in other departments.⁶³ But HA I documents also gesture to friendship, support, and intimacy as important for queer soldiers navigating military service. Their individual status and connections shaped the amount of influence they could have on the institution and their ability to evade scrutiny or live openly queer lives within the NVA. Officers like Karl—senior, married, well-connected—had more freedom and influence than lower-ranking officers like Andreas or Lutz, who were routinely transferred and dismissed. But the files show that soldiers across ranks and regiments connected for sex and intimacy and for community, comradeship, and mutual advantage.

Perhaps the soldiers' most lasting influence on the NVA and Stasi as institutions is through the traces and silences they left in the files themselves, shaping how scholars view the GDR today. The HA I's attempts to gain certainty and understand queer men under its purview produced ambiguity, suggestion, and conjecture, which expose that these investigations are above all evidence of moments when the Stasi's control fails, a fact in line with Lowe's work. These files also build on Muñoz's argument about the ephemeral quality of queerness in the archive. The insubstantial nature of evidence of queerness shaped the NVA's documentation in lasting ways, prompting obsessive fascination from the HA I officers compiling the documents and leaving incongruities and awkwardness in the writing itself. Ahmed writes in *What's the Use* about the "fainter trails" that must be followed to understand how people have made "queer use" of institutions.⁶⁴ The HA I files show how the NVA and Stasi were disrupted and unsettled by their incessant investigations into queerness, but they also show soldiers making queer use of the connections and intimacies forged during military service as they charted their own socialist subjectivities and life trajectories.

Notes

1. Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 139–140. I avoid “homosexual” because of its historical use for medicalization and persecution. For some East German soldiers, though, *Homosexueller* was a term of identification: Bundesarchiv Berlin (hereafter BArch), DY 30/1275, Petition by former career soldier to Egon Krenz (October 30, 1989), 152.

2. For example, Denis Sweet, “Bodies for Germany, Bodies for Socialism: The German Democratic Republic Devises a Gay (Male) Body,” in *Gender and Germanness: Cultural Productions of Nation*, ed. Patricia Herminghouse and Magda Mueller (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1997), 248–262; Jennifer V. Evans, *Life among the Ruins: Cityscape and Sexuality in Cold War Berlin* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); and Samuel Clowes Huneke, *States of Liberation: Gay Men between Dictatorship and Democracy in Cold War Germany* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022).

3. José Esteban Muñoz, “Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts,” *Women and Performance* 8, no. 2 (1996): 5–16.

4. Scott Harrison, Jeff Hayton, and Katharine White, “Beyond the Black Hole: 1989 and the Narration of East German History,” in *Socialist Subjectivities: Queering East Germany under Honecker*, ed. Scott Harrison, Jeff Hayton, and Katharine White (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2025), 5.

5. BArch, DY 30/1212, Petition by noncommissioned officer to Franz-Joachim Hermann (March 15, 1987), 142–144; BArch, DY 30/1250, Petition by noncommissioned officer to the Central Committee (January 20, 1987), 133–135; and Petition by former career soldier to Egon Krenz (October 30, 1989), 150–157.

6. For example, Josie McLellan, “Glad to Be Gay behind the Wall: Gay and Lesbian Activism in 1970s East Germany,” *History Workshop Journal* 74, no. 1 (2012): 105–130; Maria Bühner, “How to Remember Invisibility: Documentary Projects on Lesbians in the German Democratic Republic as Archives of Feelings,” in *Sexual Culture in Germany in the 1970s: A Golden Age for Queers?*, ed. Janin Afken and Benedikt Wolf (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 241–265; Scott R. Harrison, “The State of Belonging: Gay and Lesbian Activism in the German Democratic Republic, 1949–1989” (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2019); and Kyle Frackman, “The Queer Cipher in East German Documentary: *In Sachen H. und acht anderer* and Queer Activist Super 8 Films,” in *Documenting Socialism: East German Documentary Cinema*, ed. Seán Allan and Sebastian Heiduschke (New York: Berghahn Books, 2024), 307–326.

7. Rüdiger Wenzke, *Ulbrichts Soldaten: Die Nationale Volksarmee 1956 bis 1971* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2013), 376; and Klaus Storkmann, “Überwachungsvorgänge ‘Anus,’ ‘Liebhaber,’ ‘Schwuler,’ und ‘Verräter’: Die Überwachung homosexuell orientierter Soldaten, Unteroffiziere und Offiziere in der NVA und den eigenen Reihen durch das MfS,” *Zeitschrift des Forschungsverbundes SED-Staat* 45 (2020): 132.

8. Huneke, *States of Liberation*, 104–117.

9. Jürgen Fuchs, *Fassonschnitt* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1984); Joerg Waehner, *Einstrich-Keinstrich: NVA-Tagebuch* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2006); and Jens Gieseke, *Der Mielke-Konzern: Die Geschichte der Stasi 1945–1990*, rev. ed. (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2006), 139–140.

10. Bundesbeauftragter für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (hereafter BStU), Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (hereafter MfS), HA I, 14841, Telegram (May 30, 1968), 251. This archive was transferred to the Bundesarchiv Berlin in 2021 with the signature BArch replacing BStU. However, since I completed the research for this chapter before the transfer, I have kept the original signature.

11. BStU, MfS, HA I, 16634, “Grundsätze für die Arbeit mit Bewerbern, Berufskadern und Angehörigen der NVA in Dienstverhältnissen auf Zeit bei Homosexualität” (1988), 88–91.

12. Huneke, *States of Liberation*, 214.

13. Sara Ahmed, “The Nonperformativity of Antiracism,” *Meridians* 7, no. 1 (2006): 106.

14. “Grundsätze,” 90.

15. “Grundsätze,” 90–91.

16. For example, one trans applicant was labelled “homosexual”: BStU, MfS, HA I, 19698.

17. See, for example, Timothy Garton Ash, *The File* (London: Harper Collins, 1997); Alison Lewis, “Reading and Writing the Stasi File: On the Uses and Abuses of the File as (Auto)Biography,” *German Life and Letters* 56, no. 4 (2003): 377–397; and Annie Ring, “The (W)hole in the Archive,” *Paragraph* 37, no. 3 (2014): 387–402.

18. “Bericht über eine Ausarbeitung für das MfS-Berlin in der Zeit 1962/63 auf Anforderung des MfS-Offiziers WOLF vom MfS-Berlin,” in *Homosexualität in der DDR: Materialien und Meinungen*, ed. Wolfram Setz (Hamburg: Männerschwarm, 2006), 205–236; and BStU, MfS, JHS, MF VVS 878/85, Reiner Blüchel, “Die Anforderung an die Suche, Auswahl und Gewinnung von IM, um Versuche des Gegners, in Kreisen homosexueller Personen Untergrundtätigkeit zu organisieren, vorbeugend zu verhindern, aufzuklären und zu bekämpfen” (final thesis, Juristische Hochschule Potsdam, 1986).

19. See, for example, Kyle Frackman, “Persistent Ambivalence: Theorizing Queer East German Studies,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 66, no. 5 (2019): 669–689; Jennifer V. Evans and Elissa Mailänder, “Cross-Dressing, Male Intimacy and the Violence of Transgression in Third Reich Photography,” *German History* 39, no. 1 (2020): 54–77; and Jamele Watkins, “From Celebrity to Saint: Angela Davis in East Germany,” Ziegler Lecture, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, March 3, 2021, <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubclecturesseminarsymposia/63300/items/1.0396066>.

20. For example, Bühner, “How to Remember Invisibility”; and Kyle Frackman, “Homemade Pornography and the Proliferation of Queer Pleasure in East Germany,” *Radical History Review* 142 (2022): 93–109.

21. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

22. Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 21.

23. All names are pseudonyms.

24. Huneke, *States of Liberation*, 112–116. See also Storkmann, “Überwachungsvorgänge,” 140–147.

25. BStU, MfS, AOP, 1761/80/1, Transcript of interrogation (September 27–28, 1979), 185. All translations are mine. I have redacted sexual descriptions and identifying information.

26. J. Logan Smilges, *Queer Silence: On Disability and Rhetorical Absence* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 4.

27. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 11.

28. BStU, MfS, AOP, 1761/80/4, Witness interrogation (June 1, 1979), 70.

29. Witness interrogation (June 1, 1979), 82–84.

30. Christian's repudiation of stereotypes of promiscuity resonates with queer-authored writing: see Jürgen Lemke, *Ganz normal anders: Auskünfte schwuler Männer* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1989).

31. BStU, MfS, AOP, 1761/80/4, Witness interrogation (July 3, 1979), 90.

32. Witness interrogation (July 3, 1979), 90.

33. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 12.

34. BStU, MfS, AOP, 1761/80/4, Witness interrogation (July 5, 1979), 194.

35. Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 4.

36. Muñoz, "Ephemera," 6.

37. BStU, MfS, HA I, 15134, Interim report on naval officer (July 4, 1977), 81.

38. See Jennifer V. Evans, "Decriminalization, Seduction, and 'Unnatural Desire' in East Germany," *Feminist Studies* 36, no. 3 (2010): 553–577.

39. BStU, MfS, HA I, 15134, Interim report (January 2, 1978), 89.

40. BStU, MfS, HA I, 15134, Interim report (November 8, 1978), 100.

41. BStU, MfS, HA I, 15134, Interim report (January 30, 1981), 121.

42. Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 35.

43. BStU, MfS, HA I, 15134, Interim report (January 16, 1978), 106.

44. Interim report (January 16, 1978), 106–107.

45. Interim report (January 16, 1978), 110.

46. BStU, MfS, HA I, 15134, Final report from OPK (November 16, 1982), 129.

47. BStU, MfS, HA I, 19097, Final report from OPK (February 11, 1980), 290.

48. Final report from OPK (February 11, 1980), 291.

49. Final report from OPK (February 11, 1980), 291.

50. Scott Harrison, "'Expulsion from Paradise': East German Lesbian Subjectivities in the 1980s," in *Socialist Subjectivities: Queering East Germany under Honecker*, ed. Scott Harrison, Jeff Hayton, and Katharine White (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2025), 147–167.

51. See Stefan Wolter, *Der "Prinz von Prora" im Spiegel der Kritik: Das Trauma NVA und WIR* (Halle: Projekte, 2007), 81, 90.

52. Sara Ahmed, *What's the Use: On the Uses of Use* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 218.

53. See witness statements in BStU, MfS, AOP, 1761/80; and Jens Bisky, *Geboren am 13. August: Der Sozialismus und ich* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2004), 130.

54. Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 6.

55. BStU, MfS, HA I, 90, "Information: Beschaffung von Artikeln aus NVA-Beständen" (n.d.), 29.

56. BStU, MfS, HA I, 15293, Statement (May 10, 1974), 17.

57. Statement (May 10, 1974), 16.
58. BStU, MfS, HA I, 15293, Final report (March 28, 1974), 9.
59. Huneke explores petitions in 1980s gay activism in *States of Liberation*, 189–225.
60. Petition by former career soldier to Egon Krenz (October 30, 1989), 150–157.
61. BStU, MfS, GH, 20/85, Statement by a noncommissioned officer (October 20, 1984), 94.
62. See one IM who was denied a study placement: BStU, MfS, HA I, 14963, “Information über Verhinderung eines Auslandseinsatzes eines Auslandskaders des Bereiches Aufklärung des MfNV” (August 10, 1989), 7.
63. Storkmann, “Überwachungsvorgänge,” 138–140.
64. Ahmed, *What’s the Use*, 218.

Section Two

Interpreting Socialist Realities
Knowledge, Navigation, and Subject Formation

A “Third Way” of Living *Christa Wolf’s Cassandra (1983)*

Catrina de Rivera

Christa Wolf (1929–2011) was one of the best-known writers of fiction in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), and one of the foremost female voices in modern German literature. In line with the current volume’s theme of socialist subjectivities, this chapter retheorizes Wolf’s commentary on the realities of East Germans in her 1983 *Cassandra* beyond the context of the GDR’s gradual decline. The novel, a loosely structured retelling of Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon*, foregrounds Wolf’s turn toward ancient temporalities as a means of situating GDR realities and potential futures. Through its examination of ancient history evolving under various political systems, *Cassandra* paints a detailed portrait of the various ways East Germans—and particularly East German women—occupied their own socialist present(s). The connections *Cassandra* draws between various subject positions and temporalities as well as international and individual politics serve as a mouthpiece for Wolf’s own “third way” politics: her vision of an alternate, compassionate form of socialism centered on gender equity.

Cassandra was delivered in 1982 as the fifth of a series of lectures given at the University of Frankfurt. Wolf’s fictional narrative presents the history of the Trojan War from the perspective of Cassandra, a Trojan priestess cursed to speak the truth but never be believed. She bears witness via a prolonged interior monologue to the gradual destruction of Troy. Cassandra recounts the key political events that led to Troy’s dissolution and defeat nonchronologically. She laments her father King Priam’s removal of Queen Hecuba from his governing council and his willingness to use his own daughters as pawns and bait. She also decries his decision to grant power to Eumelos, a warmongering propagandist who misrepresents the Greeks

and perpetuates Paris's (false, in Wolf's narrative) assertion that Helen is in Troy. Through Wolf's strategy of what she has called "subjective authenticity," she merges her own voice narrating a trip to Greece with Cassandra's voice, connecting her reality with that of her protagonist's.¹

The different historical temporalities and realities present in *Cassandra* have the effect of "queering" German history, placing an emphasis on critical analysis and self-reflexivity over simplistic and binary accounts. In Jennifer Evans's words, a "queer" history "renders historical categories strange instead of assuming they apply more or less uniformly across time, to all people."² The mythical figure of Cassandra, an ancient priestess and conduit for other voices past and present, allows Wolf to dissect provocative similarities and differences in how subjectivities were constituted under socialism and capitalism then and in contemporary times. Cassandra's ultimate challenge is to understand and incorporate subjectivities beyond her life as a princess into a new, reconceived sense of self—a challenge that Wolf faced as a well-known writer with travel and political privileges unimaginable for most East Germans. Although Wolf's work was derided by some critics in the GDR as "subjectivistic" (a derisive term reserved for works in which protagonists turned inward rather than identify with the collective), throughout the course of the novel Cassandra learns to be both self-reflective and excessively empathetic. Wolf uses Cassandra's journey of self-actualization to show how a third way of equitable living between the current existing systems of socialism and capitalism in divided Germany was impossible without all classes and genders being able to strive for subjecthood.

In examining *Cassandra's* queering of histories and subjectivities, this chapter calls several dominant critical tendencies into question. The first is, as Caroline Summers has pointed out, an overzealousness on the part of scholars to "emphasize resonance with narratives not specific to the GDR" in East German literature, and particularly Christa Wolf's writing.³ Critics were eager to defend Wolf from dismissal as a communist hard-liner following the extended media campaign known as the German-German literary debate (*deutsch-deutsche Literaturstreit*) in the years immediately following the fall of the Berlin Wall.⁴ This series of debates accused East German intellectuals of blindness to the GDR's flaws due to their adherence to government policies. It eventually broadened into a public attack on the merits and authenticity of all literature from the former GDR.⁵ Wolf was a main target of these attacks, cast as a "state poet" (*Staatsdichterin*). She was also widely called an opportunist because of her delayed publication of *What Remains* (*Was bleibt*, 1990), a narrative that criticized the widespread surveillance of GDR citizens. In 1993,

media condemnation of Wolf was renewed when it was revealed that she had collaborated with the Ministry for State Security (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*; MfS or Stasi) as an "unofficial collaborator" (*inoffizielle Mitarbeiterin*) from 1959 to 1962. (The media chose to ignore the significantly larger file of information the Stasi had gathered while surveilling Wolf.)

Yet the counternarrative to these unbalanced attacks, in which Wolf is cast as a subtle detractor of the GDR regime and a prophesier of its failure, is equally biased.⁶ The inclination to view Wolf as a resistor with strong ties to Western thought reveals less about Wolf's texts and more about her critics' political motivations in the decades following the fall of the Berlin Wall. "Critics in the West," Anna Kuhn has recently argued, "strove to ferret out criticisms of 'real-existing socialism' in GDR texts in order to legitimize Western capitalist political systems."⁷ This in part explains the dominant tendency to read the city of Troy, where *Cassandra* is set, as a metaphor for the GDR. Troy's strong disparities between classes and the tendency to objectify its citizens are in fact tendencies that many East Germans associated with West Germany. Troy thus cannot be viewed as a simple metaphor for the GDR but rather a way for Christa Wolf to address both socialist and capitalist cultures more generally.

The second critical tendency this chapter aims to call into question is the classification of *Cassandra* as feminist literature organized around primarily Western principles, ideas, and theories, particularly the post-structural writings of Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray. A growing number of critics since the early 2000s have read *Cassandra* as a veiled critique of a failed GDR women's policy and Wolf's disillusionment with socialism in favor of Western systems.⁸ In her influential monograph on GDR women's literature, Lorna Martens makes the claim that *Cassandra* cannot be read as socialist literature because women are shown as victims of patriarchy rather than as strong and financially self-sufficient. "Wolf," Martens writes, "takes a giant step away from socialist doctrine on the woman question and towards a feminism, in the Western sense . . . pinpoint[ing] the origins of the malaise at the beginning of patriarchy—that is, at the beginning of history."⁹ Such analyses, however, unfairly dismiss critical statements Wolf has made regarding Western feminism as mere lip service to the ruling Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*; SED), and ignore the specific, pointed attacks on Western feminism in *Cassandra*. The female warrior character, Penthesilea, for example, reads as a flawed caricature of what many East German women viewed as extremism within the Western feminist movement: "militant" or "man-hating" women who, in their fight

for legal equality, saw men as enemies and obstacles. In this spirit, Wolf writes that Penthesilea “did not just fight against the Greeks, but against all men.”¹⁰ Penthesilea spoke to Wolf’s unwillingness to, in her view, rewrite the Marxian battle of the classes under the terms of feminism, setting her firmly apart from her Western counterparts.

Wolf’s concern with the “woman question” is tied up with what she regards as an increasingly narrowing worldview in divided Germany. This worldview, she argues, is reliant on dominant historical narratives created by the nation’s respective governments to support their political objectives. East and West Germany each, she writes, claim to champion “objectivity” and renounce “subjectivity” in both their politics and cultural traditions, following “the route of segregation, of the renunciation of the manifoldness of phenomena, in favor of dualism and monism, in favor of closed systems and pictures of the world, of the renunciation of subjectivity in favor of a sealed ‘objectivity’” (287–288). The “objective” stories Wolf criticizes in her Frankfurt lectures, however, suppress narratives by women and the working classes. “The things we exclude and ban,” Wolf writes, “are the things we have to fear” (282). With *Cassandra*, Wolf examines the economic and cultural phenomena of ancient and contemporary societies explicitly from the point of a woman living in a time in which women’s stories were simply not told. What, Wolf imagines, could a woman’s suppressed viewpoint have added to our understanding of what is considered (rather arbitrarily, Wolf hints) the foundation of the democratic world? As Wolf made explicitly clear in later political speeches, marginalized stories must be heard if there is any hope for improving gender relations and equality. She would ultimately demand the creation of a radically different form of socialism based on these principles that, she claimed, the people would have no wish to abandon.¹¹

Wolf’s concern with a disadvantaged female subjectivity as opposed to female civil rights indicates the rift between women’s movements in the GDR and those in Great Britain and North America. In North America, women were organizing in groups such as the National Organization for Women and fighting for legal rights such as equal pay, availability of birth control, first-trimester abortion, and access to reliable, state-funded childcare. East German women, however, had already been granted these privileges by 1980—including the right to abortion, free birth control, and state-funded childcare—that women in the West were still struggling to gain. As a result, the official stance of the SED was that women’s emancipation had already been achieved under state socialism.¹² This stance had the effect of silencing and delegitimizing the many women who were still struggling

under long working hours and the "double burden" of being wives and mothers in the GDR.¹³ As Larissa Stiglich's chapter on petitions (*Eingaben*) in Eisenhüttenstadt highlights, East German women in particular faced a lack of upward mobility in a society that was still gender divided. While positions of political power typically went to men, women found themselves as increasingly important lynchpins of the family and private life.¹⁴ As a result, they developed what Donna Harsch has called a "female consciousness" that stems from key shared duties in family care and housekeeping that went unappreciated.¹⁵ Wolf felt the need to talk about a specific female (i.e., secondary and disadvantaged) subjectivity, even though the subjectivities privileged in *Cassandra* include male and female slave and proletariat classes living outside the palace.

Rather than creating a dialogue with Western feminism, then, Wolf's *Cassandra* addresses the specific problems East German women faced. The novel spoke to the issues being discussed by the many organized dissident groups beginning to form in the GDR in the early 1980s. Chief among these issues were concerns about peace and militarization, which were central to the discussions held by a growing number of autonomous groups concerned about civil rights. In *Cassandra*, Wolf explores the experience of political upheaval and war deliberately from an outsider perspective: the everyday experiences of women and other marginalized people inform a new socialist politics founded on a third way of love, care, and nonviolence. *Cassandra* in this way reflects on the status and desires of women and other disenfranchised citizens when the GDR's much-touted politics of gender equality (*Gleichberechtigung*) began to face more open criticism in the early 1980s.

An Aesthetics of Resistance

Wolf's early work was characterized by the idealized aesthetic of Socialist Realism (*Moscow Novella*, 1961; *The Divided Heaven*, 1963), but by the late 1960s, Wolf had developed an experimental style and unorthodox critical concerns with *The Quest for Christa T.* (1968) and *Patterns of Childhood* (1976). Following the end of a period of perceived social liberalization with the 1976 expatriation of GDR dissident poet Wolf Biermann, the role of gender became increasingly important in Wolf's work. As Briana Smith argues in her chapter, a certain "new pioneer spirit" emerged in the wake of the Biermann affair among artists and intellectuals who sought to "stretch the boundaries of what was permissible." Wolf's novella *No Place on Earth* (1979), which depicts a fictional 1804 meeting of the two Romantic poets Heinrich

von Kleist and Karoline von Günderode, was one of Wolf's most ideologically progressive literary experiments. As an early articulation of a female subjectivity that presents itself as radically other from a dominant male discourse, *No Place on Earth* foreshadows Wolf's treatment of gender roles and the female intellectual in *Cassandra*.

Wolf began *Cassandra* in 1980, during an intensification of Cold War hostilities. At the forefront of Wolf's mind while writing was the two superpowers' contemplation of waging, in Ronald Reagan's words, a "limited nuclear war" in Europe. It is thus not surprising that *Cassandra* reflects on not only gender but what Wolf calls the "delusional thinking" that threatens to end human life. "The realization," Wolf writes, "that the physical existence of us all depends on shifts in the delusional thinking of very small groups—that is, on chance, to be sure unhinges the classical aesthetic once and for all, slips it from its mountings, which, in the final analysis, are fastened to the law of reason" (226). Because of its political dimensions, *Cassandra* became, alongside several other texts,¹⁶ a key reference and topic of discussion for various East German autonomous groups. These groups consisted of mostly women interested in the connections between gender critique and war in patriarchal societies.¹⁷ In her 1980 Büchner Prize acceptance speech, Wolf addressed the threat of the nuclear destruction of Europe: "Maps," she said, "already exist which record the phases of our extinction."¹⁸ Therefore, Wolf declared, literature must be "taken at its word" and "counteract those maps of death" (186).

Among these groups, one of the largest and most engaged with Wolf's writings was Women for Peace (*Frauen für den Frieden*), which was "a major catalyst for further civil rights movements to emerge in the late 1980s."¹⁹ Founded in 1982 and active until 1988, the group formed in response to the Euromissile Crisis. The crisis began in the late 1970s, when the Soviets began to improve and increase nuclear systems threatening Western Europe. When the Soviets strategically stored many of these weapons in East Germany, NATO members in turn adopted the so-called double-track decision, eventually deploying over five hundred missiles to West Germany.²⁰ Over five thousand people attended the 1982 peace workshop hosted in part by Women for Peace in East Berlin. Women for Peace demanded that the GDR take an active part in deescalating the continuing military buildup of Warsaw Pact countries. They argued that to do so East Germany must refrain from storing additional Soviet weapons even if West Germany increased its number of missiles. A new law passed in 1982 that stated that women aged 18–50 could be drafted for military service quickly became another cause for concern by

autonomous women's groups, including Women for Peace.²¹ An open letter the group sent to Honecker in response stated:

We women want to break the cycle of violence and refuse to participate in all forms of violence as a means of conflict resolution. We don't perceive our equality to men by standing next to men with weapons in their hands but next to men who have recognized that abstractions such as "enemy" and "opponent" imply mankind's destruction.²²

Cassandra, published in 1983, reflected the concern among women and some men with the GDR's increasingly aggressive military stance. The GDR claimed status as a *Friedensstaat* (state of peace), justifying Soviet policies on extending military training and increasing the presence of weapons on GDR soil by counterintuitively claiming these actions maintained the peace. In passing a female draft, the GDR effectively announced that women's equality hinged on their support for a conflict that they considered to oppose their interests. This further intensified women's dissatisfaction with their legal position.

Given this historical context, *Cassandra* combines the issues of nuclear armament and gender critique, making true gender and class equity necessary conditions for peace. It addresses GDR women's experiences of and response to the threat of nuclear war alongside and directly related to the continued patriarchal demands of society. Citing United Nations figures stating that there are three European tons of TNT for every person on earth, Wolf asserts the need for a literary "aesthetic of resistance" to deal with these related issues: "Indignation, revolt would be inappropriate. The aesthetic of resistance to it all has yet to be developed" (236). Her "aesthetic of resistance" is, she claims, designed to make readers conscious of social problems and work toward social change. The aesthetic of resistance is evident in both the novel's plot and its form, including its nonchronological structure and its use of language.

At the level of plot, the novel details Cassandra's process of discovering how the warlike, patriarchal society she inhabits is what stands behind many of her psychological and social problems. *Cassandra* can thus be considered a form of anachronistic *bildungsroman*, in which the eponymous protagonist must grow from a sheltered young princess into a woman well-informed of the corruption within the palace and the many different lives beyond the palace's walls. To achieve this level of growth and self-actualization, Cassandra must recognize herself, alongside her fellow citizens, as historical subjects

despite their constant objectification and exploitation. Wolf has stated, "I see the true kinship between real literature and socialist society as follows: both aim to help people reach self-realization."²³ It is Cassandra's high status as a princess that prevents her growth. Cassandra initially speaks of Troy and its rival Greece in the dehumanizing binaries perpetuated by her father and other functionaries of the palace, idealizing Troy and its men while dismissing the Greeks as violent beasts. Even when Cassandra becomes aware of her hypocrisy, she is reluctant to jeopardize her preferred status by confronting the violent, unjust aspects of Trojan society that her father the king endorses and perpetuates. "I have always granted myself these times of partial blindness, to become seeing all of a sudden—that would have destroyed me," she states (40). When Cassandra begins to question the increasingly militaristic tendencies of her nation in political meetings, she runs afoul of her father. She is banned from political meetings and the castle spy, Eumelos, begins to watch and harass her ceaselessly.

Much of Cassandra's life has clear autobiographical parallels to Christa Wolf's own experiences. Cassandra's conflict with her father, the king, calls to mind the generational tension Wolf often claimed was felt by GDR youth. As Mary Fulbrook points out in her chapter on the GDR as a "post-Nazi society," Wolf felt she was speaking on behalf of a generation lacking role models and facing a legacy of guilt. Moreover, the celebrity status that Wolf later enjoyed in West Germany protected her from the oppression and in many cases prison sentences that many other, unknown authors in East Germany faced. When Wolf accused the SED of nepotism in 1967, she was ousted from her position of candidate member of the Central Committee of the SED, which she had occupied since 1963. In the years that followed, she was subjected to extensive surveillance. Key to Wolf's socialist vision, which arose in part from her own struggles in both the East and West, is allowing citizens the freedom to fulfill their social and ethical obligations to one other. Individuals must be permitted to strive for their subjecthood and achieve a Marxian sense of "self-actualization" in which one's value to others, to society, and to themselves is clear. Even though Cassandra is a priestess, a central and highly important social role in ancient Greece, she experiences constant feelings of "alienation." Wolf was an avid reader of Marx,²⁴ and her use of the word "alienation" (*Entfremdung*) shows the influence of Marx's concept of depressed social relations in capitalist societies. "My overall concern," Wolf writes, "is the sinister of alienation, in aesthetics, in art, as well as elsewhere" (142). In *Manuscripts*, Marx explains alienation as the "devaluation of the

human world" and a corresponding "increase in value of the world of things," resulting in "servitude to the object."²⁵

To overcome the alienation she experiences, Cassandra must become a true "subject of history." Cassandra feels as though she is a possession of the palace ("I, the seeress, was owned by the palace" [69]), and does not "belong" to herself. When she discovers the palace's dark secret regarding the war with Greece—that Helen, the supposed root of the conflict, is not in Troy at all and instead was taken from her brother Paris on his way back to Troy by the King of Egypt—she chooses not to inform her fellow citizens of the palace propaganda. "The Eumelos inside me forbade me," she explains (69). She does this despite recognizing the pride and greed that undergirds the lies about Helen. Cassandra's hypocrisy begins to destroy her, and she no longer sees meaning in the rituals she performs as a priestess: "The people I met seemed to me more and more alien," she comments. Cassandra becomes a literal tool of the state and begins to lose the properties associated with humanity: "My limbs no longer moved of their own free will. . . . I had lost all desire to walk, breathe, sing. . . . The unloved duty inside me ate up all my joy" (99–100). It is not until Cassandra completely abandons the power structure that the castle represents and joins a community of social outcasts living at the edge of Mount Ida that she begins to question the binaries and categories that determined her earlier subject position.

In addition to the novel's overarching plot, Wolf uses literary form and language to hint at her vision for East Germany. In *Cassandra* and its associated lectures, Wolf makes clear that the (ab)use of language is essential to the official creation of a false reality, in which ambiguities are eliminated for the sake of creating a binary account and maintaining existing social categories. In tightly controlling and censoring whose stories are allowed to appear, or otherwise papering over the complexities of everyday life, current policies inflict a kind of violence on citizens. This violence prevents the self-actualization so important to being fulfilled political subjects. *Cassandra* brings to light how palace authorities manipulate citizens by creating rigid and arbitrary categories with language (for example, speaking of us versus them, or friend versus enemy). Eumelos, Troy's head of security who manages Troy's image and the perception of Troy's enemies, polices the rhetoric of citizens, and uses language as a political tool. He, for example, retroactively changes the Trojan man Trolius's age to meet the specifications of a prophecy. The war that Troy fights is, much like the Cold War, not just a physical war but an abstract one, or a "language war" (*Sprachkrieg*) (94).

To counteract the language abuse that Wolf saw as a catalyst of the Cold War, she aims to use language in a fundamentally new and nonviolent way in *Cassandra*. Known for her claim that literature must also be “peace research,” she considered *Cassandra* and its corresponding Frankfurt lectures as serious pieces of socially engaged writing designed to make political interventions. While writing and researching for *Cassandra*, Wolf attended various peace conferences in both West and East Berlin, which were designed to lessen political barriers and bring participants from both nations together in a rejection of violence. It was primarily the female participants of these meetings (Christa Wolf among them) who argued that a fundamentally new language was needed to address the current political crisis.²⁶ Transcripts from the first Berlin meeting of writers for the advancement of peace, held on December 14, 1981, reveal that the small group of female participants present accused their (male) collaborators of recycling the very aggressive, violent language that they condemned in their leaders: “We are just as adept at juggling military terms as the politicians. . . . We give ourselves an equally well-informed air and know as much as politicians, namely nothing.”²⁷ It is Cassandra’s status as priestess (a role always filled by females) that allows her to deliver a message that refuses to claim authority or do violence to its subjects. Rather, it is deliberately vague: as Cassandra is a conduit for multiple, godly voices, her messages are open to interpretation, and it is their openness that makes them of high value to Troy. In addition to privileging Cassandra’s intersubjective form of communication, Wolf offers other alternatives to manipulative, warlike language throughout the novel by making ample use of strategies such as alternating first- and third-person narrative tones, inner monologues, different interpretations of dreams, use of subjunctive language forms, syntactic ellipses, questions, dashes, parentheses, and literary allusions, quotes, and paratexts.

Wolf elaborates something of a theory of “subjective” language in her Frankfurt lectures by expounding at length on the Ingeborg Bachmann poem “Tell Me, Love” (*Erklär mir, Liebe*). She praises Bachmann’s “precise indefiniteness and clearest ambiguity” in her treatment of the complex relationship between two lovers. The poem refuses to explain their relationship in straightforward terms, despite the ironic and paradoxical title “Tell Me, Love.” Implying that love is something that cannot be explained, Bachmann’s language is able to capture the ambiguity of the intersubjectively linked figures of the “I” and the “you,” capturing hints of what is beyond the representational powers of “objective” or logical writing. “Things are this way and no other way, it says, and at the same time (this cannot be explained

logically) things are that way, a different way. You are I, I am he, it cannot be explained. The grammar of manifold simultaneous relations” (276). The verse, Wolf concludes, questions why “objective” political thought has come to exclude love and be understood counter to emotion. The “thinking” lover that Bachmann addresses in her poem has, to the frustration of his partner, traded his emotions for cold, logical objectivity. Wolf uses the message of this poem to argue that the achievement of objectivity—of restraint, strict form, and control—ignores the subjective components present in both art and politics.

In *Cassandra*, Wolf models how to use language to breathe life into what were once stale objects, making them into subjects again. The first sentences of the novel are a transition from the previous lectures: they seem to be narrated by Wolf herself, who had recently taken a research trip to Greece. Wolf describes her experience of standing at the location in Greece where, according to legend, Cassandra was killed: “These stone lions looked at her; now they no longer have heads. This fortress—once impregnable—now a pile of stones” (1). Wolf thus begins *Cassandra* in the least “objective” way possible—by critically acknowledging her own subject position and its respective limitations. When she continues, “Keeping step with the story, I make my way into death,” it is unclear whether the “I” refers to Wolf, Cassandra, or both. At that moment, the narrative shifts and Cassandra is allowed to speak through herself, polyvocally, through Wolf. A vital part of Wolf’s “aesthetic of resistance,” then, aims to create narratives in which descriptive objects are not simplified and dominated. Rather, Wolf wants to elucidate the complexities of life and the ambiguities of subjective experience.

“The Third Alternative: Living”

Up until this point, I have argued that Wolf used *Cassandra* to draw attention to tensions between the two German states and imagine a more peaceful and gender-equitable socialism for the GDR. To encourage its reader to recognize and reject binary accounts of history that promulgate stale political agendas, *Cassandra* emphasizes the inherent value of subject positions “in between” accepted social norms. Wolf complicates dominant and reductionist understandings of socialism in both the East and West. One of Wolf’s central claims in the Frankfurt lectures that accompanied *Cassandra* is that a dangerous kind of political one-sidedness characterizes Cold War German society. In her view, the one-sidedness stems from a reduction of human reason to a cold, instrumental rationality—the same kind of thinking that

made events like the Holocaust possible. “Knowledge which has not passed through the senses,” Wolf writes, quoting Leonardo da Vinci, “can produce none but destructive truth” (268). Certain “sensory” abilities fundamental to humanity and associated with women, such as compassion, love, and care, Wolf argues, have been systematically devalued in favor of aggression, militarism, and greed. This explains, for Wolf, why women often work in care roles for which they are undercompensated and undervalued, and men who oppose war and gender discrimination are rarely promoted.

The Mount Ida community, a group of mostly women and some men living inside a cave on the outskirts of Troy, models Wolf’s vision of an ideal socialist political utopia in *Cassandra*. Cassandra joins this community after being imprisoned in the “grave of heroes” for questioning her father, King Priam. The community forms a counter-world to the palace—Wolf repeatedly calls it a third alternative: “Between killing and dying, there is a third alternative: living” (118). This group makes her reconsider her life in the castle, and realize the way that the king and the rest of her family twisted Troy’s perception of reality for their own benefit by their binary accounts:

For them, there is no alternative but either truth or lies, right or wrong, victory or defeat, friend or enemy, life or death. They think differently than we do. What cannot be seen, smelled, heard, touched, does not exist. It is the other alternative that they crush between their clear-cut distinctions, the third alternative, which in their view does not exist, the smiling vital force that is able to generate itself from itself over and over: the undivided, spirit in life, life in spirit. (106–107)

Wolf utilizes the cave society to embody humanity (*Menschlichkeit*) in Enlightenment thought as it informs Marxism, specifically the Kantian categorical imperative to “never use people as a means to an end.”²⁸ Rather than recognize any private property, they share their possessions, and in place of traditional gender roles, share sexual partners, including same-sex partners. In terms of social relations, there is a near total absence of hierarchy: Arisbe, an elderly woman and former citizen of Troy, is the group leader, but her leadership style aims to give as much freedom to the people as possible. She imposes few if any interpretations on the community’s cultural norms and language. The cave is full of painted images, and when Cassandra asks their meaning, Arisbe explains that other members interpret the objects as they please, but that she interprets them as standing “for that which we do not dare to recognize within ourselves” (48). The society accommodates the

needs of all: there are Trojans and Greeks, gay and straight sexual partners, and members of all social classes, living together as equals. Despite their differences and the lack of a common language, they connect with each other through what Wolf describes as "touching": a strong bond of companionship and communication created with their bodies. At one point, wishing to leave behind a legacy in their caves, they engage in what Wolf calls a spontaneous "touch-fest" and leave their handprints all over the cave's walls (48).

This "touching" serves as a counter-position to the kind of social alienation that Cassandra experienced as a Trojan princess and priestess, and its philosophy is derived from a lengthy essay Wolf wrote in 1977 entitled "Touching" (*Berührung*). The essay was written as an extended review of a volume edited by the Austrian Maxie Wander: *Good Morning, You Beauty—Women in the GDR: Transcripts (Guten Morgen, du Schöne—Frauen in der DDR: Protokolle)*. Wander's volume comprised a series of candid interviews with different GDR women, who recounted their experiences with their jobs, personal and sexual relationships, and family life. Many of their accounts were negative and disturbing, including incidents of domestic and sexual violence as well as general feelings of exhaustion, hopelessness, and depression. "Touching" was later used as the forward to the 1978 edition of Wander's volume, published in West Germany. In it, Wander develops Wolf's position on what she regards as unique feelings of comradeship and connection within marginalized groups (including women). She explains:

[A position] unconscious of the prevailing self-understanding and what is unspoken is always to be found among the underprivileged, the marginalized, those who have been declared underage and outcasts; where misery and degradation prevent a subject from speaking: among those who do the meanest and most mindless work; in prisons, barracks, in homes for children, young people and the elderly, in insane asylums and hospitals. And, for a long time: with the women who remained almost speechless.²⁹

For Wolf, women fall within society's lowest positions: those who have been marginalized and find themselves outside of society. Their low position affords them the advantage of being outside of current corruption and reductionism: because they are generally the victims of political evils as opposed to the perpetrators, they are in the ideal position of suggesting a new political way forward in which the demands of all are fairly met. The female gender constitutes a radical other, or "what they do not dare to recognize in themselves" (141). The third way of the Mount Ida cave society

embraces the viewpoints of the “other,” differentiating it from the palace and the social alienation with which the palace society is associated. It represents a political practice that goes beyond simple oppositions and assumptions, even if it does not offer any simple, practical political solutions.

Part of Cassandra’s journey of self-realization is to learn to reject the invisible social structures that marginalize certain groups, including women. In her dreams, a battle over her subjectivity takes place, in which she confronts the categories that define and constrict her. In one dream, Cassandra is appointed a judge of a heavenly contest. Her assignment is to determine whether it is the sun god Apollo or the moon goddess Selene who shines more brightly. Cassandra states that anyone can see that the sun shines more brightly than the moon, causing the moon to disappear, wailing in misery. The source of her conflict, Cassandra later realizes, is not the difficulty of being a judge but rather the guiding question by which she is expected to judge. What categories, Cassandra must ask herself, is she using to judge the worth of others? What terms apply to the perverted “contest” in which she finds herself? When she admits to Arisbe that the terms of the contest she judged were never valid, a weight was lifted for her: “One coil in the rope that bound me, the outermost coil, snapped, dropped away; many others remained. It was a time to draw breath, to stretch stiff joints; a blossoming of the flesh” (88). At that moment, she realizes the existing categories that unfairly stacked life against her. Shortly before her death, after Cassandra had spent time in the Mount Ida community, she has another dream, in which she feels light and happy, and the categories of colors, human and animal, light and dark, and land and sea no longer apply:

I saw colors, red and black, life and death. They interpenetrated, they did not fight each other as I would have expected even in a dream. They changed form continually, they continually produced new patterns which could be unbelievably beautiful. They were like waters, like a sea. In the middle of the sea I saw a bright island which I was approaching rapidly in my dream—for I was flying; yes, I was flying! What was there on the island? What kind of creature? A human being? An animal? It glowed the way only Aeneas glows at night. What joy. Then headlong fall, breeze, darkness, awakening. (124)

Cassandra’s final vision is an amalgamation of opposing substances and categories, existing together in complete harmony. Although she had been taken captive, she finds strength in the third alternative she had found, in

which she was able to live how she wanted without constriction, manipulation, or violence. She was, finally, in Marxist terms, a subject of history.

Cassandra begins at the cusp of the plot's end, in which Cassandra is about to be put to death by Clytemnestra and is recalling how she ended up where she was. She recalls a similar kind of totalizing, utopian vision, in which her subjectivity begins to take on new dimensions, as intersubjectivity:

The secret that encircles and holds me together. . . . There is something of everyone in me, so I have belonged completely to no one, and I have even understood their hatred of me. Once, "in the past" I tried to talk about it to Myrine. Aeneas had pulled out with his people. Myrine despised him. And I tried to tell her—no, not just that I understood Aeneas; that I knew him. As if I were he. As if I were crouching inside him, feeding in thought on his traitorous resolves. (4–5)

Many GDR critics accused Wolf of being selfish over the course of her career because of her attention to subjectivity in her writing. One such critic called *Cassandra* "grotesque" because of its attention to "male and female thought" and accused Wolf of warping history in her novel. "History, deep down," he wrote, "is not the struggle between the exploiters and the exploited [for Wolf]." ³⁰ Others called her work "subjectivistic," which was used as a pejorative term in the GDR, as it implied a solipsistic turn inwards in the place of the identification with the collective demanded by the tenets of Socialist Realism. Yet when Wolf writes a so-called subjectivistic novel, she is writing, in fact, about her characters' ability to be both self-reflective and move beyond the borders of the self to identify with others. Subjectivity, as opposed to a lack of connection with others, is in fact an excess of that connection. Cassandra, in her capacity as a prophet and priestess, "enters the minds" of others of both genders (in the case above, for example, the warrior hero Aeneas) and both Trojans and Greeks. Her powers eventually allow her to blend individual and collective politics and eradicate the distinctions between seemingly opposing subject positions. In the process, she legitimates spaces "in between" these positions. This represents an act of self-empowerment, as opposed to the opposition, separation, blame, and aggression that characterizes war.

Yet the question remains: to what extent was Wolf's utopian vision and her description of the Mount Ida community useful to the GDR? Although Wolf wrote about an "aesthetics of resistance" geared toward social change, the GDR of course never adopted the third way Wolf championed. The Mount Ida community in *Cassandra* functioned as an important and much-needed

abstract acknowledgment of humankind's potential. With it, Wolf convincingly argued that there is an alternative way of living apart from existing social categories. Yet, by nature, utopian society is unrealistic and idealistic. Perhaps because of its radical nature, it did not inspire the necessary social actions to move GDR socialism forward. In writing, Wolf expressed her desire to realize a socialist, queer temporality that existed in competition with real-existing socialism. But without a materially grounded reality principle, it stands to question how empowering Wolf's message was for the average East German citizen. As Wolf occupied a position of incredible privilege herself, her musings of utopia, when taken at their face value by those living in the GDR, likely appeared to some as out of touch with reality. Wolf may well have foreseen this lack of efficacy: after all, she chose Cassandra as her protagonist, the prophet whose advice was doomed never to be heeded.

It was a "third path" that Wolf had in mind when she said to the thousands gathered at Berlin Alexanderplatz on November 10, 1989, in her memorable speech: "Let Us Dream, with Our Critical Reason Focused" (*Traumen wir, mit hellwacher Vernunft*).³¹ Wolf believed even beyond the GDR's final days that there was something in between what, by that point, had been acknowledged as the failures of GDR socialist policies and what she knew were the many flaws and dangers of West German capitalism. Wolf demanded that her audience think beyond the present moment and binary understandings of history to reconsider how East Germans relate to the world around them. She emphasized the need for connection, for community, and for a language that does not do violence to its citizens. For Wolf, there would and could be no heroic history of the GDR. This perhaps explains Cassandra's decision to go to her death rather than follow Aeneas into his Roman conquests. The prophetess Cassandra knew her demand for a third alternative would entail her own violent destruction—much like Wolf's later writings would incite ferocious attacks on her reputation.

Notes

1. For a commentary on subjective authenticity, see Christa Wolf, "Die Dimension des Autors: Gespräch mit Hans Kaufmann," in Christa Wolf, *Lesen und Schreiben: Neue Sammlung* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand Verlag, 1980), 75.

2. Jennifer V. Evans, "Introduction: Why Queer German History?," *German History* 34, no. 3 (2016): 371–384, here 371.

3. Caroline Summers, "Hostage to Feminism? The Success of Christa Wolf's Cassandra in its 1984 English Translation," *Gender & History* 30, no. 1 (2018): 226–239, here 234.

4. For a detailed discussion of the *deutsch-deutsche Literaturstreit* in context with other historical literary debates, see Frank Finlay, “Literary Debates and the Literary Market since Unification,” in *Contemporary German Fiction: Writing in the Berlin Republic*, ed. Stuart Taberner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 21–38.

5. Günter Grass claimed that the disparagement of Wolf—who, up until November 4, 1989, had called upon her compatriots to remain in the GDR and work toward reform—was an attempt to delegitimize the GDR via its most important writer. See “Nötige Kritik oder Hinrichtung? Spiegel-Gepräch mit Günter Grass über die Debatte um Christa Wolf und die DDR-Literatur,” *Der Spiegel* 29 (1990), Nötige Kritik oder Hinrichtung?—DER SPIEGEL (accessed February 23, 2024).

6. See Antonia Lacey, “‘A Woman Is Not without Honour’: The Prophetic Voice of Christa Wolf’s ‘Cassandra,’” *New Blackfriars* 79, no. 931 (1998): 377–389.

7. Sonja E. Klocke and Jennifer R. Hosek, eds., *Christa Wolf: A Companion* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 163.

8. See, for example, Muriel Cormican, “Woman’s Heterosexual Experience in Christa Wolf’s *Kassandra*: A Critique of GDR Feminism,” *Philological Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (2002): 109.

9. Lorna Martens, *The Promised Land? Feminist Writing in the German Democratic Republic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 88.

10. Christa Wolf, *Cassandra: A Novel and Four Essays*, trans. Jan van Heurck (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1988), 117. All subsequent parenthetical citations in the chapter refer to page numbers from this text.

11. Only five days before the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Wolf demanded a new form of socialism be created as an alternative to the Federal Republic. This socialism must, she argued, be centered on true equality of classes and genders to differentiate itself from the socialism championed by the ruling SED. See Christa Wolf, “Sprache der Wende. Rede auf dem Alexanderplatz,” in Christa Wolf, *Werkausgabe in 12 Bänden*, ed. Sonja Hilzinger (Munich: Luchterhand, 1999–2001), XII: 182–184.

12. See Erich Honecker’s claim of women having achieved equal rights in the GDR in his Central Committee Report at the Eighth Party Congress of the SED, 1971, cited in Hannelore Scholz, ed., *Die DDR-Frau zwischen Mythos und Realität: Zum Umgang mit der Frauenfrage in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und der DDR von 1945–1989* (Schwerin: Frauen und Gleichstellungsbeauftragte der Landesregierung Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 1997), 179.

13. See Peter Caldwell and Karrin Hanshaw, *Germany Since 1945: Politics, Culture, and Society* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 155–170.

14. See Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

15. Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 7.

16. Texts discussed in group meetings included Herrad Schenk’s *Frauen kommen ohne Waffen* (*Women Come without Weapons*), Elisabeth Braendle-Zeile’s *Seit 90 Jahren: Frauen für den Frieden* (*For 90 Years: Women for Peace*), *Frauen machen Frieden: Lesebuch für Grossmuetter, Muetter, und Toechter* (*Women Make Peace: A Reader*

for *Grandmothers, Mothers, and Daughters*), and Eva Quistorp's *Frauen für den Frieden* (*Women for Peace*). For a summary of different regional groups and notes on their engagement with Christa Wolf and other female authors, see Samirah Kenawi, ed., *Frauengruppen in der DDR der 80er Jahre—Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: GrauZone, 1995).

17. In East Germany there were two strands of independent groups. The first strand consisted of several autonomous, urban organizations addressing primarily human rights, peace, women's rights and war/demilitarization. The second strand were semiautonomous groups that focused on similar issues in the GDR Protestant churches, which enjoyed extraterritorial status. On early women's and human rights groups in the GDR, see Antje Finger and Ingeborg Michael, *Genau hingesehen, nie geschwiegen, sofort widersprochen, gleich gehandelt. Dokumente aus dem Gewebe der Heuchelei 1982–1989. Widerstand autonomer Frauen in Berlin Ost und West* (Berlin: Bildungswerk für Demokratie und Umweltschutz, 1990).

18. Christa Wolf, "Büchner Prize Acceptance Speech," trans. Henry Schmidt, *New German Critique* 23 (1981): 3–11.

19. Susanne Kranz, "Frauen für den Frieden—Oppositional Group or Bored Troublemakers?," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 16, no. 2 (2015): 141–154.

20. See Jeffrey Herf, *War by Other Means: Soviet Power, West German Resistance, and the Battle of the Euromissiles* (New York: The Free Press, 1991).

21. Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949–1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 234.

22. Matthias Domaschk Archiv, Eingabe an Erich Honecker (October 12, 1982), n.p.

23. Christa Wolf, "Selbstinterview," in Wolf, *Werkausgabe in 12 Bänden*, IV: 139–144, here 141.

24. See Herbert Arnold, "On Myth and Marxism: The Case of Heiner Müller and Christa Wolf," *Colloquia Germanica* 21, no. 1 (1988): 58–69.

25. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," in *Marx's Concept of Man*, ed. Erich Fromm, trans. T. B. Bottomore (New York: Ungar, 1961), 87–196, here 95.

26. Alexander Stephan, "Frieden, Frauen, und Cassandra," in *Wolf: Darstellung, Deutung, Diskussion*, ed. Manfred Jürgensen (Bern: Francke, 1984), 149–173.

27. Stephan, "Frieden, Frauen, und Cassandra," 151.

28. See Kojin Karatani, *Transcritique: On Kant and Marx* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005). Karatani argues that Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* forms the ethical basis for Marxism.

29. Maxie Wander, *Guten Morgen, du Schöne—Frauen in der DDR: Protokolle* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1978), 19–20.

30. Wilhelm Girnus, "Wer baute das siebentorige Theben?," *Sinn und Form* 2 (1983): 439–447, here 442.

31. Christa Wolf, "Sprache der Wende. Rede auf dem Alexanderplatz," in Wolf, *Werkausgabe in 12 Bänden*, XII: 182–184.

“What German Thought Cannot Express” *Gert Neumann Reads Adam Michnik*

Kyrill Kunakhovich

“To ‘queer’ a history in its simplest terms,” writes Eli Rubin in his epilogue to this book, “is to look at a history from a different ‘orientation’ point, to look at it ‘slantwise,’ categorically questioning the very frameworks that have been essential to understandings of that history in the past.”¹ For any national history, one way of doing so is to step out of the national frame. To understand “what it meant to be an East German subject,” as this volume seeks to do, it is helpful to look beyond the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Encounters with other countries could lead East Germans to reflect on the particularity of their experience. Such encounters offered “a different orientation point” from which to look at oneself “slantwise,” an opportunity to revisit one’s notions of normativity. They also allow historians to do the same. A study of East German contacts with the broader world can cast the country and its residents in a new light. It aids in “questioning the very frameworks” that underpin our understandings of GDR history, not least by bringing them to the surface. Concepts and methodologies that scholars of one region take for granted start to look queer when we apply them to another. To queer East Germany history, in other words, it can be helpful to consider how its subjects interacted with their neighbors.

Sometime in 1985, East German writer Gert Neumann read an open letter by Polish activist Adam Michnik, most likely in a West German magazine. In December, he wrote a response to Michnik, which never reached its addressee but did appear in a Leipzig underground journal. This imagined conversation explored the nature of the self under communist rule. It forced Neumann to contemplate his own identity, along with those aspects of the GDR that made him who he was. At the same time, his “Open Let-

ter to Adam Michnik” exposed his blind spots and assumptions. Neumann frequently misconstrued Michnik’s arguments, failing to appreciate the differences between East Germany and Poland. Unable to transcend his own experiences, he ended up projecting them onto Michnik and thus imagined parallels that did not actually exist. Reading the two letters side by side highlights how much could be lost in translation, even between two thinkers who shared basic values and goals. Yet it also reveals how much both men reflected their political environments, largely without being aware of it. Faced with a letter from Poland, Neumann showed the many ways in which he was conditioned by the GDR. He not only discussed his East German subjectivity but displayed it too.

Both Neumann and Michnik were ardent critics of communist rule, and both described it in similar terms. Such commonalities have prompted scholars to identify a community of dissidents in the Eastern Bloc or even a shared “dissident subjectivity.”² Juxtaposing Neumann and Michnik, though, suggests that we can speak of dissident subjectivities only in the plural. Even when they used the same words, the two men used them differently. In tracing the divergent meanings of dissent for Neumann and Michnik, this chapter heeds Jennifer Evans’s call “to render historical categories strange instead of assuming they apply more or less uniformly across time, to all people.”³ It shows how the specific circumstances of late socialist East Germany and Poland inflected the language that Neumann and Michnik both used, making transnational communication a challenge. At the same time, it seeks to render one more category strange. Neumann was acutely conscious of his East German subjectivity, while Michnik denied that he was in any sense a socialist subject. Historians have by and large followed their lead, speaking of subjectivities in the GDR more often than they do for communist Poland. Building on the examples of Neumann and Michnik, this chapter asks when and why we apply the term to historical actors and calls for queering the category of subjectivity itself.

Parallel Lives

Gert Neumann and Adam Michnik never met, but for years they led parallel lives. Neumann was born four years before Michnik, in July 1942, in Heilsberg, East Prussia—which became Lidzbark Warmiński when it was ceded to Poland at Potsdam. Drafted into the Wehrmacht, Neumann’s father was killed in the last days of World War II. The rest of the family was forced to relocate, moving first to Mecklenburg, then to Halle, and finally settling on

the outskirts of Berlin. Neumann's mother, Margarete, worked as a farmer and welder before becoming a professional writer.⁴ Her debut novel, 1955's *The Path across the Field*, was one of the first treatments of collectivization in the GDR; it established her as a rising star of East German literature, politically engaged and faithful to Socialist Realism.⁵ Gert Neumann followed in his mother's footsteps, initially training as a tractor driver—"an ideological decision," he later admitted.⁶ After volunteering for the East German army, he joined the Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*; SED) in 1963 and spent several years as a metalworker in Karl-Marx-Stadt (now Chemnitz). In 1967, Neumann began a course for "writing workers" at the Johannes R. Becher Literature Institute in Leipzig, designed as a training ground for East Germany's literary elite.⁷ By then, however, the institute was firmly in the grip of "revisionist" ideas, as both students and professors openly questioned the party line in search of an authentic, gentler socialism. Within this environment, Neumann became a vocal critic of the SED's rigidity and indifference to public opinion. "I finally decided to get on the side of the people," he explained, abandoning "the ideology that I had long espoused."⁸

Michnik was born a hundred miles south of Lidzbark Warmiński in Warsaw in October 1946. His family, too, had recently been forced to move, leaving Lviv—in what is now western Ukraine—after the area was annexed to the USSR. Michnik's father, Ozjasz Szechter, a Pole of Jewish background, had been a communist since age eighteen. Fleeing to the Soviet Union during World War II, he was conscripted into the Red Army and later joined the Union of Polish Patriots, a Soviet-backed organization that developed into Poland's postwar government. In Warsaw, Szechter worked for the Central Trade Union Council as a writer and editor, while Michnik's mother, Helena, taught history in schools.⁹ Michnik grew up in the city's intellectual circles at a time of intense ferment. Amid a mass uprising in 1956, the Polish United Workers' Party (*Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*; PZPR) selected a new leader, Władysław Gomułka, who set out to pursue a "Polish road to socialism." This change in course not only brought reform but also inspired vibrant debates over the nature of socialism.¹⁰ After entering Warsaw University in 1964, Michnik helped circulate two colleagues' "Open Letter to the Party," which criticized the PZPR as a bureaucratized ruling class and called for a regime of worker councils. Predictably, the party leadership reacted with alarm: the letter's authors received prison terms, while Michnik was suspended from his studies. A second suspension followed two years later, for organizing meetings with

dissident thinkers. As an avowed “revisionist,” Michnik kept brushing up against socialist rule yet holding onto faith in its potential.¹¹

That faith would be profoundly shaken by the events of 1968, for Michnik and Neumann alike. In January, Polish authorities banned *Forefathers' Eve*, a classic play by Adam Mickiewicz, on the grounds that it incited anti-Soviet sentiment. Michnik initiated a protest letter and was expelled from university outright. This punishment set off a wave of demonstrations, first in Warsaw and then at universities across Poland. Amid growing student unrest, Michnik was detained, tried, and sentenced to a three-year term for “anti-state activity.” Three months later, Neumann was himself expelled, both from the SED and from the Literature Institute. He had become outspoken in his criticisms of the party, as well as his enthusiasm for Czechoslovakia’s Prague Spring—a reform movement crushed by Soviet troops in August 1968.¹² Along with his wife and fellow student, Heidemarie Härtl, Neumann exhibited “anarchistic, subjective, and individualistic positions [that] stand against the policies of the party,” the institute’s rector pronounced.¹³ As Eastern Bloc regimes moved to consolidate their power, would-be reformers like Michnik and Neumann were declared enemies of the state—and soon came to embrace the role. “When there is open conflict, one must clearly state a position and declare whose side one is on—that of those being beaten up or that of those doing the beating,” Michnik insisted.¹⁴

Michnik came out of prison in September 1969 after sixteen months of detention. Banned from continuing his studies, he spent two years on the assembly line at Warsaw’s Rosa Luxemburg factory, making electric bulbs. He later served as personal secretary to Antoni Słonimski, a Polish-Jewish writer forty years his senior who was renowned for sending protest letters to the state. Michnik helped him write several and was repeatedly arrested. But their petitions forged new opposition networks, connecting dissident thinkers from different walks of life. These networks sprang to action in the summer of 1976, after police beat up hundreds of striking workers in the cities of Radom and Ursus. A group of intellectuals formed the Workers’ Defense Committee (*Komitet Obrony Robotników*; KOR), which offered victims legal aid but also sought “to stimulate new centers of autonomous activity.”¹⁵ This involved building an alternative infrastructure independent of the communist state: underground periodicals, discussion clubs, cultural venues. Michnik became the editor of several samizdat magazines, as well as a co-founder of the Flying University—a lecture series that addressed forbidden themes in private apartments. All these activities moved into the open in late August 1980 after Polish officials begrudgingly legalized an independent

trade union, Solidarity. Michnik served as one of its leading advisors and was thus placed in an internment camp when the regime suppressed the union in December 1981. He would stay in prison until July 1984 and then again from February 1985 to July 1986.

Neumann, too, bounced between odd jobs after his expulsion, getting by as a stagehand, stoker, and mechanic. From 1976 to 1978, he worked as a repairman in a Leipzig department store, an experience he detailed in his novel *Eleven O’Clock*—whose title referenced his daily break time. Like Michnik, Neumann was prohibited from publishing at home, but he circumvented this restriction by sending his writing abroad. A short story collection, *The Guilt of Words*, appeared in West Germany in 1979, and *Eleven O’Clock* followed two years later. This led to constant observation by the Ministry for State Security (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*; MfS or Stasi), though Neumann’s growing fame helped insulate him from direct attacks.¹⁶ In 1983, however, his son was sent to prison on a trumped-up charge, as part of a campaign to pressure Neumann to emigrate. He stayed, despite being denied employment by the state, and found a menial job at an evangelical deaconess-house in Leipzig. He also continued to write, helping to found some of the first underground journals in the GDR: the literary revues *Anschlag* (Attack, 1984) and *Zweite Person* (Second Person, 1987).

In the spring of 1985, while Michnik was awaiting trial for “illegal union activity,” he wrote an open letter to explain why he was being prosecuted. The letter was smuggled out of Gdańsk’s Kurkowa Street prison and quickly made its way abroad; on May 13, an excerpt appeared in the West German magazine *Der Spiegel*.¹⁷ Neumann read it eagerly, having followed Michnik’s activities for some time. The year before, he had composed a poem “To Adam Michnik,” imagining the Polish dissident’s life in jail.¹⁸ At some point over the next few months, Neumann managed to read Michnik’s letter in its entirety, and in December he penned a reply. “An Open Letter to Adam Michnik” was first presented at a public reading in early June 1986 at the Samaritan Church in East Berlin; that same month, it appeared in *Anschlag*, and an excerpt came out in a West German magazine in February 1987.¹⁹ There is no indication that Michnik ever read it or that he knew of Neumann at all. Still, the two men engaged in a kind of virtual conversation, conducted over the East German–Polish border via samizdat with an assist from the West German press.

Both in his “Letter to Michnik” and in later interviews, Neumann framed Michnik as a kindred spirit. He had felt profoundly isolated in the GDR, he explained in 1995, since even friends struggled to grasp his political views.

Writings from Eastern Europe, however, gave him comfort: “I realized that similar ways of thinking [to mine] had arisen in Poland and Czechoslovakia.” The encounter with Michnik was particularly impactful, Neumann remembered. “In the 1980s I read an important essay by Adam Michnik that was about the same thing as . . . my own experiences, and reassured me that my thinking was on the right track.”²⁰ Indeed, Neumann’s letter exhibits striking parallels to Michnik’s and uses three of its core concepts: totalitarianism, solidarity, and dialogue.²¹ And yet it uses them in subtly different ways. While Neumann thought the two men were writing “about the same thing,” a closer reading indicates he was mistaken. A shared vocabulary couched contrary worldviews, shaped by the authors’ disparate political environments.

Totalitarianism

The starting point for both authors was a shared sense of what they were up against: an oppressive, totalitarian regime. Michnik and Neumann described it in nearly identical terms. By its “very essence,” Michnik wrote, “the totalitarian system . . . promotes sterility and destroys creativity and the spirit of society.”²² For Neumann, too, a “totalitarian emptiness” supplanted civic life and served “to deaden thought.”²³ Such discourse had long been widespread in Poland, but it was far less common in the GDR. Even in the 1980s, most East German intellectuals sought to reform the communist regime rather than to replace it; Neumann stood out for his outright hostility to communism as such. He found more overlap with thinkers from Eastern Europe, including Michnik and Václav Havel, whose work he reprinted in *Anschlag*. This became the first East German journal to engage in a substantive discussion of totalitarianism.²⁴ It not only popularized the concept in the GDR but also brought its usage in line with Polish practice.

Yet different perspectives lurked beneath a common vocabulary. For Michnik, totalitarianism was an external force that one could fight and even overcome. In Poland, “the structures of independent civil society . . . exist side by side with totalitarian power,” he wrote (77). While this power always aimed to suppress autonomous institutions, it did not always succeed. In fact, recent Polish history “may be described as a dramatic wrestling match between the totalitarian power and a society searching for a way to attain autonomy,” Michnik concluded, alluding to the rise of the Solidarity movement (79). To Neumann, though, totalitarianism’s roots were both deeper and firmer. The SED dictatorship, he argued, was only “a symptom that testifies

to the condition of thought" in the GDR (49). Even those who resisted it still had to "live in an edifice of ideas that the totalitarian state has built to keep freedom away" (49). Totalitarian rule, in other words, was not just a threat but a reality. It extended beyond the state's repressive power and encompassed a whole system of thought.

Neumann himself felt trapped in this oppressive "edifice of ideas." He could barely muster a protest at his expulsion hearings, he recalled, because he, too, was so "ensnared in the dominant, supposedly scientific worldview."²⁵ He simply had no words to express what he was thinking and feeling. "Whenever I tried to speak about the present, my mind just clouded over . . . All my sentences were already geared toward power, perhaps without me knowing it directly."²⁶ It was this overpowering feeling of helplessness that inspired Neumann's first story collection, *The Guilt of Words*. "I was not healthy," he told an interviewer in 1986, "and I first had to heal myself through writing."²⁷ This meant unlearning everything he knew and breaking off all contact with old friends—who were themselves immersed in the regime's ideological language.

The difficulty of this undertaking permeates Neumann's "Letter to Michnik." His sentences are long and winding, many as long as half a page. Ellipses and semicolons appear seemingly at random, along with occasional underlining and quotation marks. It is hard to escape the impression of a feverish mind, spinning in circles to latch onto an idea that remains perpetually out of reach. Neumann admitted as much: the "essential," he wrote, always kept disappearing from view and threatening to dissolve into "a diffuse nothingness" (44). Trying to capture it in words, to express the essential before it flittered away, was Neumann's stated goal, and he believed that it was Michnik's too. "Your knowledge, which I encounter, for example, in your 'Letter from Kurkowa Street,' names the hidden difficulties and related beauties that begin when one attempts to speak of the essential" (43). Neumann repeatedly compared himself to Michnik and evidently thought they were engaged in the same task: to find a way out of totalitarian captivity by speaking the "truth," despite the many "hidden difficulties" of this effort.

For Michnik, though, speaking the truth was far less fraught. Like Neumann, he recognized that communist newspeak obscured and perverted the true nature of things. But this was no impediment to communication, for truth lay outside of communist language and could not be tainted by it. Even the communists did not take their words seriously: "Marxist-Leninist doctrine . . . is a dead creature, an empty gesture, an official ritual," Michnik

insisted.²⁸ There was no need to “push toward the essential,” no “hidden difficulties” to overcome. Reality was plainly visible to all and put the lie to communist pretensions. Only in prison, deprived of any contact with the outside world, did Michnik feel a moment of doubt. “The officials in the Ministry of Internal Affairs . . . always tried to convince me that Solidarity had long ago ceased to exist and that I, cut off, continued to live with illusions. Sometimes I even asked myself: ‘Perhaps they are right after all?’” Once he was out of prison, though, reality became as clear as day: “What I saw after my release exceeded not just my expectations but even my dreams” (85). Neumann discussed the same Polish officials in his “Letter to Michnik,” commenting on a photo of the Polish activist that had run in *Der Spiegel*. “The hand gesture of the security man in the striped pullover is that of a ‘master of reality,’” he told Michnik; “your appearance is *directed*, as also happens with our thought during ‘questioning’ and ‘interrogations’” (44–45).²⁹ To Michnik, “the security man” could only lie about reality, but Neumann was convinced he could “direct” it.

There was perhaps more to this dissonance than differing personalities. “Security men” were far less numerous in Poland than in the GDR: the Security Service (*Śłużba Bezpieczeństwa*; SB) had one staff member per 1,574 Poles, compared with one Stasi officer for every 180 East Germans.³⁰ The Stasi also ran a massive network of informants—as many as 200,000 in a country of 16 million.³¹ Two were assigned to report on Neumann, chronicling his private conversations, foreign contacts, and underground activities. This was a relatively low number, the consequence of Neumann’s self-isolation; another *Anschlag* editor was “overseen” by twelve informants.³² The Stasi knew about the journal before it had even appeared and later received updates on each editorial meeting. In 1988, officials went a step further: through an informant, they arranged for *Anschlag* to be printed on a Stasi-owned computer, so they could read each issue before publication.³³ While he was not aware of these specifics, Neumann knew that the magazine was being watched and came to suspect his collaborators. That was, in part, the Stasi’s goal: a 1988 report listed “creating uncertainty” as a main purpose of following Neumann.³⁴ Many GDR authors have written about the psychological toll of constant surveillance, from paranoia to anxiety to self-doubt.³⁵ One can see all of these in Neumann’s vision of totalitarianism: a mechanism that traps, confuses, and denatures thought, never letting up and always sowing fear. His experience of communism was different than Michnik’s, and so was his perception of how totalitarianism worked. Neumann used the same word as Michnik but imbued it with a specifically East German meaning.

Solidarity

For Michnik as for Neumann, the antidote to totalitarianism was solidarity. Regimes like the SED "live by isolating people, or by making them lonely," Neumann wrote; in fighting such isolation, East Germans could fight the totalitarian system itself.³⁶ Michnik saw the issue similarly. "For every dictatorship, the critical moment arrives with . . . the emergence of social bonds that do not enjoy official sanction," he argued in his "Letter from the Gdańsk Prison." Social bonds were at the heart of Poland's Solidarity movement, which understood itself as a national front rather than a conventional trade union. It was this "ethos of Solidarity" that made it strong, Michnik insisted.³⁷ In December 1981, the union was suppressed and most of its leaders arrested, and yet the underlying social bonds endured. The practice of solidarity had outlived Solidarity itself.

Neumann, too, wrote about the "ethos of Solidarity," but he understood this movement in his own peculiar terms (47). "In its maturation, Solidarity came so close to things that the facts of real socialism could not tolerate it," he argued; by imposing martial law, the Polish government was desperately trying to "depart from things" again (48). The day this happened—December 13, 1981—had therefore been an "extraordinarily black day for thought," which had almost succeeded in "fleeing the ghetto of the present" before being forcibly brought back to earth (45). But Neumann insisted that "in a certain way, I shared this fate with you in Poland" on that day. The night before, he had given a reading for "the underground of the GDR" at an informal gathering of critical writers (45). The conversation naturally turned to Poland, and Neumann tried to explain why he placed such high hopes in the Solidarity movement. His colleagues simply could not understand; they called Solidarity "'unrealistic,' 'Romantic,' even 'work-shy,' and spoke of the economic situation in Poland, which it could never come to here, thanks to German economic management, etc." (47).³⁸ When Neumann brought up the movement's "philosophical dimensions," the audience laughed in his face. "I received no answers of solidarity but almost ridicule," he recalled (46). A discussion of Solidarity in Poland had revealed the lack of solidarity in the GDR.

To Neumann, the experience highlighted the inadequacy of East Germans' language. By using the SED's rhetoric to describe Solidarity, Neumann's interlocutors foreclosed the possibility of understanding it, of appreciating its potential. A conversation thus degenerated into a failed "conversation *attempt*" because the words East Germans used did not allow for genuine communication (47; emphasis in original). After repeatedly

stressing his commonalities with Michnik, Neumann finally acknowledged the difference in their contexts. “You can rely on a beauty in Polish thought that is completely missing from German thought under real socialism,” he told Michnik (50–51). Something about East Germany set it apart from Poland, making both solidarity and Solidarity inconceivable in the GDR.

What was it? Neumann never answered the question directly, but his writings and interviews suggest some explanations. One was the impact of the Nazi past, which justified communist efforts to transform German society—and dissuaded many Germans from resisting. “The rationale of Socialist Realism was based on the idea that man had become completely guilty through the Nazi delusion,” Neumann told a West German interviewer in January 1986, shortly after completing his “Letter to Michnik.”³⁹ Nazism became the GDR’s original sin, framing the public as penitents and the communist state as confessor. For Neumann, it was the reason why the SED was able to impose a new, ideological language.⁴⁰ Nazism also ruptured East Germany’s connection to the German past, unmooring the national community from its foundations. Neumann’s letter referred almost wistfully to a quotation by the interwar Polish leader Józef Piłsudski, cited by Michnik in his text: “In Poland prison is a constant, . . . a part of consciousness, political culture, and everyday life.” Neumann seemed struck by the extent of continuity in Polish “political culture,” which gave present-day activists courage and inspiration (78). “The culture of German thought,” he noted by way of contrast, simply could not “touch on the trivial reality” of the GDR (51). The trauma of National Socialism had produced “a division of thought” between past and present, leaving East Germans ill-equipped to stand up to the totalitarian threat (51).

There was of course another cause for the division of German thought, and Neumann felt its influence acutely. “The existence of two German states” made possible a “flight of thought, which chooses emigration and leaves the problem behind” (52). Rather than strive to liberate their minds, East German intellectuals could simply jump ship, forsaking any sense of solidarity. West Germans, meanwhile, had no interest in understanding the true nature of the GDR; steeped in Cold War rhetoric, they smugly called for “freedom” without asking what it really meant. For Neumann, the contrast to Poland made plain what East Germany lacked—a unified, self-conscious national community. Michnik, indeed, wrote confidently in collective terms, referring to “the Polish nation” (80), “the mood of society” (84), and “the spirit of society” (79). He had no doubt that such a national community existed, that he was part of it, that he could speak on its behalf.

Neumann, conversely, felt profoundly alone. “I do not want to give you the impression, dear Adam Michnik, that any socially relevant layer in East Germany shares these thoughts with me” (54). The GDR, he believed, had failed to develop a cohesive identity. “The solidarity of oppositionists,” Neumann concluded, “is a long way off.”⁴¹

Nevertheless, Neumann kept searching for a solidarity like Poland’s. He had no hope of finding it in the political realm, since the GDR lacked organized opposition—much less a national opposition movement. Instead, he focused on the world of labor, which he saw as the incubator of Poland’s Solidarity. Dejected at his failed “conversation attempt” with the East German underground, Neumann and his wife sought solace in the local pub, where “the shouts of men in overalls . . . reassured us of the necessity and possibility of our thinking” (48). There was a natural solidarity in the workers’ world, Neumann insisted, though it could never be expressed in words. Trying to do so—by formulating a list of grievances, for instance—would only force reality into a verbal straightjacket, since language inevitably distorted the true nature of things and even destroyed it. Though he saw Poland’s Solidarity as a model, Neumann thoroughly reinterpreted it for the GDR. There would be no mass movement, no political program, only a solitary quest to understand things as they really were. Where Michnik advocated solidarity with people, Neumann pursued a solidarity with things.

Dialogue

For all their differences, Michnik and Neumann took up the same challenge—how to combat totalitarianism and foster solidarity? Outright struggle against communist regimes was out of the question since their repressive power was simply too great. Defeating communism required a different approach, as Michnik laid out in a landmark 1976 essay. Communist leaders would make concessions to prevent civil unrest, Michnik reasoned, so long as the opposition maintained “a sense of reality and moderation.”⁴² Instead of attacking and provoking the regime, Polish society had to pressure it peacefully from below. It was this vision of grassroots organizing that inspired the Solidarity movement and that encouraged it to seek accommodation with the state. Union leaders spoke of a “self-limiting revolution,” ever mindful not to challenge the state’s authority while building up their own.⁴³ This was not only a sound strategy but also an explicit goal: by embracing dialogue with the authorities, Michnik explained, the Polish opposition avoided imitating them. Dialogue laid the foundation of a new kind of politics, one that

rejected totalitarian thinking altogether.⁴⁴ It was at the same time a path toward national liberation and a means of liberating the self.

For Neumann, on the other hand, these two goals were at odds. He, too, believed that the anti-communist opposition should “give up its ambition to govern” but took that logic a step further (54). Since communist politics was corrupt, any engagement with it was corrupting; there was no way to have a dialogue with the state without starting to speak and act as it did. The world of politics and the world of things were incompatible and so pursuing truth meant leaving politics behind. “Self-liberation must take the place of revolution,” Neumann argued; “it confirms the existence of freedom more effectively.”⁴⁵ This meant eschewing any interaction with the state and instead turning to a different kind of dialogue. “There must arise a dialogue between words and things,” he told an interviewer in January 1986. “All my work today is preoccupied with this conversation.”⁴⁶

The starting point for a dialogue with things was the total rejection of ideological language. Since it could not express the truth, such language only mangled it. To reach “the dignity of things,” Neumann maintained, “we must distance ourselves from the power of words.”⁴⁷ Truth needed a protected space in which to flourish—a “place of ethical beauty” where things could reveal themselves as they really were.⁴⁸ Neumann called this condition “clandestinity,” a term he borrowed from French theorist Gilles Deleuze. It represented both an escape from totalitarian reality and a cure for it, allowing individuals to “reassure themselves of their *living* dignity” (53; emphasis in original). There was just one requirement for entry: silence. Rather than signaling withdrawal, Neumann argued, “speechlessness . . . spreads hope in this catalogued, decreed world. Its recognition is the praxis of noncompliance, the liberation of speech.”⁴⁹ True dialogue was possible only “once we have learned to speak in silence,” communing with each other and with things without resorting to language.⁵⁰ “Clandestinity is a spiritual program of praxis,” Neumann summed up. “One *practices* solidarity” and thus creates it.⁵¹

In his “Letter to Michnik,” Neumann made clear what had inspired his thinking. “The notion [of clandestinity] was born out of the ethos of Solidarity,” he explained, pointing once more to December 13, 1981—the day the Polish regime declared martial law (54). That was a day of “horror” but also “deliverance,” because it made clear to “intellectual thought . . . that it *cannot* really push the battle for freedom into the spaces of the ‘working class’” (54).⁵² The lesson Neumann took away was that any organized action against the communist regime was bound to fail; instead of fighting for democracy

in public life, East German activists would do better "to strive first for an inner democracy" (55). Embracing clandestinity required accepting one's own powerlessness to change political affairs. It entailed a retreat into the self, with its many fears, anxieties, and insecurities—all of which permeate Neumann's letter. Neumann clearly believed that Michnik had taken this step along with him, ignoring all the passages in the "Letter from the Gdańsk Prison" that called for dialogue with the regime. While Michnik pursued a self-limiting revolution, Neumann's revolution was limited to the self.

Subjecthood and Subjectivity

"The Polish-German dialogue is important," wrote Michnik in a 1985 essay for *Der Spiegel*. "Under the circumstances, the future of European democracy depends on it."⁵³ His imagined conversation with Neumann hardly qualifies as a dialogue, far less as "the" Polish-German one. Nevertheless, it, too, took up a question vital to democracy: how to protect the self from the totalitarian system. The starting point for both thinkers was the conviction that communist regimes repressed not just the body but also the mind. In destroying social bonds, fostering fear, and perverting language, communism alienated people from themselves. Resistance, therefore, had to be internal; combatting communism began with restoring the self, not least because the system was too powerful to topple through violence. The best defense against totalitarianism was an ethical code that refused to bend under pressure. Both Michnik and Neumann described this code in similar terms, as a commitment to solidarity, truth, and dialogue. It was directly juxtaposed to communism's main traits—atomization, lies, intolerance—and therefore had the power to resist them. By staying true to their inner selves, individuals could undermine the communist system at large.

This outlook was widespread among Eastern Bloc dissidents in the 1980s. In their own ways, Havel's "living in truth," György Konrád's "anti-politics," and Václav Benda's "parallel polis" can all be seen as variations on the theme of interior resistance.⁵⁴ Such a convergence was partly the product of exchange: thanks to underground magazines like *Anschlag*, texts by anti-communist thinkers circulated across Eastern Europe. It was also a response to the Helsinki Accords, struck in 1975, which popularized the discourse of human rights behind the Iron Curtain.⁵⁵ Above all, perhaps, the notion of interior resistance emerged out of the failure of the Prague Spring. Many of its proponents, including both Michnik and Neumann, had once aimed to

improve the communist system from within, but the invasion of Czechoslovakia dashed such hopes. It showed both the limits of government-driven reform and the apparent limitlessness of government power.⁵⁶ For Michnik as for Neumann, a newfound interest in interiority reflected an attempt to find a space beyond state intervention. The self could be the locus of anti-communist resistance because it alone remained free from communist rule.

And yet, Michnik and Neumann envisioned the self in starkly different ways. For Michnik it was sovereign and autonomous, a bulwark against communist pressure. Even after decades of oppression, Poles had not become socialist subjects, and never would: their “spirit” (79), “values” (87), and “sensibilities” (91) simply would not allow it. Neumann, on the other hand, was painfully aware of being a socialist subject. The East German state haunted his “Letter to Michnik” as a specter, too powerful to topple and too expansive to circumvent. Far from a bastion of authentic thinking, the self was suffused with communist concepts and words. Neumann could not even articulate what he wanted to say, much less communicate it to others. He felt he lived under a “cognitive neurosis” that perverted his ability to engage with the world, stripping away all “self-confidence” and subjecting him to an “existential loneliness” (49). Neumann acknowledged that the GDR’s specific history had contributed to this predicament, as both denazification and German division had fractured “the culture of German thought” (51). There was no shared identity for East Germans to fall back on, no national self that could stand up to communist pressure. The conditions that had “led to the thought and praxis of Solidarity in Poland” were sorely lacking in the GDR (52–53).

Even as he contrasted the two countries, however, Neumann failed to recognize his own contrasts with Michnik. His letter ascribed to Michnik the self-doubt and resignation that he felt himself, punctuated by rhetorical questions: “There is only one way out, isn’t there? To flee into the culture of the clandestine” (56). Neumann’s acute sense of subjecthood—of being subject to the communist regime—colored not just his ruminations on the self but also his reading of Michnik’s essay. He seemed unable to process Michnik’s very different notions of identity, so much so that he ignored large parts of Michnik’s argument entirely. The “Letter to Michnik” clearly assumed that no one living under totalitarianism could maintain an autonomous self. This assumption betrayed Neumann’s own experiences: of being mocked by fellow intellectuals, of having to publish abroad, of being harassed by the secret police. The communist regime inflected every aspect of his life, making it impossible for him to see the state like Michnik did—as something

external and limited. The difference in their views was partly the result of individual sensibilities, to be sure. But it also reflected a historical reality: the communist regime was more powerful, more present, and more pervasive in East Germany than in Poland.⁵⁷ In this sense, Neumann’s thinking was not just idiosyncratic, though it certainly was that. It was also profoundly East German.

Neumann did not embody *the* East German subjectivity any more than he did “the Polish-German dialogue.” Nevertheless, his introspection was by no means unique. East Germans had particular cause to ponder how communism shaped who they were; indeed, they could hardly avoid it. Thanks to Germany’s division, they were constantly confronted with images of what they might have been, had they but ended up on the other side of the inner German border. As Peter Schneider asked in *The Wall Jumper*, “What would I have become, how would I think, how would I look *if*?”⁵⁸ The growing gap between the two societies was vivid proof of communism’s transformative impact. To the extent that they felt different from West Germans, East Germans bore the mark of their regime and knew it. East German identity was thus intertwined with communist power in a way that Polish identity never could be. East Germans could not blithely claim that they remained impervious to communism, for evidence to the contrary lay just across the Iron Curtain. That awareness was far from ubiquitous in communist regimes and should not be taken for granted.

In fact, this may be why we speak of East German subjectivities in the first place. The concept is practically absent from studies of the Federal Republic; scholars study West German “attitudes,” “mentalities,” and “worldviews,” but rarely subjectivities.⁵⁹ The same is true for other Western states, with the exception of their marginalized groups. It is far more common to analyze “female,” “queer,” and “racial” subjectivities than to extend this notion to an entire national community. Even in studies of the Eastern Bloc, the term is only sparingly applied to Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, or Czechoslovakia, at least in English-language works. It appears most often in literature on the USSR, which is surely no accident. Like East Germany, the Soviet Union was a construct of communist rule, without a prior history or identity. That makes it impossible to conceive of anything “Soviet” without considering the role of the Soviet state; the word itself is unavoidably tied up with communist power. As a result, scholars have thoroughly explored how Soviet subjecthood shaped Soviet subjectivities, even if it did not determine them.⁶⁰ Historians of the GDR have raised similar questions, aided

by the same linguistic conjuncture. A seminal volume is titled *Becoming East German*, highlighting the process by which “socialist structures” produced “socialist sensibilities.”⁶¹ The same idea is far more difficult to express in the Polish context. “Becoming Polish” is clearly inadequate for people who had long considered themselves Polish; “becoming Polish communists” or “becoming communist Poles” shifts the focus to political affiliation and describes only a small part of the population. Both “Soviet” and “East German” imply an overlap of subjecthood and subjectivity that “Polish” or “Hungarian” simply cannot convey—and may indeed rule out. As Neumann perceptively observed, the words we use inevitably condition our thinking.

So, then: was it a sense of subjecthood that made East German subjectivities East German? Yes and no. It is essential to interrogate this sense, turning it into an object of study. The present volume aims at “foregrounding the *making* of socialist subjects,” and that is a welcome direction for research on the GDR. At the same time, we must consider whether East Germans felt themselves to be socialist subjects and how they understood communism’s impact on their selves. The exchange between Neumann and Michnik reminds us that the perception of subjecthood could be a major feature of one’s subjectivity; we must investigate the “socialist subject” as an actor’s category, not just an analytical one. It would be a mistake, however, to reduce subjectivity to subjecthood. Neumann was right to insist that Michnik, too, had been shaped by the communist system, despite his protestations to the contrary. We should be wary of dissidents’ claims that they remained impervious to communist influence; their denials of subjecthood, or even mere indifference to it, must also be objects of study. In this sense, research on subjectivities in the GDR can teach us a great deal about Poland and beyond. Thirty-five years after the fall of communism, “the Polish-German dialogue” remains as valuable as ever.

Notes

1. Eli Rubin draws on Sara Ahmed’s work in “Doing Straight Time in the GDR,” in *Socialist Subjectivities: Queering East Germany under Honecker*, ed. Scott Harrison, Jeff Hayton, and Katharine White (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2025), 292.

2. Benjamin Nathans, “Talking Fish: On Soviet Dissident Memoirs,” *The Journal of Modern History* 87 (2015): 579–614, here 603. On dissident networks in the Bloc, see, for example, Barbara Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence in East-Central Europe: Citizen Intellectuals and Philosopher Kings* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2003); Jonathan Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, The Plastic People of the*

Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); and Kacper Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe: Human Rights and the Emergence of New Transnational Actors* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

3. Jennifer V. Evans, "Introduction: Why Queer German History?," *German History* 34, no. 3 (2016): 371–384, here 371.

4. Walter Habel, ed., *Wer ist wer?* ([West] Berlin: arani, 1965), II: 233.

5. Cf. "Neue Bücher," *Neues Deutschland* (July 3, 1955), 8.

6. Roland Berbig and Vanessa Brandes, "Flechtwerk—Berliner Studenten und deutsche Literatur nach 1989/90. Materialien für eine ausstehende Literaturgeschichte der Berliner Universität," *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* 2 (2010): 395–410.

7. On the history of the Institute, see Isabelle Lehn, Sascha Macht, and Katja Stopka, *Schreiben lernen im Sozialismus: Das Institut für Literatur Johannes R. Becher* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2018).

8. Berbig and Brandes, "Flechtwerk."

9. On Michnik's early life, see Cyril Bouyeure, *L'Invention du politique: Une biographie d'Adam Michnik* (Lausanne: Noir sur Blanc, 2007), esp. 37–54.

10. See, for example, Andrzej Friszke, *Anatomia buntu: Kuroń, Modzelewski i komandosi* (Warsaw: Znak, 2010).

11. Adam Michnik, "A New Evolutionism," in *Letters from Prison and Other Essays*, trans. Maya Latynski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 147.

12. On the Prague Spring, see Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and Its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics, 1968–1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

13. Quoted in Uta Grundmann, Klaus Michael, and Susanna Seufert, eds., *Revolution im geschlossenen Raum: Die andere Kultur in Leipzig, 1970–1990* (Leipzig: Faber & Faber, 2002), 109.

14. Michnik, "A New Evolutionism," 142.

15. Jan Józef Lipski, *KOR: A History of the Workers' Defense Committee in Poland, 1976–1981* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 64.

16. On Neumann's biography, see Walter Schmitz, "Nachwort," in Gert Neumann, *Verhaftet: Dresdner Poetikvorlesung 1998* (Dresden: Thelem, 1999).

17. Adam Michnik, "Das neue Wunder an der Weichsel," *Der Spiegel* 20 (May 13, 1985), 170–171. In English, this text is commonly known as the "Letter from the Gdańsk Prison," following the title first given to it in the *New York Review of Books*. See Michnik, "Letter from the Gdańsk Prison," trans. by Jerzy B. Warman in *The New York Review of Books* (July 18, 1985).

18. Gert Neumann, "Auf Adam Michnik," in *Übungen jenseits der Möglichkeit* (Kurfürst am Main: Koren & Debes, 1991), 26.

19. Grundmann, Michael, and Seufert, *Revolution*, 130. The essay appeared as part of Gert Neumann, "Übungen jenseits der Möglichkeit" in *Anschlag* 6 (Spring 1986); an excerpt was then reproduced as Neumann, "Der Dialog mit den Dingen. Aus einem Brief an Adam Michnik," in *Ästhetik und Kommunikation* 17, no. 65/66 (1987): 109–113.

20. Berbig and Brandes, "Flechtwerk."

21. To my knowledge, this is the first study to consider the two letters side by side. A handful of authors have analyzed Neumann's "Letter to Michnik" in the context of his life and work. See, for example, Manuel Ghilarducci, "Gert Neumanns Etablierung eines 'sprachlichen Widerstandes' in der DDR," *Revista de Filología Alemana* (2014): 107–126; and Patricia Anne Simpson, "Syntax of Surveillance: Languages of Silence and Solidarity," in *The Power of Intellectuals in Contemporary Germany*, ed. Michael Geyer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 160–182. Marion Brandt mentions Neumann's "Letter to Michnik" in her discussion of Polish influence on the GDR. Brandt, *Für eure und unsere Freiheit? Der Polnische Oktober und die Solidarność-Revolution in der Wahrnehmung von Schriftstellern aus der DDR* (Berlin: Weidler, 2002), 428–430. Michnik's "Letter from the Gdańsk Prison" is one of his best-known works and has received a great deal of scholarly attention. See, for example, Falk, *The Dilemmas of Dissidence*, 180–184; John Keane, *Reflections on Violence* (London: Verso, 1996), 84–85; Jonathan Schell, "Introduction," in Michnik, *Letters from Prison and Other Essays*, xvii–xlii.

22. Michnik, "Letter from the Gdańsk Prison," in *Letters*, 76–99, here 79. All parenthetical citations to Michnik refer to this text. For more on Michnik's uses of the term, see Robert Brier, "Adam Michnik's Understanding of Totalitarianism and the West European Left," *East European Politics and Societies* 25, no. 2 (2011): 197–218.

23. Neumann, "Übungen jenseits der Möglichkeit," part 17, 48. All parenthetical citations to Neumann refer to this text. The phrase "to deaden thought" comes from Neumann's conversation with Egmont Hesse: "Geheimsprache 'Klandestinität.' Mit Gert Neumann im Gespräch," in *Sprache & Antwort. Stimmen und Texte einer anderen Literatur aus der DDR*, ed. Egmont Hesse (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1988), 135.

24. Grundmann, Michael, and Seufert, *Revolution*, 131.

25. Hesse, "Geheimsprache 'Klandestinität,'" 135.

26. Hesse, "Geheimsprache 'Klandestinität,'" 137.

27. Hesse, "Geheimsprache 'Klandestinität,'" 141.

28. Michnik, "A New Evolutionism," 146.

29. Emphasis in original.

30. Stephen Kotkin, *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment*, contrib. Jan T. Gross (New York: Modern Library, 2009), 53.

31. Jens Gieseke, *The History of the Stasi: East Germany's Secret Police, 1945–1990*, trans. David Burnett (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014).

32. Jacques Poumet, "Die Leipziger Untergrundzeitschriften aus der Sicht der Staatssicherheit," *Deutschland Archiv* 29, no. 1 (1996): 67–85, here 80.

33. Grundmann, Michael, and Seufert, *Revolution*, 132. See also Kyrill Kunakhovich, *Communism's Public Sphere: Culture as Politics in Cold War Poland and East Germany* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022), chapter 8.

34. Poumet, "Die Leipziger Untergrundzeitschriften," 80.

35. The best-known account is Christa Wolf, "What Remains," in *What Remains and Other Stories*, trans. Heike Schwarzbauer and Rick Takvorian (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1993). See also Joachim Walter, *Sicherungsbereich Literatur: Schriftsteller und Staatssicherheit in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1996).

36. Gert Neumann, *Die Klandestinität der Kesselreiniger: Ein Versuch des Sprechens* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1989), 138.

37. This phrase is from the Warman translation, which is more in line with the Polish: "Etos 'Solidarnosci.'" Adam Michnik, "List z Kurkovej," *Aneks* 38 (1985): 3–27, here 16. Latynski translates it instead as "ethics of Solidarity" (88). In Michnik's "Letter from the Gdańsk Prison," as throughout this essay, the word "Solidarity" is capitalized when referring to the trade union and lowercase in other contexts.

38. These concepts drew on long-standing German stereotypes of Poland, often encapsulated in the derogatory phrase *polnische Wirtschaft* ("Polish management" or "Polish economy"). See Hubert Orłowski, "*Polnische Wirtschaft.*" *Zum deutschen Polandiskurs der Neuzeit* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1996).

39. Hesse, "Geheimsprache 'Klandestinität,'" 131.

40. Neumann's views on language—and on Nazism—were heavily influenced by Theodor Adorno. See Samir Gandesha, "The 'Aesthetic Dignity of Words': Adorno's Philosophy of Language," *New German Critique* 97 (2006): 137–158.

41. Gert Neumann, *Elf Uhr* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1981), 170.

42. Michnik, "A New Evolutionism," 144.

43. The concept is explored in depth in Jadwiga Staniszkis, *Poland's Self-Limiting Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

44. On the notion of dialogical politics in Michnik, see Jeffrey Stout, "Dialogical Democracy: King, Michnik, and the American Culture Wars," in *The Long 1989: Decades of Global Revolution*, ed. Piotr Kosicki and Kyrill Kunakhovich (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2019), 91–122.

45. Hesse, "Geheimsprache 'Klandestinität,'" 142.

46. Hesse, "Geheimsprache 'Klandestinität,'" 133.

47. Hesse, "Geheimsprache 'Klandestinität,'" 132.

48. Hesse, "Geheimsprache 'Klandestinität,'" 138.

49. Neumann, *Elf Uhr*, 297.

50. Hesse, "Geheimsprache 'Klandestinität,'" 139.

51. Hesse, "Geheimsprache 'Klandestinität,'" 138. Emphasis in original.

52. Emphasis in original.

53. Adam Michnik, "'Totalitäre Ruhe ist kein Frieden,'" *Der Spiegel* 30 (August 28, 1985), 110–111, here 110.

54. On dissident networks in the Eastern Bloc, see Falk, *Dilemmas of Dissidence*; Szulecki, *Dissidents in Communist Central Europe*; and Robert Brier, ed., *Entangled Protest: Transnational Approaches to the History of Dissent In Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Osnabrück: Fibre, 2013).

55. On dissidents' use of the Helsinki Accords, see Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent*, especially chapter 5; and Ned Richardson-Little, *The Human Rights Dictatorship: Socialism, Global Solidarity and Revolution in East Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), especially chapter 4.

56. Cf. Barbara Falk, "Resistance and Dissent in Central and Eastern Europe: An Emerging Historiography," *East European Politics and Societies* 25, no. 2 (2011): 318–360, here 324.

57. See, for example, John Connelly, "The Paradox of East German Communism:

From Non-Stalinism to Neo-Stalinism?" in *Stalinism Revisited: The Establishment of Communist Regimes in East-Central Europe*, ed. Vladimir Tismaneanu (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009), 161–194.

58. Peter Schneider, *The Wall Jumper: A Berlin Story* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 14. Emphasis in original.

59. Searches on Google, HathiTrust, ProQuest, and other databases return only a handful of hits for “West German subjectivity” or “West German subjectivities.”

60. For a recent overview of the state of the field, see Anatoly Pinsky, “Subjectivity after Stalin,” *Russian Studies in History* 58, no. 2–3 (2019): 79–88.

61. Mary Fulbrook and Andrew I. Port, eds., *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013).

“Expulsion from Paradise” *East German Lesbian Subjectivities in the 1980s*

Scott Harrison

By the late 1980s, East German lesbians in social and activist circles across the German Democratic Republic (GDR) had come to recognize, push back against, and sometimes even laugh at the gendered power and heteronormativity that structured their daily lives. Take, for instance, the cartoon published in the inaugural issue of the Jena-based lesbian zine *frau anders* (miss different) in January 1989 (see Figure 6).¹ The lack of robust public discussions about lesbian love in the GDR until the mid-1980s had resulted in a majority of East Germans, represented by the women in the foreground, lacking a framework through which to process sexual intimacies shared between women, such as those in the background, let alone accept them. For the actors in the foreground, the cuddling women were not properly positioned to attract men, thus depriving themselves of the opportunity to experience heterosexual partnership and the presumed joys thereof. The pair embracing one another while staring at a shop window—who were visible to fellow citizens as women, though not as lesbians per se—had taken a detour from a broader cultural inheritance of heterosexual norms, thereby shaking loose a sense of the possible and remaking themselves in the process.

Who were the women who produced and consumed *frau anders*? And what does this image reveal to us about the existence of coterminous temporalities during the Honecker era—namely the collision of heterosexual time (“family time”) and queer time in East German society?² The editors of the publication were predominantly in their early to late twenties and came of age in a GDR in which same-sex love was decriminalized in 1968.³ They were gardeners, teachers, nurses, opticians, theology students, musicians,



Figure 6. “The way they look it’s no wonder they can’t find a husband!” *frau anders* I (1989), 19 (Credit: Courtesy of the GrauZone Archiv of the Robert Havemann Gesellschaft Berlin, GZ-S 01, Bl. 201)

and more. They lived in both rural and urban areas, and nearly all of them had contact with both church-based and secular gay and lesbian rights activist groups across East Germany.⁴ Those who read *frau anders* were equally diverse. They ranged from twenty to fifty years of age (and perhaps older). Some had experienced motherhood, while others had not. Some had once been married to men, while others had only ever experienced partnership and intimacy with women. They were, so far as we can tell, white-appearing and did not stand out in East German society as being racial others. In the shared literary space of *frau anders*, they used the term “lesbian” as an approximation of who they knew themselves to be in the moment—women who felt an emotional and sexual attraction to other women and who did not yet have alternate terms with which to describe themselves.⁵ Finally,

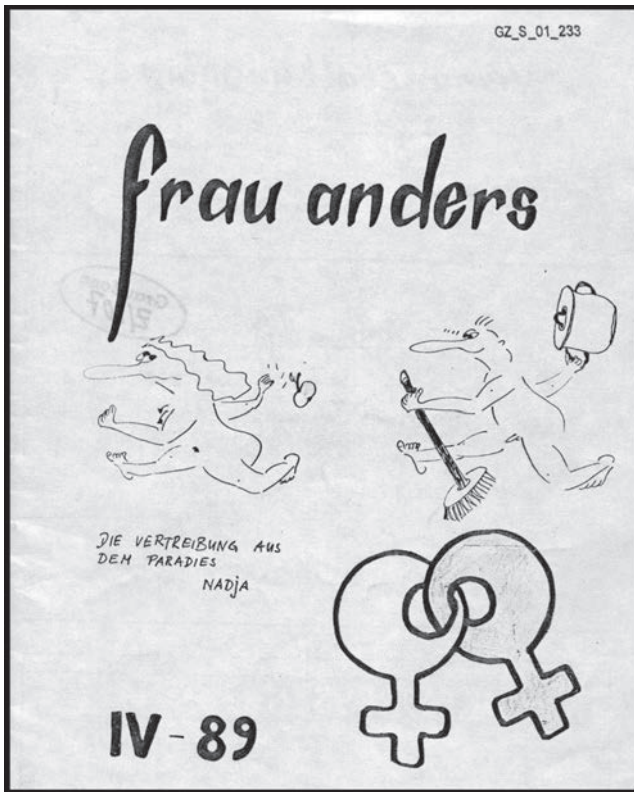


Figure 7. “Expulsion from Paradise,” *frau anders* IV (1989), cover page (Credit: Courtesy of the GrauZone Archiv of the Robert Havemann Gesellschaft Berlin, GZ-S 01, Bl. 233)

many of them acknowledged that, in charting a course outside the bounds of normativity, they were willfully expelling themselves from “paradise”—for example, exiting a heterosexually imagined “natural order” of living that, for women who loved women, seemed to lead only to existential dead ends.⁶

The cover cartoon of issue 4 of *frau anders* titled “Expulsion from Paradise” (*Vertreibung aus dem Paradies*), captures the normative flow of time that many same-sex desiring women sought to disentangle themselves from in the GDR. As Eve flees paradise, Adam chases her with a broom and a cooking pot, attempting to remind her of what *he* perceives her domestic duties to be (see Figure 7).⁷ As far back as one could remember (or imagine), a reader of the cartoon might have thought, both the tempo and unfolding of women’s lives had been structured around meeting the needs of men. But what did

it mean for queer East German women to slow down time just enough to consider that loving other women was not only possible but rather central to their happiness? And how did their experiences of “hiccups” or disruptions “in sequential time” shape and reshape their subjectivities?⁸

We still know far too little about lesbian lives in East Germany during the 1970s and 1980s. This may be, at least in part, due to the limits of the archival source bases we access to excavate and analyze queerness in the GDR. Because gay men were the “loudest” actors in the project of East German gay liberation, scholars seem more inclined (and able) to trace their voices in the archives. Historians have thus reproduced the very lack of knowledge about the lives of East German lesbians that the cartoons featured in this chapter once brought to light. In essence, those who study the GDR’s past are still working to move past the assumption that “gay and lesbian experiences were simply the same” during the 1980s.⁹ Much like the women who populate the foreground of Figure 6, we still lack a framework through which to understand how lesbians sought to disrupt the normative functioning of gender and sexual roles in the GDR. In charting paths outside the bounds of heterosexual monogamy, East German women who loved women sought to elasticize notions of what it meant to be both women and sexual beings in East German society.¹⁰ It is the imprints left upon the world by the women featured in this chapter’s cartoons—and the ever-evolving nature of their subjectivities as they made those imprints—that are the focus of my work here.

Throughout this text, I argue that we can productively use subjectivity as a vehicle to pursue what happened when East German lesbians took temporal detours from the life trajectories prescribed to (or expected for) them by parents, state officials, friends, and peers. In so doing, I work to recover and make sense of the echoes left behind by same-sex desiring women in the archives of the former GDR. At the same time, I aim to avoid reproducing a scholarly paradigm of lesbian invisibility that is all too easy to embrace. To be sure, women who loved women across the GDR found each other difficult to locate during the 1970s and 1980s.¹¹ This was because, even after the decriminalization of same-sex love in 1968, the ruling Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*; SED) significantly limited discourse on female-female love in popular culture, sexology literature, pronouncements regarding family law, and mass organizations—to such an extent that many lesbians reported feeling that heterosexuality was compulsory in nature.¹²

Nevertheless, I am loath to project coherence backwards onto lesbian histories in such a way that misguidedly recasts the actors who we meet

in this chapter as having existed within a homogenizing teleological arc of "margins to mainstream" activity.¹³ To do so would mean producing all too orderly histories that do not consider the ambivalences—and even a sense of loss—with which same-sex desiring women felt about the very idea of "going mainstream" in the first place. Public visibility for women who loved women brought with it both excitement and peril during the 1980s. While some of the women who read and (or) wrote *frau anders* certainly felt ready to jettison their former lives, others fretted that doing so would mean losing jobs and access to friend-and-family networks in which they were known (or imagined) to be women who found joy in heterosexual partnership, child-birth, and homemaking. To use subjectivity as a conceptual tool for exploring lesbian histories, therefore, is to hold in place frictive relationality between historical actors in real time. It also allows us to care for the ways in which lesbians in the GDR recognized the radical potentialities of the present and the future(s) that might evolve from it.

As historian Samuel Clowes Huneke rightly suggests, scholars can consider roughly 1985 onward as something of a "gay and lesbian *Wende*," a distinct turning point in queer cultural production and visibility that resulted from the socialist regime granting heretofore marginalized actors voice and presence in popular publications, sexology literature, and mass organizations such as the Free German Youth (*Freie Deutsche Jugend*; FDJ).¹⁴ However, the mere existence of turning points does not mean that actors pivot in predictable or uniform ways to face and make the future.¹⁵ The women whom we meet in this chapter watched and related to who their peers were becoming on a moment-by-moment basis and gauged who they themselves might become in relation to race, religion, gender, family, and society in hardly predictable ways. Throughout this chapter, I demonstrate the value of tracking dissonant, fractious queer histories for their potential to shed light on how East German lesbians fostered understudied forms of collective intimacy with one another.¹⁶ Such interconnectedness brought to life the possibility of belonging within socialism in ways that still beg further research in relation to, among other phenomena, women's rights, peace, and feminist activism in the GDR during and after the *Wende*.¹⁷

Inspired by and often connected to the efforts of gay male activists, many East German lesbians sought to locate and, where needed, form queer activist circles. They came and went from organized activism with both gay men and other women when it suited them, and their navigation of patriarchal norms within the GDR's gay emancipation movement eventually compelled them to create lesbian-only affinity groups. It was in these groups that East German

lesbians took stock of how one's life and selfhood might be reshaped if they relinquished the imperative to reproduce a (hetero)normative flow of time. This chapter, therefore, seeks to listen to the voices of lesbian historical actors in what was the here and now as they grappled with a range of possibilities and pondered the meanings of their constantly evolving selfhoods in relation to a society whose end they could not foresee. Women who loved women hardly responded to the cultural upheavals of the 1980s in a monolithic way, and thinking of subjectivities in the plural allows us to hold the "beautiful inconsistencies" of East German lesbian activity in place while not going so far as to imagine that we know—or can ever know—the whole story.¹⁸

Karin Dauenheimer and the Fragmented Nature of Gay and Lesbian Activism in the GDR

Dresden-based theology student Karin Dauenheimer was a lesbian activist who worked to test just how visible and vocal queer subjects could become in East Germany during the 1980s. Born in 1951, Dauenheimer studied theology in Jena and split her time professionally as a publisher and journalist between the St. Benno Verlag in Leipzig and the Dresden-based office of the Christian Democratic Union's newspaper, *Die Union*.¹⁹ Beginning in the 1970s, gay men and lesbians emboldened by legal reform and a sexually liberalizing society established gay scenes in Berlin, Dresden, and Leipzig. In 1973, the East Berlin–founded Homosexual Interest Group Berlin (*Homosexuelle Interessengemeinschaft Berlin*; HIB) took to the streets to proclaim that it was not homosexuals who were perverse, but rather the heterosexual society that feared and ostracized them.²⁰

There is no evidence that Dauenheimer was aware of, let alone a part of, the HIB's activities. She appears in the archives for the first time in 1979, the year in which the socialist regime disbanded the HIB, as a member of a church-based working group (*Arbeitskreis*; AK) in Dresden that focused on the concerns of single women, including single mothers, in the GDR. Foremost among the issues discussed by AK's members was their sense that married East Germans viewed divorced women, unmarried women, and single mothers—the last, the category into which Dauenheimer fell—as "egocentric" and "selfish" co-citizens of a "second-class status."²¹ Thus, even though her fellow citizens perceived her as a heterosexual mother, Dauenheimer faced social stigmatization because of her status as an unwed single parent. Among the numerous trappings of patriarchy that she hoped to address and counter

in her collaboration with other single, working women was the notion that women were at their happiest when they embraced marriages to men, even though it was commonly known in the GDR that women utilized divorce as a vehicle through which to exit marriages that ranged from emotionally unfulfilling to physically violent.²²

Beginning in 1982, a second wave of gay rights activists began to carry queer voices into mainstream publications, sexology literature, partner-seeking ads, radio programming, and state-sanctioned public events. Amid such commotion, Karin Dauheimer became one of the primary organizers of a fractious gay rights movement whose adherents wished to make their socialism more inclusive, tolerant, and queer-friendly.²³ Among a diverse group of both secularly organized and church-based gay emancipation activists, Dauheimer situated herself squarely, at least at first, within the Protestant Church. To her mind, and not unlike her gay male compatriots in the movement, Eduard Stapel and Christian Pulz, a partnership between activists and congregants fit within the longer arc of German Protestantism. The Protestant Church, in the tradition of anti-Nazi theologian Dietrich Bonhöffer, was a "church for everybody" (*Kirche für jeder*), and one's ability to experience the love of God and community was not dependent on markers of identity such as gender or sexual orientation.²⁴ A not insignificant number of gay and lesbian activists in church-based working groups rejected the notion that their work took place *unter dem Dach der Kirche* (under the roof of the church) but rather was simply the work of the Church.²⁵ In other words, for activists like Dauheimer, the church was much more than simply a space in which the disenfranchised of society could gather.²⁶

Before Dauheimer found her footing in gay rights activism, her life had been shaped by the experience of living in both queer and straight worlds without feeling confident enough to acknowledge her place in the former. Yet upon visiting church-based gay rights working groups in Leipzig and Dresden in early 1983, a new terrain of possibility expanded significantly under her feet. She recalled her initial visits to AK Dresden as thrilling, not least because so many of the gay men and lesbians who attended "all looked so normal," which confirmed for her that "[she] too was perhaps a totally normal person."²⁷ The queer compatriots with whom she now surrounded herself had, like her, once uneasily inhabited a normative flow of time governed by women's biological clocks and peer-based expectation of heterosexual marriage and family life.²⁸ Over the course of 1983, and through her work with fellow activists, Dauheimer learned that it was common—normal,

even—to both question the happiness-generating potential of heterosexual partnerships and embrace same-sex desires.²⁹

The validation that Dauenheimer experienced in the Dresden working group allowed her to abandon a series of half-truths that had once tethered her to the performance of normative gender and sexual roles. Gone were the days when she identified merely as a theologian; she now came to call herself a “lesbian theologian” whose actions were influenced by the need to care for gay and lesbian actors who experienced homophobia, anti-gay violence, and isolation in East German life. Additionally, by the mid-1980s, she began publicly to acknowledge that she had lived for years with her female partner and child.³⁰ In so doing, she signaled to all whom she encountered that her feet were planted in a future-facing direction and that she was actively remaking what it meant for her to live as an East German woman and citizen.

Between 1983 and 1985, Dauenheimer focused her activist work on making herself and her working group visible to both queer folks and heterosexuals whom she felt might benefit from questioning their shared cultural inheritance. Every spring the Protestant Church sponsored a series of *Kirchentage* (church days) during which environmentalist, peace, and gay rights group set up “information stands,” spaces to interact with and enlighten the public about their individual causes. For heterosexual East Germans in less populous towns, the *Infostands* often served as their first introduction to the GDR’s gay and lesbian subcultures, and Dauenheimer recalls visitors who walked by a booth she had set up in Erfurt in 1983 as behaving in ways that were both cautiously curious and “tolerant.”³¹

The nascent, fragmented nature of gay emancipation activism within church-based AKs was on full display at the *Kirchentage*. Gay male activists in Eisleben in 1983, for example, adorned their stand with a sign that read “*Der ist wohl ein Homo?*” (*That guy is a homo?*), thereby signaling a more measured, integrationist approach to gay rights activism that made clear that anyone, even masculine men, could be gay. Dauenheimer utilized the events to push fellow East Germans to reconsider their deeply held beliefs about femininity—highlighting that one could be a woman, a pastor, a mother, and a lesbian.³² While *both* gay men and lesbians challenged traditional gender roles, Dauenheimer feared that gay men might prove to be hesitant, inconsistent allies in the face of anti-lesbian backlash against women whom the hetero public might perceive as threatening the centrality of men in a patriarchal society.³³ Yet, she did not voice this concern, as what mattered most to her in the early stages of the GDR’s second wave of gay emancipation activism was that the public encountered and conversed with a variety of queer

subjects and that the latter gained the confidence to speak and perform their truths in public.³⁴ Daueneheimer's subjectivity, therefore, was shaped during the early to mid-1980s by her belief that, through engagement with her fellow citizens, genuine social change was possible in the GDR. She embraced fragmentation within the gay emancipation movement precisely because its disparate possibilities provided queer East Germans with avenues to remake themselves and society.

From 1985 onward, and as a result of gay and lesbian activists winning permission from the state to form clubs within pre-existing mass organizations such as the FDJ, Daueneheimer expanded her energies beyond the walls of the church.³⁵ Movement veterans who had extensive experience within church-based working groups headed many of the newly created state-sponsored groups. Such was the case when Daueneheimer and her gay male compatriot, Kai Werner, founded the state-sponsored group *Gerede* (pronounced "gay-rede," to talk about being gay) in April 1987 in Dresden's FDJ branch.³⁶ To their pleasant surprise, many young people proved interested in learning about and meeting their gay and lesbian peers. Daueneheimer reported to fellow activist Eduard Stapel that *Gerede's* first event—a panel discussion on homosexuality featuring two gay rights activists and two sexologists—drew 140 attendants and included both queer and heterosexual East Germans.³⁷ Subsequent events drew comparable numbers and Daueneheimer routinely summarized the goings-on in *Die Union*.

To be sure, gay rights activists saw collaborating with the state as an imperfect yet tactically pragmatic endeavor. Certainly, they had to censor their speech in FDJ clubs. Gay emancipation activists, for instance, avoided public mention of peers who had fled to the West. They were also reluctant to point out that the existence of anti-gay animus in the GDR was at least in part fueled by the socialist regime's attempts to remove all traces of same-sex desire from a range of discursive forums until the early to mid-1980s.³⁸ Nonetheless, state resources—such as financial support, media advertising, and access to mailing lists of youth clubs—allowed activists to spread the message of gay rights to a nationwide audience.³⁹ For Daueneheimer to host such events was to place queer time alongside "family time" in East German life so that queer and heterosexual citizens collided with one another in ways that had been unthinkable just a few years earlier. Such relational interactions, as Jack Halberstam tells us, carry the potential to disrupt the seemingly linear flow of normative time in which "values [and] morals" are "passed . . . from one generation to the next," thereby carving paths for queer East Germans to "abandon paradise" in pursuit of unpredictable futures.⁴⁰

Yet, the existence of a mostly male-centered leadership structure of both secularly organized and church-based working groups drove wedges between gay and lesbian activists. Gay men, for instance, proved unwilling to critique East German patriarchy and heterosexism publicly, often referring to doing so as a drain of time and energy, which led lesbian activists to pursue organizing in a manner that was separate, though never wholly disconnected, from gay men.⁴¹ Samirah Kenawi of East Berlin's Lesbians in the Church (*Lesben in der Kirche*; LiK), recalls gay men both excluding women from positions of leadership in the working groups and refusing to acknowledge the seminal role that lesbians played in fostering the birth of the church-based movement—such as negotiating with church officials for larger meeting spaces.⁴² Kenawi remembered most mixed-gender working group meetings as being dominated by men who regularly spoke over women, making gender-based conflict within the groups a common occurrence.⁴³

Examining conflicts between gay and lesbian activists during the mid-to late 1980s allows us to recognize the moments in which one's subjectivity could shift along with reactions to the vicissitudes of gendered dynamics. The schism between gay male and lesbian activists was especially apparent at a conference on gay rights held on September 26, 1987, in the Magdeburg city mission. The conference—Integration [of Gays into Society]—But How?—was to serve as a platform for East German gay rights activists to assess the extent to which societal attitudes toward same sex love had evolved by the late 1980s. However, when Karin Dauenheimer took the lectern, she instead announced the birth of a lesbian separatist movement in the GDR. According to her, the issue of patriarchy was the proverbial elephant in the room that hampered the development of a thriving lesbian emancipation movement. Instead of “questioning the feelings of insecurity that autonomous women” made them feel, gay men clung to leadership positions in working groups to exclude their lesbian peers intentionally.⁴⁴ As a result, many same-sex desiring women felt the need to organize in female-only spaces and analyze the ways in which gendered power functioned in East German society.

With time, Dauenheimer believed, women and men could work together again in the AKs, but only once gay men worked vigorously “to overcome [their] fears of . . . self-confident women.”⁴⁵ The project of gay and lesbian emancipation in the GDR, therefore, fractured along gendered lines in the late 1980s, an unexpected rupture in Dauenheimer's trajectory as an activist. She responded by dedicating the majority of her energies to militating against the tyrannies of gendered power faced by women, and especially

lesbians, across East Germany. Such work was more than important to her, it was urgent.

The Urgency of Now: Rejecting Patriarchy in the Project of Gay Emancipation

Dauenheimer came to the realization that gendered power was a significant hurdle to sexual liberation early in her activist work. Reflecting on her experiences in the Dresden AK, she noted that she had been part of the AK leadership for some time without taking into consideration that it was a "men's circle" (*Männerkreis*). She knew there were other lesbians in Dresden, but they simply were not joining the AK.⁴⁶ Thus, from 1985 onward, she devoted herself to addressing the absence of women within the project of gay emancipation, not least because she felt that she had been sitting by too quietly while men steered that work. This was, Dauenheimer argued, a matter of lesbians breaking their silences, becoming visible to other women, and disrupting flows of rote cultural production and reproduction. As she explained in an issue of *frau anders*,

For far too long we've played along [in silence]. We've hidden ourselves, degraded ourselves, silenced ourselves. But our silence doesn't protect us, it does harm to us . . . because it perpetuates judgments about women and lesbian love. Our silence confirms the notion that women can only find happiness through a man and that there is no such thing as love between women. . . . Together with other women, I have decided to break through this demeaning silence.⁴⁷

For Dauenheimer, activist work had helped her become one of the women in the background in the *frau anders* cartoon at the opening of this chapter—that is, a person freed from the trappings of heterosexual monogamy. She was loath after the mid-1980s to continue collaborating with gay male activists, especially if it meant participating in her own (or other women's) silencing. For lesbians in both church-based and secularly organized gay rights activist groups, the urgency of the now—and who they became as they inhabited the frictive present—shifted from merely making themselves visible to rejecting the patriarchal norms that characterized their interactions with gay men in activist spaces.

The awareness that lesbian women navigated gay emancipation in distinctly gendered ways compelled Dauenheimer to hold the first Wom-

en's Festival (*Frauenfest*) in 1985. The *Feste* were annual gatherings of East German feminist activists—some queer, some not—from across the GDR.⁴⁸ Each *Fest* featured a thematic focus—lesbian love in literature (1985), women between paid work and self-realization (1986), violence against women (1987), to name a few—that addressed the realities of women's lives right up until the opening of the Wall.⁴⁹ During these events, Dauenheimer and her lesbian compatriots held a seat at the table for straight women to understand and debate the gendered burdens that women shared across the divide of sexuality, not least among them intimate partner violence and sexual violence.⁵⁰ Of course, such collaborations between hetero and queer women were not without friction. As a member of East Berlin's Lesbians in the Church, Marinka Körzendörfer, recalls, many straight women claimed that same-sex desiring women were "too dominant" at the festivals and recoiled at the site of women holding hands and embracing one another at the gatherings.⁵¹ Nonetheless, the yearly *Feste* allowed straight and lesbian women to work outside the bounds of patriarchal norms to address a range of concerns that both dealt with regularly.

Lesbian attendees of the *Frauenfeste*, however, struggled after each event to maintain both a sense of connection and camaraderie with one another as well as ongoing collaborations with gay men in church-based AKs. Bärbel Klässner's history is instructive on these points. Klässner, who hailed from Jena and later became one of the editors of *frau anders*, fell in love with a woman in 1984. Upon reading a newspaper article on same-sex love published by sexologists, she was relieved to learn that she was not a social deviant—"neither ill nor criminal"—but rather that she simply loved women.⁵² She attended the first *Frauenfest* in 1985 with great anticipation for what she might learn from fellow attendees. Yet upon continuing to visit a mixed-gender working group in Jena populated predominantly by gay men, she found herself feeling "ill at ease."⁵³ This experience made Klässner fear for the well-being of other same-sex desiring women, particularly those who struggled to find a space in which to ponder the meanings of their queerness in (nearly) all-male social environments.

By the late 1980s, therefore, the urgency of the moment had shifted from lesbians merely establishing contact with broader queer communities to their finding common ground with other lesbians who opposed patriarchal norms within both East German society and the gay emancipation movement. Klässner and her peers in a lesbian-only AK in Jena took the initiative to connect the broad network of same-sex desiring women brought to life by Dauenheimer's *Frauenfeste*.⁵⁴ In 1988, Klässner wrote to lesbians

across the GDR and announced the birth of *frau anders*.⁵⁵ The journal was to serve as a one stop shop for women who sought a broad overview of the social and activist possibilities available to them in the GDR. Klässner and her co-editors sought to link women who loved women in both urban centers and "the hinterlands" and acknowledged that each individual woman who touched a copy of *frau anders* was likely on a unique journey of self-development and worldmaking.⁵⁶ There was, in essence, no one way to be a lesbian in the GDR, and the journal's contents spoke to both veterans and newcomers of a nascent movement of women who (at that time) identified as lesbians. To inhabit the late GDR, thus, was hardly to wander a landscape of sociocultural decline but rather to watch alternate realities to normative culture come into relief in ways that made the future wholly unpredictable.

The editors of *frau anders* were unsure as to how the socialist state and its functionaries might react to the existence of their journal. Like their gay male counterparts, lesbian activists were acutely aware that they were tracked by the Ministry for State Security (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*; MfS or Stasi).⁵⁷ Nonetheless, the women who published and distributed *frau anders* on a bimonthly basis felt that the benefit of connecting with other women outweighed the risks of being watched, harassed, and informed upon by secret police and the vast network of unofficial informants. As Klässner recalls, those who circulated *frau anders* were sure to print the protective phrase "for internal church use only" (*nur zur innerkirchlichen Gebrauch*) on the cover, even though the central mailing address to which readers sent inquiries was that of a private apartment.⁵⁸ For women in the know, the juxtaposition of a private mailing address and the semi-imperative to circulate the zine only within church walls might have signaled the reality that their movement had outgrown its initial home. For the state and its security apparatus, by contrast, the broad menu of gatherings and contact options put forth in *frau anders* may have made clear to them that they did not have a firm—let alone totalizing—grasp on the reins of cultural production in the GDR.

East German lesbians' desire to work (mostly) apart from gay men in the mid-to-late 1980s resulted in the formation of both a geographically dispersed network of women who loved women and the creation of the lesbian zine *frau anders*. The reorientation of segments of East German lesbian activism into a women-only sphere allowed women who read the journal to grapple with the meanings of their same-sex desire under state socialism. While some readers of *frau anders* felt a sense of risk around the notion of possibly abandoning normativity, others reveled in the opportunity to exchange ideas with

other women who were simultaneously weighing the benefits of pursuing new ways of being and, thus, uncertainty in their lives. What emerges to us in this epistolary-literary space are the numerous subjective pathways same-sex desiring women could take as they became unmoored—or *not*—from the hegemonic social conventions that had heretofore structured their lives.

Reveling in the Now: From the Pages of *frau anders*

Rather than using *frau anders* to argue for the formation of a lesbian emancipation movement with clearly defined goals, the readers and editors of the journal reveled in—and also experienced anxiety around—the project of redefining the possibilities of their lives. Klässner and her co-editors published the first issue in January 1989 and instructed readers to pass it to the next reader who might need it. Women who read the journal and sent it on to others sometimes stamped their names and addresses on its front page, further solidifying a growing network of actors who wished to know and produce further knowledge about same-sex desire in the GDR.

For instance, Christiane Kloweit, a leader of the Lesbian and Gay Working Group of Erfurt (*Erfurter Lesben-und-Schwulen-Arbeitskreis*; ELSA), advertised the existence of her group to any woman who might want to join it, be they an Erfurter or not. In issue 4, Kloweit wrote an overview of ELSA's activities and made clear that the AK was a space for women to share feelings directly with other women related to queerness. To facilitate such interactions, she formed a lesbian subgroup that operated separately "within a larger [mixed-gender] group of gay men and women."⁵⁹ One need not identify strictly as a lesbian *per se* to be welcomed into the group, and she argued that the term "lesbian," at least in her understanding, was something of a catchall to describe a sort of general queerness for women who, in her words, "want to be with women now and then (*ab und zu*), frequently, or preferably always."⁶⁰ So as not to drive away women with fixed notions of "right" or "wrong" ways of being queer, Kloweit and her contemporaries invited women to make what they wanted of the term "lesbian" and the range of intimacies associated with it.⁶¹ Additionally, there was simply no rush to "complete" or "finish" the work of lesbian emancipation. As Kloweit pointed out, "Nothing final can be said about an unfinished thing. Our goal is not to finish anything. We want to carry on, stay on the path, and we're curious about where we're going and who's coming with us. Don't you feel a bit like joining us, women?"⁶² In her formulation, the enterprise of lesbian

activism was never-ending work. There was, as of yet, no rush to step out of the milieu of cultural production that seemed to make this exact moment possible.

Alongside the lesbian group within ELSA, Kloweit also formed another subclub specifically tailored to address the needs of women who loved women in rural provinces (*in der Provinz*). The responses to this group demonstrate how one's queerness played out against a backdrop of geography, gender, and heteronormative behavioral expectations in the GDR. In an essay published in *frau anders* on the lives of same-sex desiring women in small towns and villages, Kloweit noted that many queer women had found themselves in heterosexual marriages, only later to realize the true nature of their sexual desires or finally to admit them to husbands who sometimes reacted violently.⁶³ Yet many women wrote to Kloweit and made clear that their own experiences of forging lesbian relationships in rural areas were much more colorful than she could imagine. One respondent noted that, in her younger years, she had gained a reputation for promiscuity for having slept with numerous men, thereby providing a cover under which to pursue same-sex intimacies in her small town. Another respondent highlighted that she was legible to her peers as a mother, and not a lesbian. "To my co-workers I fall under the category of divorced mother with a child," she stated and pointed out that her child provided her with the alibi of a socially presumed heterosexuality.⁶⁴ Thus for a number of Kloweit's interlocutors, publicly identifying as lesbians was not necessarily a precondition for reshaping their lives and the worlds they inhabited.

Of course, embracing the queer here and now did not come without anxiety and risk. Take, for instance, Christiane from Gera, a teacher who decided it was in her best career interests to perpetuate silence around same-sex desire when the topic came up with students. In the following vignette in *frau anders*, she describes being asked by a student about her personal life:

STUDENT: "Do you have children?"
TEACHER: "No, I do not."
STUDENT: "But surely you have a husband?"
TEACHER: "No."
STUDENT: "Oh, then you must live totally alone!?"
TEACHER: ". . ." ⁶⁵

"And? I don't live alone! I live together with a woman, yet why didn't I say that? Why do I silence myself again and again in such discussions with stu-

dents in my class and in other classes?”⁶⁶ The questions posed to Christiane suggest that the student was unable to imagine why a woman like her would neglect to partner romantically with a man. Or perhaps the student had some curiosity regarding nonnormative desire—and possibly even an interest to understand their own sexuality better. We cannot know for sure, though we do know that Christiane stood by her decision not to divulge the details of her personal life to students and colleagues. For readers such as Christiane, therefore, *frau anders* provided an essential commiserative site in which to narrate the burdens of “passing” within the straight world. The relational terrain that women like Christiane navigated was fraught with peril, not least because her heterosexual co-citizens, namely the parents of the pupils whom she taught, held immense influence in matters of employment and social inclusion (or exclusion).

In a subsequent issue of *frau anders*, Annegret from Zwickau—“a lesbian mother of three children”—wrote to the editors that she well understood Christiane’s dilemma; in fact, Annegret even knew who she was, as her children attended the school where Christiane taught. To her great regret, Annegret noted, she, like Christiane, had chosen to live a life in which she hid her same-sex desire from the vast majority of her fellow citizens out of fear that her children would be “teased or ostracized” because of their lesbian mother.⁶⁷ Annegret’s and Christiane’s stories make clear there is no single, tidy history to recover as it pertains to lesbians’ everyday realities in late socialism. The readers of *frau anders* nonetheless found ways to participate in discourses that focused on disparate ways of both inhabiting and being queer in the GDR.

Despite the very real challenges and risks they faced living openly as lesbians in the GDR, the women who wrote, produced, and distributed *frau anders* relished the opportunity to willingly exit the “paradise” of heterosexual time for the queer here and now. In August 1989, Leo from Berlin, who regularly contributed to *frau anders*, reported on a vacation she had taken in Burglemintz, a village roughly an hour south of Jena. On the first day of her trip, she was “in utopia,” running from corner to corner of her guest apartment, anticipating the arrival of telegrams from other lesbians who demanded answers to difficult questions related to being queer in a world that still seemed so rigidly straight.⁶⁸ We might dwell for just a moment in the queer temporality that Leo inhabited as she sought to tend to the needs of her compatriots in a timely manner. That she listed among her obligations replying to women who hoped to know how they might embrace new modes of being made clear that, for many of the women featured in this chap-

ter, their senses of heteronormative time had been disrupted just enough to compel them to move toward newness, unknowingness, and sometimes radically altered selfhoods. Life in the late GDR, then, was dynamic and unpredictable—full of twists, turns, and subjective refashionings that became possible once one realized that the socialist future did not have to replicate the past that preceded it.

Conclusion

Subjectivity is the means by which we might pursue and recover the in-the-moment turns that historical actors take once they become unmoored from the hegemonic temporalities that once seemed to lead them to existential dead ends. When human beings experience what we might call "new time"—or the urgency of now—a vast geography of possibilities becomes available to them. However, as queer theorist Sara Ahmed points out, the emergence of a new someone or something in our lives in no way guarantees that we will turn to grasp for it or them: "Even when things are within reach," Ahmed posits, "we still have to reach for those things" for them to be actualized, touched, realized, and made a part of our lives.⁶⁹ Contingency, therefore, is a crucial component of revivifying historical subjectivities, not least because none of us behave in ways that are prefigured or predictable when presented with new opportunities. Hence, the pluralized term (and concept of) "subjectivities" frees the subjects featured in this chapter from the conceptual burdens of a "margins to mainstream" telos that assumes that all women who loved women in East Germany recognized and responded to the social and political upheavals of the 1980s in the same way.⁷⁰ Adopting this term is to question how and why lesbians are still so troublingly absent in the history and historiography of the Honecker era. It is also to suggest that we might use the concept of "queer time" to understand better post-socialist expressions of the self as representing complex emotional reactions to having shaped what was and what could have been in the GDR.⁷¹

Notes

1. Robert Havemann Gesellschaft (hereafter RHG), GrauZone Archiv (hereafter GZ), S01/201, in *frau anders* I (1989), 19.

2. On "family time" and the implications of stepping away from its flow, see Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 1–5.

3. Bärbel Klässner, "Als *frau anders* war," in *Das Übersehenwerden hat Geschichte*.

Lesben in der DDR und in der friedlichen Revolution. Tagungsdokumentation (Halle (Saale): Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Sachsen-Anhalt; Berlin: Gunda Werner Institut, 2015), 58–69.

4. RHG, GZ, ZS/9/204, I-1989, “Wer arbeitet an frau anders mit?,” in *frau anders I* (1989), 21.

5. Such women did *not* refer to themselves as queer. However, I use the term “queer” throughout so as not to flatten the experiences of actors for whom, beyond the *Wende*, “lesbian,” ceased to be a term by which they self-identified.

6. RHG, GZ, S01/233, IV-1989, in *frau anders IV* (1989), cover page.

7. *frau anders IV* (1989), cover page.

8. On how temporal “disruptions” link subjects to new possibilities of self-making, see Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 3–11.

9. Samuel Clowes Huneke recognizes the lack of scholarship on lesbian histories from this period in his essential book on gay liberation in postwar Germany, though, as he notes, he foregrounds the voices of gay men in his work. See Huneke, *States of Liberation: Gay Men between Dictatorship and Democracy in Cold War Germany* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022), 6.

10. My efforts closely align with the work of Maria Bühner, who argues that the shaping of an East German lesbian subjectivity arose (in part) from efforts to question normative gender roles. See Bühner, “The Rise of a New Consciousness: Lesbian Activism in East Germany in the 1980s,” in *The Politics of Authenticity: Countercultures and Radical Movements Across the Iron Curtain, 1968–1989*, ed. Joachim C. Häberlen, Mark Keck-Szajbel, and Kate Mahoney (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019), 151–173.

11. Maria Bühner, “How to Remember Invisibility: Documentary Projects on Lesbians in the German Democratic Republic as Archives of Feelings,” in *Sexual Culture in Germany in the 1970s: A Golden Age for Queers?*, ed. Janin Afken and Benedikt Wolf (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 241–265.

12. See especially the interviews in Kerstin Gutsche, ed., *Ich ahnungsloser Engel: Lesbenprotokolle* (Berlin: Reiher: 1991). See also Ursula Sillge, *Un-Sichtbare Frauen: Lesben und ihre Emanzipation in der DDR* (Berlin: LinksDruck, 1991).

13. Jennifer V. Evans, *The Queer Art of History: Queer Kinship After Fascism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2023), 8.

14. Huneke, *States of Liberation*, 189.

15. See Sara Ahmed’s commentary on the ways in which we “turn toward” and “reach” (or not) for new people and possibilities in our lives in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 2–7, 10.

16. See especially Larissa R. Stiglich’s “Showing Up for Socialism: *Eingaben* in Eisenhüttenstadt during Late-Stage Socialism,” in *Socialist Subjectivities: Queering East Germany under Honecker*, ed. Scott Harrison, Jeff Hayton, and Katharine White (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2025), 168–186. Her chapter similarly touches upon relational bonds between citizens that seemed to suspend the normative flow of time in Eisenhüttenstadt before and after 1989/1990.

17. On queer women’s participation in a range of late-1980s activist movements in the GDR, see Gabriele Dennert, Christiane Leidinger, and Franziska Rauchut, eds.,

In Bewegung bleiben: 100 Jahre Politik, Kultur, und Geschichte von Lesben (Berlin: Querverlag, 2007).

18. Eric A. Stanley, *Atmospheres of Violence: Structuring Antagonism and the Trans/Queer Ungovernable* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), quoted in Evans, *Queer Art of History*, 2.

19. See Dauenheimer's personal website: <http://www.karin-dauenheimer.de/vita.html> (accessed May 28, 2023).

20. Josie McLellan, "Glad to Be Gay Behind the Wall: Gay and Lesbian Activism in 1970s East Germany," *History Workshop Journal* 74, no. 1 (2012): 105–130.

21. RHG, GZ, A1/268, "Protokoll eines ersten Gesprächs über Alleinstehende Berufstätige" (November 23, 1979), 1.

22. "Protokoll eines ersten Gesprächs," 2. See also Jane Freeland, *Feminist Transformations and Domestic Violence in Divided Berlin, 1968–2002* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); and Donna Harsh, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

23. Bühner, "Rise of a New Consciousness"; and Huneke, *States of Liberation*, 190–225. See also Kristine Schmidt, "Lesben und Schwule in der Kirche," in *Verzaubert in Nord-Ost: Die Geschichte der Berliner Lesben und Schwulen in Prenzlauer Berg, Pankow und Weißensee*, ed. Jens Dobler (Berlin: Bruno Gmünder, 2009), 198–220.

24. Author's interview with Eduard Stapel on July 19, 2013.

25. Interview with Stapel.

26. For a contrary take, see Detlef Opitz's 1985 essay "Wie anders den?," in *Mikado oder Der Kaiser ist nackt: Selbstverlegte Literatur in der DDR*, ed. Uwe Kolbe, Lothar Trolle, and Bernd Wagner (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1988), 147–164.

27. RHG, GZ, ZS/9/206, III-1989, "Gruppenvorstellung: Dresden," in *frau anders III* (1989), 2–5, here 2–3.

28. Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place*, 4–5.

29. "Gruppenvorstellung: Dresden," in *frau anders III* (1989), 2–3.

30. Karin Dauenheimer, "Beitrag für eine Chronik, die vielleicht einmal geschrieben wird," in *Frauengruppen in der DDR der 80er Jahre—Eine Dokumentation*, ed. Samirah Kenawi (Berlin: GrauZone, 1995), 114–121.

31. Dauenheimer, "Beitrag für eine Chronik," 121. See also Günter Grau, "Homosexualität im Gespräch von Kirchen und Gemeinden," *Die Zeichnen der Zeit*, no. 41 (1987): 126–136.

32. Grau, "Homosexualität im Gespräch von Kirchen und Gemeinden," 126.

33. RHG, GZ, ZS/9/206, III-1989, "Frauen sind ganze Menschen," in *frau anders III* (1989), 9.

34. Dauenheimer, "Beitrag für eine Chronik"; see also "Gruppenvorstellung: Dresden," in *frau anders III* (1989), 2–5.

35. Huneke, *States of Liberation*, 189–225.

36. For what limited archival information does exist on *Gerede*, see gay rights activist Eduard Stapel's personal papers, RHG, EST/06/Cottbus, Dresden, Karl-Marx-Stadt. See also Kai Werner, "Der FDJ-Schwulenklub 'Gerede' in Dresden," in *Die DDR. Die Schwulen, Der Aufbruch. Versuch einer Bestandsaufnahme*, ed. Jean Jacques Soukup (Gleichen-Reinhausen: Freies Tagungshaus Waldschlößchen, 1990), 63–66.

37. RHG, EST/06/Cottbus, Dresden, Karl-Marx-Stadt, Letter from Kai Werner to Eduard Stapel (January 10, 1987), n.p. See also Karin Dauenhaimer, "Anders als die andern?: 'Das Thema "Homosexualität" lockte viele in die "Scheune,"" *Die Union* (April 3, 1987), 5.

38. Lesbian activists did, in a more private manner, discuss the reality that some of their compatriots had migrated West. See RHG, GZ, ZS/9/206, II-1989, "Gruppenvorstellung: Berlin," in *frau anders* II (1989), 2–5, here 4.

39. For Werner's commentary on the relative advantages of collaborating with the state, see Werner, "Der FDJ-Schwulenklub 'Gerede' in Dresden," 63–66.

40. Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place*, 5. On willingly "expelling" oneself from "paradise," see RHG, GZ, ZS/9/207, IV-1989, in *frau anders* IV (1989), cover page.

41. Lesbians in Jena, for instance, began in 1985 to organize apart from gay men. See RHG, GZ, JEN188, "Arbeitsweise, Möglichkeiten, und Grenzen einer Lesben-gruppe: Erfahrungen unserer Arbeit in Jena" (n.d.), 4–12.

42. Samirah Kenawi, "Die Ersten werden die Letzten sein: Thesen zur Lesbenbe-wegung in der DDR," in *Lesben und Schwule in der DDR. Tagungsdokumentation* (Halle (Saale): Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2008), 57–66.

43. See Kenawi's unpublished manuscript on lesbian activism in the GDR: RHG, WA/59, *Zeigen wir uns, damit man uns nicht verleugnen kann!—Die 'Lesben in der Kirche' Berlin* (2008), 31.

44. RHG, A1/1023, Karin Dauenhaimer, "Das Schweigen durchbrechen," in *Integration—Aber wie? Homosexuelle 1987—Fortgesetzte Versuche zur Verständigung* (1988), 35–46, here 35.

45. Dauenhaimer, "Das Schweigen durchbrechen," in *Integration—Aber wie?*, 46.

46. "Gruppenvorstellung: Dresden," in *frau anders* III (1989), 3.

47. "Frauen sind ganze Menschen," in *frau anders* II (1989), 8–9.

48. RHG, GZ, ZS/9/206, II-1989, "Frauenfest! Wann? Wo?," in *frau anders* II (1989), 17.

49. "Gruppenvorstellung: Dresden," in *frau anders* III (1989), 4–5.

50. The *Feste* became more intricately programmed over time, which Dauenhaimer referred to as a "learning process." See RHG, GZ, A1/286, "Einladung zum 2. Dresdner Frauenfest," (n.d.), 1.

51. RHG, GZ, A1/2572, Marinka Körzendörfer, "Fast 10 Jahre Lesbenbewegung in der DDR und ihr Übergang in die bundesdeutsche Wirklichkeit" (1993), 1–6, here 3.

52. RHG, GZ, ZS/9/204, I-1989, "Gruppenvorstellung: Jena," in *frau anders* I (1989), 4–5, here 4.

53. "Gruppenvorstellung: Jena," in *frau anders* I (1989), 4.

54. RHG, GZ, JEN188, "Arbeitsweise, Möglichkeiten, und Grenzen einer Lesben-gruppe—Erfahrungen unserer Arbeit in Jena" (n.d.), 4–12.

55. RHG, GZ, A1/2594, Bärbel Klässner, "An alle Lesben-gruppe in der Evangelischen Kirche in der DDR" (1988), 1–3; and Klässner, "Als *frau anders* war," 62.

56. "An alle Lesben-gruppe," 3.

57. Marinka Körzendörfer, "Mehr Schein als Sein," *Weiblick: Kommentar Frauen und Stasi*, no. 16 (1994): 26–27.

58. See Klässner, "Als *frau anders* war," 62.

59. RHG, GZ, ZS/9/207, IV-1989, "Gruppenvorstellung: Erfurt," in *frau anders* IV (1989), 6–7, here 6.
60. "Gruppenvorstellung: Erfurt," in *frau anders* IV (1989), 6.
61. "Gruppenvorstellung: Erfurt," in *frau anders* IV (1989), 6.
62. "Gruppenvorstellung: Erfurt," in *frau anders* IV (1989), 7.
63. See Kloweit's notes from a discussion group with lesbians living in rural areas in RHG, GZ, A1/650, "Gesprächsgruppe Lesben in der Provinz" (n.d.), n.p.
64. "Gesprächsgruppe Lesben in der Provinz" (n.d.), n.p.
65. RHG, GZ, ZS/9/206, IV-1989, ". . . nicht länger Hetero-Moral über alles—lesbische Frauen in der Volksbildung," in *frau anders* IV (1989), 1–2, here, 1.
66. ". . . nicht länger Hetero-Moral über alles," in *frau anders* IV (1989), 1.
67. RHG, GZ, ZS/9/208, V-1989, "Leserinnenzuschriften," in *frau anders* V (1989), 20–21.
68. RHG, GZ, ZS/9/208, V-1989, "Gelebte Utopie—Frauen-Kreativurlaub," in *frau anders* V (1989), 17–20.
69. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 7.
70. Evans, *The Queer Art of History*, 8.
71. Samuel Clowes Huneke, "A Queer Wall in the Head: Using Oral Histories to Map Gay Desire across Cold War Germany," *German Studies Review* 45, no. 3 (2022): 495–515.

Showing Up for Socialism *Eingaben in Eisenhüttenstadt during Late-Stage Socialism*

Larissa R. Stiglich

On October 25, 1989, residents gathered at city hall in the socialist model city of Eisenhüttenstadt to participate in the first of a series of open dialogues with local functionaries from the Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*; SED) about growing demands for democratic reform in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The large auditorium was packed to the rafters, so party and city officials spontaneously held an additional discussion on the front steps to accommodate the more than four hundred citizens who had shown up to participate. “The participation of so many here today I interpret as an expression of the deep care that our citizens have about the recent developments,” said First Secretary Siegfried Uhlig in his opening remarks.¹ In the discussion that followed, residents were able to “make suggestions and identify challenges, without taboos, uninhibited and open, with often hot, pent-up anger.”²

At the October 25 meeting, residents’ questions and criticisms varied in the degree of frustration expressed toward the party and the state. The first person to speak up asked whether the next elections would also be “sham elections.” A young secretary from a division of the party organization at the local steelworks (*Abteilungsparteiorganisation*; APO) lamented the lack of accountability on the part of his superiors, to whom he had been passing along concerned reports for nearly two years without ever receiving an answer or witnessing any tangible changes. “Now we’ve got to get out of this mess. The scam within socialist competition must stop.”³ Toward the end of the meeting a young woman took the floor: “I want to live here in this country, also in socialism. But changes must be visible, and fast. I want

to be a part of them,” she demanded.⁴ In response to these criticisms, First Secretary Uhlig admitted, “*Jawohl*, we’ve made mistakes, including me. The criticism from below did not lead to changes.” But from this point forward, he emphasized, “the dialogue must be conducted with all citizens—no one can be left out.”⁵

This exchange between ordinary East Germans and state officials tells us much about the temporal heterogeneity of socialism in the GDR during the autumn of 1989.⁶ That the first meeting of this sort did not happen until October 25 shows that the events of the revolutionary autumn unfolded differently in Eisenhüttenstadt than elsewhere throughout the country. After all, by late October 1989, protesters at the Monday Demonstrations (*Montagsdemos*) in Leipzig had already swelled into the hundreds of thousands.⁷ Moreover, in Eisenhüttenstadt, these first impulses of democratic renewal were not spearheaded by dissidents from below as in other centers of discontent; rather, they were initiated from the top down by SED officials themselves. In other words, the first and most crucial moments of reform in Eisenhüttenstadt were not on the streets as in Leipzig, but in meeting halls and under the guidance of party officials. There was more than one possible trajectory of events in East Germany during the revolutionary autumn—a reality that sometimes recedes into the background in the face of the seemingly irrevocable momentum of growing protest movements and public dissidence that often take center stage in both scholarly and popular recollections of the *Wende*.⁸ Put differently, Eisenhüttenstädters continued to show up for the possibility of socialism—often with frustration, sometimes with disgust, but also with an ambivalent curiosity about what socialism *could* be if “the scam” were indeed finally abandoned.

This open discussion on the steps of the Eisenhüttenstadt City Hall also hints at another dynamic that characterized the relationship between citizens and the state during late-stage socialism. As we have seen, Eisenhüttenstadt residents’ criticisms of the regime were often accompanied by their willingness to work to improve the system. Recall the steelworker who had tried to alert his superiors of problems, or the young woman who declared she wanted to be a part of the changes necessary to reform socialism. This was no new dynamic. Indeed, East German citizens, and specifically Eisenhüttenstädters, had long been showing up for socialism. Nor was it a dynamic that disappeared among Eisenhüttenstadt residents as street demonstrations and popular protests took center stage elsewhere throughout the GDR. This ongoing robust engagement between residents of the socialist model city and the state can be gleaned from their enthusiastic participation in the

institutionalized practice of writing *Eingaben* (petitions) well into the revolutionary autumn.

Since the country's infancy, petitions and written letters of complaint had offered one outlet for East Germans to express their grievances and concerns about a range of issues affecting their daily lives. The petition laws (*Eingabengesetze*) of the GDR originated in the masses of spontaneous letters that Wilhelm Pieck and his administration received during the first months of the regime. These correspondences typically took the form of a letter handwritten by an individual citizen (or later typed), as opposed to a collection of signatures as the English translation "petition" might seem to imply. These letters were initially used as an instrument to measure the administration's effectiveness. A citizen's right to file an *Eingabe* was even protected under Article 3 of the 1949 constitution, as well as under subsequent iterations. After Pieck's death, Walter Ulbricht further institutionalized the petition system through the creation of the State Council (*Staatsrat*), which served as the official national addressee for all citizens' petitions and complaints.⁹

What is perhaps especially striking is that by the late 1980s, East Germans were writing more petitions than ever before, totaling more than a million per year. In 1983 alone around 52,000 letters were addressed to the Berlin *Staatsrat*. By 1989, this number had risen to 134,000, not to mention all the letters penned to local and regional authorities.¹⁰ Their complaints typically addressed issues that tangibly affected their everyday lives, like shortages of consumer goods and replacement parts, or long waiting times for larger apartments and renovations. An explanation as to why the volume of petitions increased during the last two decades of the GDR has in part to do with the new economic policies implemented by Erich Honecker after he replaced Ulbricht in 1971. While a materialist understanding had long undergirded Marxist interpretations of human rights,¹¹ the "main task" of Honecker's new economic policy underscored the importance of "rais[ing] the people's material and cultural standard of living on the basis of a fast developmental pace of socialist production, of higher efficiency, of scientific-technological progress and the growth of productivity of labor."¹² Honecker claimed that this so-called "unity of economic and social policy" (*Einheit von Wirtschafts- und Sozialpolitik*), which promised to deliver far-reaching improvements in the everyday lives of ordinary East German citizens and workers, had finally delivered "real-existing socialism."¹³ The state, however, found these improvements increasingly difficult to fulfill.¹⁴

It is tempting to read the sheer volume of petitions written in the final

years of the GDR as convincing evidence that the regime had entered what the editors of this volume have aptly termed the “antechamber of collapse.”¹⁵ In other words, to interpret the *Eingaben* as a compelling indication of East German citizens’ inexorably mounting discontent, which served to push them into the protest movements that—combined with other internal and external factors—ultimately topped the regime.¹⁶ This interpretation, however, privileges material conditions as the driving factor fueling citizens’ participation in popular protest movements, thus serving to reify a dichotomous understanding of East and West Germany by portraying the GDR as a *Mangelgesellschaft* (shortage society) in contrast to the *Überflußgesellschaft* (surplus society) of the Federal Republic.¹⁷ To be sure, there were many East Germans for whom material shortages or unsatisfactory living standards played a part in their embrace of popular protest against the regime. But the practice of writing *Eingaben* could also be, in the words of Mary Fulbrook, “system sustaining,” for it “confirmed the possibility of drawing attention to shortcomings in a system that, while imperfect in practice, was nevertheless developing on the right lines and could in principle be improved.”¹⁸ For East German subjects, writing *Eingaben* could also be interpreted as means to express the ways in which they had shown up for socialism and believed, to some degree, in the state’s promises that it would show up for them.

In considering *Eingaben* and other letters of complaint written in Eisenhüttenstadt in the late 1980s and during the *Wende* itself, it becomes clear that alongside dissatisfaction, many Eisenhüttenstädters still retained both the hope and expectation that the state would ultimately fulfill its end of the socialist social contract. In unpacking the seemingly scripted pattern of petition writing—including the painstaking articulation of ideological credentials¹⁹—these *Eingaben* reveal that Eisenhüttenstädters *had* in fact shown up repeatedly for the state. They had put in their hours at the steelworks; borne children and raised them up to be the next generation of socialist subjects. Petitions penned to the local municipal council (*Rat der Stadt*) revealed, at times, frustration, but also an underlying assumption that the “workers’ and peasants’ state” (*Arbeiter- und Bauern-Staat*) would do right by its citizens (which it sometimes did, as action on the part of city officials reveals).

Perhaps even more tellingly, Eisenhüttenstadt residents continued to adhere to the ritual of petition writing against the mounting backdrop of discontent in other regions of the GDR during the autumn of 1989. This firmly evinces their continued belief in the reciprocal duties and responsibilities between socialist subjects and their socialist state at a time when

socialist subjects elsewhere envisioned a different future. Eisenhüttenstädters' continued efforts to collaborate with their local and regional governments in reforming socialism shows how residents of the socialist model city inhabited what might be referred to as a "queer time" amid a political and social climate characterized elsewhere in the GDR by seemingly irrevocable condemnations of the regime. In the broader temporal and geographic landscape of the *Wende*, Eisenhüttenstädters' collaborative efforts with the regime come to appear "nonnormative," thus producing what Jack Halberstam understands, in part, as "the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics."²⁰ Accordingly, that some Eisenhüttenstadt petitioners were still, in many ways, waiting for—and prepared to continue working toward—socialism reminds us of the plurality of presents that socialist subjects experienced throughout the GDR in what nobody at the time knew to be its final months.

Eingaben in Eisenhüttenstadt before the Wende

Constructed along the banks of the Oder River and Spree Canal beginning in 1950, Eisenhüttenstadt was the GDR's first socialist model city. Its residents had thus long enjoyed certain privileges in the quality of their material circumstances. After all, a model city intended to showcase the superiority of socialism over capitalism ought to demonstrate the best the regime had to offer in terms of economic performance, urban living, and the amenities of modern life.²¹ Nevertheless, for the Eisenhüttenstadt local administration and for the regime as a whole, the 1970s and 1980s witnessed the perfect storm of economic and social conditions that made attention to consumption all the more acute, especially in the aftermath of Honecker's promise to achieve real-existing socialism. The convergence of low prices for basic goods, rising wages, assurances of expanded consumer choices, growing comparisons with the imagined quality of life in the West (as propagated by near-universal consumption of West German television), and shortages of more desirable basic goods help explain why Eisenhüttenstadt residents' expectations had grown, as well as why the city was failing to deliver.²²

In Eisenhüttenstadt, as throughout the rest of the GDR in the 1980s, residents penned more petitions and anonymous complaint letters than ever before. One reason that Eisenhüttenstadt residents spilled ink with persistence—and sometimes vehemence—had to do with the unsatisfactory living conditions inside their apartments. With Honecker's ascension to power

in 1971 came the party leadership's renewed devotion to raising the living standard for its citizens. One of the central components of this aforementioned "unity of economic and social policy" was the countrywide Housing Construction Program (*Wohnungsbauprogramm*) that sought to address the housing shortage that had plagued the GDR from its founding. A resolution of the SED Politbüro in October 1973 inaugurated the Housing Program, which party members described as the centerpiece (*Kernstück*) of the regime's new policy of real-existing socialism.²³ The housing program's overall aim was to provide each citizen a modern, comfortable apartment by 1990 and thus solve "once and for all the housing problem as a social problem."²⁴

On the surface, the local administration in Eisenhüttenstadt appeared to make strides toward achieving its local housing plan for the years 1981–1985. This was to be realized through the construction of new apartments, the modernization and renovation of existing apartments, timely maintenance and upkeep of apartments so that they would retain their value, and the rational distribution of apartments.²⁵ In addition to the completion of *Wohnkomplex* (Housing Complex, abbreviated *WK*) VI in 1977, which could house up to 16,000 residents, the city also made plans to construct a seventh *Wohnkomplex* on the eastern edge of the city.²⁶ Upon its completion in 1987, this housing market expansion ultimately made an additional 3,200 apartments available.²⁷ Despite these tangible efforts to solve the housing problem once and for all, between 1979 and 1980 alone, the percentage of petitions directed specifically at the state-run building management firm (*VEB Gebäudewirtschaft*) more than doubled from 7.2 percent to 15.2 percent of all petitions received by the mayor's office and municipal council.²⁸

The residents who wrote housing-related complaints throughout the 1980s had good reason to do so. As their *Eingaben* reveal, these were committed socialist subjects who had worked in various capacities to help the regime achieve both its economic and social goals. Take, for instance, the Eisenhüttenstadt resident who had lived in a two-and-a-half-room apartment with furnace heating (*Ofenheizung*) since 1977, where his two children—a boy and a girl about a year apart—shared a room. By the time this resident authored his petition to the municipal council in March 1988, his children were teenagers (or nearly so), and this living arrangement had become untenable "because they are nearly the same age and have extremely divergent interests."²⁹ After a quick sketch of the dire circumstances—which takes up only six brief lines on the typewritten letter—the petitioner began to articulate his socialist credentials in the several paragraphs that follow:

It is noteworthy that I have worked as an employee of the Transportation Department for the steel mill since 1974 and am currently employed as a foreman shunter. Later I received qualification as a train driver for the V60 and the V100 and also as a transport service dispatcher. My wife has likewise been employed in the Transportation Department since 1972. She started as a train dispatcher, got further qualifications as a sequence attendant and as a transport service dispatcher. She is also deployed as a district foreman shunter. Over all the years we have both worked in the four-shift system, six of those years on alternate shifts.³⁰

This recitation of employment credentials clearly served to establish that the petitioner in question had fulfilled his end of the bargain with the state: he was a worker for whom the state was meant to provide adequate material circumstances. And if his profession were not enough evidence of this, he also went on to share that in his free time he served on various socialist task forces while pursuing further ideological education at the company school (*Betriebsschule*).

This petitioner's commitment to the goals of the working class was, moreover, a family affair. Beyond his own professional credentials, he took pains to demonstrate how disciplined his wife was in her own contributions toward the GDR's industrial production. Having worked in the Transportation Department since the early 1970s, it is clear from this resume that she must have quickly returned to work after the birth of her two children. In this way, she not only fulfilled industrial production quotas but also helped the regime meet its reproductive goals by raising the next generation of socialist citizens.³¹ Parenting while working full-time clearly did not come without additional sacrifices, as the petitioner underscored toward the end of his letter. He and his wife had spent six years working alternate shifts to juggle their professional and parental responsibilities, which no doubt strained their own relationship.

Despite these circumstances and personal appeals to his company union leader (*Betriebsgewerkschaftsleitung*), the petitioner's request to upgrade to a four-bedroom apartment went unanswered after he had authored his first petition back in 1977, prompting him to follow up with this second petition in 1988. "Certainly, it is clear from this account that I am an active member of our society and not just making demands; rather, I am personally doing my part to achieve my share of societal duties. Therefore, I ask you to collaborate with me in the clarification of my problem."³² In this closing statement, while the petitioner did not explicitly articulate whose share of the societal duties were going unfulfilled, the message was clear: it was time for

the local party administrators to make good on their promise to guarantee an adequate standard of living for this socialist citizen and his family. It is worth emphasizing that the petitioner framed the relationship between himself and the state as a collaboration because it attests to a long-standing dynamic between socialist subjects and their state; a dynamic in which it was a possible, even plausible outcome, that the state would do its part to fulfill its share of societal duties in turn.

Indeed, when Eisenhüttenstadt residents wrote a petition to the municipal council, they were not just writing into the void. City administrators and relevant local leaders read these letters and responded, which could even result in a resolution of the petitioner's complaint. Take the following example of a petitioner complaining about the quality of the apartment that his family had been allocated. In April 1986, this family received notice that a five-room apartment had become available for them to move into. But upon examination of the apartment, they found that it was in such "catastrophic condition" that the subfloor had to be completely redone in two of the rooms. The petitioner undertook some of the renovations himself, including painting the entire apartment, but at the time of his letter to the mayor of Eisenhüttenstadt, in June, he and his family had been waiting over four weeks for the flooring to be replaced and a new gas oven to be installed.³³ Though this handwritten letter was missing a resume-like recitation of socialist credentials, the author did go into more detail about his family:

We have five children, all boys. The oldest is seventeen years old and already goes to work at the industrial meat packing plant (*Fleischkombinat*). The other boys are twelve, seven, six, and three years old. The seventeen-year-old boy currently sleeps in the same room as the seven year old, but he has to get up every day at 4:00 a.m., and the seven year old gets woken up every time. The boy should start school this year, but thanks to the constant waking up, at this point in time he is constantly anxious. We have a four-room apartment. How long will this go on???³⁴

The underlined text was emphasized in the original in two different colors of ink. The line "We have a four-room apartment" was underlined in red, as were many of the words and phrases describing the subpar condition of the apartment on the first page of the letter (not quoted here). There were also administrative markings in red in the header of the original letter, suggesting that the city official who read it used the red ink to emphasize important information. All the other underlined text is in the same color ink as the letter itself, including the title of the letter, which simply reads "Eingabe!"

It is noteworthy, then, what the author of the petition chose to underline: the number of children, the age and working status of the eldest child, and an exasperated plea punctuated with three question marks. Though he did not go into as much detail about his work history as the first letter writer, the petitioner nonetheless effectively communicated that he and his family were contributing to society by raising socialist citizens. And if their success in doing so was ever in doubt, the fact that their eldest son was already engaged in labor outside the home would surely lay those doubts to rest. In this case, there is evidence that the petition worked. In the marginalia on the first page of the letter, an employee from the mayor's office wrote that "the family should be helped immediately," and a subsequent correspondence from the Housing Office confirmed that the necessary repairs would be complete by the end of July. Here, we have confirmation of the possibility of successful collaboration between the state and its workers. This petitioner was met with a responsive administration that sought to provide improvements in his family's material circumstances, and the state had invested in the possibility of future collaboration with this petitioner's five children, who represented the next generation of committed socialist subjects.

As this small sampling of petitions makes abundantly clear, residents of Eisenhüttenstadt were at times dissatisfied with the provision of everyday goods and services in their city. This ostensible preoccupation with material circumstances should not, however, come as a surprise given that, by the 1980s, the regime had rested its legitimacy so firmly on the promise of creating real-existing socialism. Indeed, the citizens who participated in the ritual of petition writing saw themselves as good socialist citizens, as they went to great lengths to establish in their letters. In other words, the act of writing a petition could be interpreted as part of the socialist subject's fulfillment of their contract with the regime, evincing their commitment to improving the entire system, in addition to their own specific circumstances. This reading of petitions is important for teasing out the various trajectories of socialism as the *Wende* began to unfold in earnest because it sets a precedent for one of the ways Eisenhüttenstädters came to express their mix of frustration, ambivalence, and cautious optimism about the possible futures of a socialist state.

Eingaben in Eisenhüttenstadt during the Wende

In the summer and early autumn of 1989, against a backdrop of growing domestic discontent and an acute crisis of outmigration throughout the GDR,

residents in Eisenhüttenstadt went about their business more or less as usual. The regional newspaper, *Neuer Tag*, contained no mention of the nearly thirty-nine thousand GDR citizens who had fled the country in the first half of 1989 alone, or of domestic dissident movements that were steadily growing in popularity.³⁵ Instead, *Neuer Tag* continued its dutiful reporting of national and regional stories—carefully in keeping with what was politically permissible in the centralized press—and local events of interest, such as the construction of new apartment units, or the delayed opening of a fresh flower stand.³⁶

However, after the October 25, 1989, meeting described in the opening pages of this chapter, democratic discussions bloomed throughout the city, helped along by the parallel relaxation of censorship in the regional newspaper. Moreover, the openness of the dialogue during the inaugural October 25 meeting set the tone for citizens' subsequent petitions and letters to the editors. In its reporting in the coming weeks, *Neuer Tag* shared residents' perspectives from across the political spectrum. Whether the editors were hedging their bets to see how developments in the growing democratic protest movement would play out or whether what they chose to publish represented an accurate sampling of citizens' opinions is hard to say. Either way, readers in support of and critical of the regime would find something to their liking in the pages of the local newspaper.

In addition to the encouraging calls to action and the frustrated castigations of the regime, Eisenhüttenstädtters also continued to write *Eingaben* with complaints about a range of everyday issues like shortages and overdue repairs. Notably, of the 171 letters that *Neuer Tag* received between October 9 and November 8, the most common source of published criticism in the newspaper remained dissatisfaction with material conditions in the GDR.³⁷ In other words, during October and November of 1989, even against the backdrop of increasingly overt political agitation throughout the rest of the country, Eisenhüttenstadt residents continued to openly express their frustration with the regime for falling short of providing its promised high standard of living. What does it say about how Eisenhüttenstädtters imagined the future of their city and their state that many of their complaints remained centered around inadequacies in their material circumstances? For one, their expression of grievances presumed the continued existence of a socialist present even while that possibility seemed to grow less likely in other regions of the GDR. More interesting than this continuity in content, perhaps, is how residents proposed that these insufficiencies be remedied; namely, with continued collaboration between themselves and the state.

Despite the growing political uncertainties and ongoing material dissatisfactions, Eisenhüttenstädters' pre-*Wende* willingness to take part in the process of showing up for socialism was now evident in residents' commitment to *reforming* socialism during the *Wende* as well. In a letter to the editor of *Neuer Tag* published on October 28, 1989, a disgruntled mother took the local administration to task for the abysmal assortment of material goods available in some of the smaller villages surrounding Eisenhüttenstadt. It deserves reproduction in full:

Dear editorial staff,

It is a constant refrain: work, work, and once again, work. Naturally, I'm in support of the idea that everyone must give their best. But nothing comes of it! I work in the state-owned operation ZBE "Fresh Eggs" in Wriggen. And every quarter we produce above our target.

But I would like to actually be able to buy something in the store for my hard-earned money. I have three children, and in my opinion, they have every right to get some vitamins once in a while. For us the only chance of that is with apples. Bananas, oranges, etc.? None to speak of. If you head out to the villages or other small cities, there's hardly anything. Where is everything, then, if everyone is working?

On page 3 of the *Neuer Tag* article from Saturday, October 21, you responded to the question of a Mrs. Höfemeier saying that "in any case, it didn't get to the heart of the matter." Tell me whether this gets to the heart of the matter: I can drive to Berlin if I want. The chests and shelves are always filled with rich offerings, for example, juice for children. Here we can only get children's juice by allocation (if there's any at all to be had), and in Berlin there are crates of it. I could burst into tears at any moment. You try splitting two bottles of juice between three children. You must go into the villages and report truthfully on how things are here. Without advance notice.

In closing, I would like to share with you that my husband and I have also considered whether or not we should apply for exit visas (*Ausreise-anträge*). But we're still hoping that something will finally change . . . or will it?

With pleasant greetings,

Martina Schwarz, Bliedorf, 1311, Dorfstraße No. 69³⁸

Following the typical formula of an *Eingabe*, Schwarz first established her own socialist credibility by identifying herself as a contributing member

of the working class before launching into her complaint about the consistent shortages facing rural residents. Schwarz's commitment to the socialist state was at least twofold: she was both a worker and a mother of three, trying her best to raise her children up to be healthy adults who might in turn contribute to socialism themselves. This latter task certainly fell more strongly onto her shoulders than her husband's; despite the legal equality between men and women guaranteed by the East German constitution, mothers typically experienced the so-called double burden (*Doppelbelastung*) of their responsibilities as workers and as the spouse performing the bulk of parenting and other domestic labor.³⁹ Even with the double burden, Schwarz had fulfilled her side of the social contract with the GDR, and she highlighted the state's failure to reciprocate. Schwarz's desperation is palpable throughout the letter, and she even admitted that these conditions were enough to make her family consider applying for exit visas.⁴⁰

Despite Schwarz's harsh criticisms and threat of departure, we still cannot categorize her letter as definitive proof that the GDR had entered the so-called antechamber of collapse. After all, Schwarz never advocated, anticipated, or even imagined regime collapse. Rather, in the last line of her letter, she wrote, "We're still hoping that something will finally change." In other words, she was still waiting for socialism, but with a healthy dose of skepticism, as her addendum of "or will it" makes clear. Though the onus was firmly on the state to finally uphold its end of the bargain, Schwarz had still not completely foreclosed upon this possibility even in the final days of October. In this way, Schwarz embodied just one of many socialist subjectivities in this moment—one caught between frustration, exhaustion, and a tentative hope—and in so doing, she expressed one potential trajectory of a socialist future that was still possible in late October 1989.

Schwarz was not alone in waiting for change in Eisenhüttenstadt. But other petitioners were even more explicit in their desire to be a part of how that change was accomplished. On November 7, 1989, *Neuer Tag* published a letter to the editor from L. Fabich, writing on behalf of a housing community (*Hausgemeinschaft*) in *Wohnkomplex VII Süd*. For over a year, Fabich and neighbors had petitioned the municipal council to spruce up the area in front of the newly constructed housing complex. Fabich remarked how "moms have to push their strollers through the crud." Beyond the potential for injury, this contradicted the image of a "clean city" that the administration sought to project. While Fabich and other members of the housing community were tired of being ignored, they were equally ready to take responsibility. "As a housing community we are by all means prepared to clean and maintain the area" if the municipal council took the first steps.⁴¹

The petition shows how many Eisenhüttenstädters envisioned the changes needed in their city would still be accomplished in collaboration with the state. Moreover, this example runs counter to many other East Germans' demands in early November 1989, reminding us once again of the "queer time" that Eisenhüttenstädters inhabited.

In addition to letters to the editor, *Neuer Tag* published reports of the various open forum discussions held throughout the city in late October and November 1989. Here, too, Eisenhüttenstadt residents showcased their willingness to work with city officials for the improvement of their city. For example, on November 2, 1989, the mayor of Eisenhüttenstadt, Ottokar Wundersee, conducted a small dialogue where residents were encouraged to offer their criticism and suggestions. "Over thirty residents took the opportunity to speak convincingly about a subject they were passionate about . . . namely, renovations to the central square, the heart of Eisenhüttenstadt."⁴² The discussion developed into a "lively experience exchange, a step on the way of our revolutionary transformation," the author assessed. On the one hand, renovating the city center might seem superfluous compared with the rapid development of opportunities for expressing even more critical opinions, perhaps suggesting that Eisenhüttenstadt residents prioritized their overall standard of living above concerns about their civil rights. On the other hand, this meeting could also be read as evidence of residents' commitment to their city and community. Indeed, the very assumption that residents would completely cast aside their everyday concerns for more abstract political and civil rights is very much rooted in a more Western-centric conception of human rights that the East German state had eschewed for decades.

Ultimately, the elements of Eisenhüttenstädters' engagement with the state in the realm of material provisioning were highly transferrable to other contexts as well, as would become evident in the months and years to come. But an early indication of this enthusiasm and willingness came during an October 29, 1989 meeting conducted between the city council (*Stadtverordnetenversammlung*) and steelworkers, which was held in the cafeteria of the company school. Tasked with opening this dialogue, local pastor Joachim Rinn declared, "We have the chance to make something different, and we want to grab that chance and make an attempt to begin new."⁴³ Judging by the interjections, whistles, boos, and applause for both sides, in just one room there existed a plurality of competing evaluations of the past, as well as visions for the future. Despite this conflict, the editor wrote, "We stayed in the cafeteria of the *Betriebsschule*. Even when it was difficult and some

questions caused personal pain, there's no getting around it if one wants answers. And that's what we really must learn."⁴⁴ In their petitions throughout the 1980s, Eisenhüttenstädters had already honed the skills that would help them to continue to show up for the state and ensure that the state continued to show up for them, even in the face of democratic renewal and political uncertainty.

The above examples indicate that throughout the late autumn of 1989, Eisenhüttenstadt residents remained concerned with the deterioration of their material circumstances. The beautification of their city and the proper outfitting of supermarket shelves at times took up more space in their agitation efforts than advocating for expanded democratic freedoms or a reduction in travel restrictions. One reading of this pattern would be to dismiss Eisenhüttenstadt residents as politically apathetic, but this would be overly simplistic. For one, Eisenhüttenstädters' ongoing discontent with their living standards was very much a by-product of life in a regime that had rested its legitimacy so firmly on material progress. Moreover, as Mor Geller poignantly puts it in chapter 9 of this volume, "[we] should not let our knowledge of the GDR's looming fate blur the fact that," in this case, above all, *citizens* "continued to believe that improvement was possible," demonstrating their openness to the prospect of collaborating with the state to "shape socialism to their liking."⁴⁵ Put differently, to dismiss Eisenhüttenstädters' range of expectations for the ways the socialist state still might show up for them anachronistically projects the ultimate outcome of the *Wende* back onto socialist subjects who, in late October and early November 1989, still envisioned many possible trajectories of socialism.

Conclusion

Taken together, these excerpts from Eisenhüttenstädters' petitions, letters of complaint to the local newspaper, and statements at various open forums from the late 1980s through the first months of the *Wende* sometimes confirm scholars' interpretations about the role that *Eingaben* played in East German society during late-stage socialism. *Eingaben* were used to air grievances and express frustration or draw attention to the mismanagement of the socialist system's allocation of goods and services, among other things. In penning more *Eingaben* than ever before, however, Eisenhüttenstädters also accentuated their impressive track record of showing up for the socialist society and economy. Their willingness to use the institutionalized practice of writing

Eingaben shows some degree of belief in the system—or else, Eisenhüttenstadt, too, might have looked more like Leipzig or Berlin, where East Germans took to the streets to make their dissatisfactions known.

In this regard, this chapter offers one entry point in revisiting socialist subjectivities from the periphery and taking seriously those East Germans who showed up to work within the system to make strides toward achieving real-existing socialism, even as the system as a whole came under increasing pressure. Moreover, in removing *Eingaben* from the “antechamber of collapse” and emphasizing the many contingencies in the process of German unification, we make space for the voices of those East Germans inhabiting queer temporalities—who saw the trajectory of socialism stretching indefinitely into the future. Only by acknowledging that unification was not a foregone conclusion can we begin to more fully understand the range of East Germans’ experiences of the *post*-socialist transition that was, indeed, eventually to come.

Notes

1. “Ein zweites Forum vor der Tür, um niemanden nach Hause zu schicken,” *Neuer Tag* 38:253 (October 27, 1989), 3.

2. Klaus Käthner, “Dialog im Saal und vor der Rathausstür,” *Neuer Tag* 38:253 (October 27, 1989), 8.

3. “Ein zweites Forum vor der Tür,” *Neuer Tag*, 3.

4. Käthner, “Dialog im Saal und vor der Rathausstür,” *Neuer Tag*, 8.

5. “Ein zweites Forum vor der Tür,” *Neuer Tag*, 3.

6. Jennifer V. Evans, “Introduction: Why Queer German History?,” *German History* 34, no. 3 (2016): 376.

7. By Monday, October 23, 1989, protestors in Leipzig numbered an estimated 225,000, and by the following Monday this had risen to an estimated 350,000. See table in Konrad H. Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 47.

8. In the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall and eventual dissolution of the GDR, scholars sought to understand both *why* and *how* this previously unimaginable event had come to pass rapidly. See Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Klaus-Dietmar Henke, ed., *Revolution und Vereinigung 1989/90: Als in Deutschland die Realität die Phantasie überholte* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009); and Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, *Endspiel: Die Revolution von 1989 in der DDR* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2015). At times, however, the looming caesura of 1989 runs the risk of obscuring the regional and temporal variability of the *Wende* throughout the GDR. See Mary Elise Sarotte, *The Accidental Opening of the Berlin Wall* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

9. Felix Mühlberg, “Vorwort,” in *Ham wa nich! Beschwerden Eisenhüttenstädter und Gubener Bürger aus der DDR-Endzeit*, Part II, ed. Erich Opitz (Eisenhüttenstadt:

Bürgervereinigung “Fürstenberg (Oder)” e.V., 2008), iii–iv; and Ned Richardson-Little, *The Human Rights Dictatorship: Socialism, Global Solidarity and Revolution in East Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 46–47.

10. Paul Betts, “Socialism, Social Rights, and Human Rights: The Case of East Germany,” *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism and Development* 3, no. 3 (2012): 419. Erich Opitz, *Ham wa nich!*, i–ii.

11. See Betts, “Socialism, Social Rights, and Human Rights,” 408–412. By the 1970s, the GDR had built a “new tradition of human rights” upon Marxist principles in combination with select external reference points, including the United Nations’s 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as it did not impose a Western conception of abstract civil rights like many other Cold War–era human rights declarations. For example, Article 11 of the 1966 covenant declared that “the States Parties to the present Covenant Recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.” Office of the High Commissioner, “International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,” United Nations Human Rights, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx> (accessed February 24, 2021).

12. *Protokoll der Verhandlung des VIII. Parteitages der SED*, 15. bis 19. Juni 1971 (Berlin (East): 1971), II: 296, quoted in André Steiner, *The Plans That Failed: An Economic History of the GDR*, trans. Ewald Osers (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 143.

13. While previously the GDR had demanded its citizens actively work toward “building up socialism,” by 1971 and beyond, in the words of Eli Rubin, “the state was going to give workers a taste of utopia in the here and now, in the hopes that they would stay loyal to the vision of an ultimate socialist utopia.” Eli Rubin, *Amnesiopolis: Modernity, Space, and Memory in East Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 28.

14. The economy of East Germany experienced repeated strains following the failed economic reforms of the 1960s. This scenario was exacerbated by the oil shocks crisis of 1973. For the remainder of the decade and into the 1980s, this convergence of fluctuating fuel prices, the inability to meet domestic production quotas, and rising foreign debts made it difficult for the East German regime to deliver on the earlier promises of “real-existing socialism.” For a discussion of the effects of the 1970s oil crises on economic and political reactions in the GDR see André Steiner, “‘Common Sense Is Necessary’: East German Reactions to the Oil Crises of the 1970s,” in *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung* 39, no. 4 (2014): 321–350. For a concise overview of the economic history of the GDR, see Steiner’s *The Plans That Failed*.

15. For one example of this interpretation see Jonathan R. Zatlin, “Ausgaben und Eingaben: Das Petitionsrecht und der Untergang der DDR,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 45, no. 10 (1997): 902–917.

16. For several accounts on the *Wende* and dissolution of the GDR that deftly balance the long-term internal structural challenges, changing international circumstances, and shorter-term domestic pressures, see Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity*; and Hans-Hermann Hertle, *Der Fall der Mauer: Die unbeabsichtigte Selbstauflösung des SED-Staates* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1996).

17. Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis: Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999), 11.

18. Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 284.

19. Felix Mühlberg, author of the definitive monograph on both the institutional history and cultural practice of *Eingabe*, has identified five rhetorical features that consistently appear in these petitions: assigning roles, self-presentation, reference to norms and standards, evidence of necessity, and threat. Mühlberg argues that over the decades these rhetorical practices developed into nearly standard set rules for composing an *Eingabe*. These features are certainly recognizable in the local Eisenhüttenstadt *Eingaben* discussed in this chapter. But I should emphasize, as Mühlberg does, that despite the formulaic construction, petitioners believed on some level in the regime's ability to change, or they would not have invested so much time and effort in expressing their wishes, criticism, and challenges. Felix Mühlberg, *Bürger, Bitten und Behörden: Geschichte der Eingabe in der DDR* (Berlin: Karl Dietz Verlag, 2004), 198–245.

20. Jack Halberstam defines “queer” as “nonnormative logics of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time.” See Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 6.

21. Several excellent German-language books on the founding and development of Eisenhüttenstadt before the *Wende* include Andreas Ludwig, *Eisenhüttenstadt: Wandel einer industriellen Gründungsstadt in fünfzig Jahren* (Potsdam: Brandenburgische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2000); Jenny Richter, Heike Förster, and Ulrich Lakemann, *Stalinstadt—Eisenhüttenstadt. Von der Utopie zur Gegenwart. Wandel industrieller, regionaler und sozialer Strukturen in Eisenhüttenstadt* (Marburg: Schürin, 1997); Ruth May, *Planstadt Stalinstadt. Ein Grundriß in der frühen DDR—Aufgesucht in Eisenhüttenstadt* (Dortmund: Institut für Raumplanung Universität Dortmund, 1999); and Elisabeth Knauer-Romani, *Eisenhüttenstadt und die Idealstadt des 20. Jahrhundert* (Weimar: VDG, 2000).

22. For a good overview of East German television consumption habits, see Heather Gumbert, “Split Screens? Television in East Germany, 1952–1989,” in *Mass Media, Culture and Society in Twentieth-Century Germany*, ed. Karl Christian Führer and Corey Ross (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 146–164.

23. Steiner, *The Plans That Failed*, 144.

24. Christa Hübner, Herbert Nicolaus, and Manfred Teresiak, *20 Jahre Marzahn: Chronik eines Berliner Bezirkes* (Berlin: Heimatsmuseum Marzahn, 1998), 10. This language of “solving the housing problem as a social problem by 1990” was repeated consistently in the language of SED resolution and determinations from the 1970s to the 1980s. See also Rubin, *Amnesiopolis*.

25. Stadtarchiv Eisenhüttenstadt, RS 07.05.1980, Abteilung Wohnungspolitik und Wohnungswirtschaft, “Grundrichtung der Wohnungspolitik und Wohnungswirtschaft im Stadtkreis Eisenhüttenstadt 1981–1985” (n.d.), 1.

26. Stadtarchiv Eisenhüttenstadt, “Wohnkomplex VI,” in *Dokumentation. Entwicklung der Wohnkomplexe I bis VII*, 2.

27. Stadtarchiv Eisenhüttenstadt, “Wohnkomplex VII,” in *Dokumentation. Entwicklung der Wohnkomplexe I bis VII*, 3.

28. Stadtarchiv Eisenhüttenstadt, RS 04.11.1980, W. Nogat, 1. Stellvertreter des Oberbürgermeisters, "Analyse über die Arbeit mit den Vorschlägen, Hinweise, Anliegen und Beschwerden der Bürger für den Zeitraum 1.11.1979–31.10.1980" (n.d.), 3–4.

29. Anonymous Eisenhüttenstadt resident, "Eingabe: Antrag auf eine 4-Raum-Fernheizungswohnung," an der Rat der Stadt Eisenhüttenstadt, Oberbürgermeister, August 30, 1988, in *Ham wa leider nich! Beschwerden Eisenhüttenstädter und Gubener Bürger aus der DDR-Endzeit*, Teil II, ed. Erich Opitz (Eisenhüttenstadt: Bürgervereinigung "Fürstenberg (Oder)" e.V., 2008), 278.

30. Anonymous Eisenhüttenstadt resident, "Eingabe: Antrag auf eine 4-Raum-Fernheizungswohnung," 278.

31. The dual concern over harnessing women's productive capacities in both the economy and society had characterized East German reproductive and natalist policies since the 1950s. See Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

32. Anonymous Eisenhüttenstadt resident, "Eingabe: Antrag auf eine 4-Raum-Fernheizungswohnung," 279.

33. Anonymous Eisenhüttenstadt resident, "Eingabe: Instandsetzung der Wohnung," an der Rat der Stadt Eisenhüttenstadt, Oberbürgermeister, 11 June 1986, in Opitz, *Ham wa leider nich!*, Teil II, 83–84.

34. Anonymous Eisenhüttenstadt resident, "Eingabe: Instandsetzung der Wohnung," 84. Emphasis in original.

35. Michael Richter, *Die friedliche Revolution: Aufbruch zur Demokratie in Sachsen 1989/90, Band 1* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 80.

36. See, for example, Klaus Käthner, "7000 neuen Wohnungen," *Neuer Tag* 38:117 (May 20, 1989), 8; Klaus Käthner, "Schritt für Schritt auf neuen Wegen," *Neuer Tag* 38:191 (August 15, 1989), 8; and Christa Kraft, "NT im Leserauftrag," *Neuer Tag* 38:206 (September 1, 1989), 6.

37. "Lesbarer und kritischer, doch immer noch zu zahm," *Neuer Tag* 38:263 (November 8, 1989), 8.

38. Martina Schwarz, "Post an uns: Hoffen auf Veränderung," *Neuer Tag* 38:254 (October 28, 1989), 3.

39. For a deft examination of both *de jure* and *de facto* claims of equality in divided Germany, see Alexandria N. Ruble, *Entangled Emancipation: Women's Rights in Cold War Germany* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2023).

40. This strategy of obliquely threatening emigration to the West in a letter about another subject altogether grew in popularity throughout the 1980s, as Fulbrook observes in *The People's State*, 278. For the petitions coming out of Eisenhüttenstadt and the surrounding rural areas, however, the threat of flight to the West was not so commonplace.

41. L. Fabich, "Bilder, die nich helten," *Neuer Tag* 38:262 (November 7, 1989), 8.

42. Christa Kraft, "Ein Maßnahmenkatalog zur Stadtverordnetenversammlung," *Neuer Tag* 38:259 (November 3, 1989), 6.

43. "Dort mitreden, wo man auch mitreden kann," *Neuer Tag* 38:257 (November 1, 1989), 8.

44. "Dort mitreden," *Neuer Tag*, 8.

45. The interpretation presented in this section dovetails with Mor Geller's anal-

ysis of reception polling among East German filmgoers. Like audience members who chose to engage with officials' requests for honest feedback, Eisenhüttenstädters' *Eingaben* and open letters to the editor in October and November 1989 (and beyond) showcased a range of rhetorical strategies for criticizing their local authorities and the regime more broadly, both conforming to and departing from normative authoritative speech norms. See Mor Geller, "Research, Subjects: Reception Polling and 'Multiple Socialism' in Honecker's East Germany," in *Socialist Subjectivities: Queering East Germany under Honecker*, ed. Scott Harrison, Jeff Hayton, and Katharine White (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2025), 201.

Research, Subjects *Reception Polling and ‘Multiple Socialisms’ in Honecker’s East Germany*

Mor Geller

The screening of Heiner Carow’s 1973 film *Die Legende von Paul und Paula* has become a part of East German cultural mythology almost as much as the film itself. As it goes, Carow’s controversial melodrama was nearly shelved, but Erich Honecker, who saw the audience’s enthusiastic reaction to the film, allowed it to be screened as planned. Although this story has some variations, its core remains the same: the film’s unusually high traction with the people saved it from sharing the fate of tens of other films produced by the East German film company DEFA (*Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft; German Film Corporation*).¹ This was indeed an anomalous incident; nonetheless, it is telling of a moment in East German history in which popular demand had the power to shape cultural policy. This happened on a regular basis even in the case of less iconic films through the German Democratic Republic’s (GDR) widespread use of reception surveys, which became established right around the time of *Paul und Paula*’s release.

The GDR is commonly known as one of Cold War Eastern Europe’s most notorious surveillance states and is immediately linked in the popular imagination with its secret police (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit; MfS* or Stasi). Therefore, its utilization of public opinion polls might be understood as a mere “continuation of surveillance by other means.” However, this chapter argues that such polls represented a queer mode of communication in that they challenged these norms and allowed for new interpretations of East German civic participation. As I suggest, the ambiguity surrounding this method—that stood at the crossroads of surveillance, survey, and petition—meant that it was interpreted by participants in creative and unexpected

ways that undermined the state's top-down power dynamics and allowed a multiplicity of voices to break the surface. The KINO-DDR (Cinema GDR) research project, conducted by the Leipzig-based Central Institute for Youth Research (*Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung*; ZIJ) between the late 1960s and the late 1980s, was intended to use the knowledge it gathered on moviegoers' cinematic preferences to help improve and stabilize the GDR's struggling film industry. However, in practice, it functioned as an interactive line of communication between moviegoers and pollsters that invited them to actively participate in the production of knowledge and culture and express their subjectivities within the constraints of the GDR's rigid political structure. Thus, their examination offers a unique window into the interaction between various agents acting within East German society—film professionals, pollsters, politicians, and ordinary citizens—as they deliberated the purposes of and expectations from popular media. By considering the communicative potential of opinion polls, we can see how the polls were used by pollsters and participants alike as a platform to explore their thoughts, desires, and imaginations not only of cinema but also of their present and future lives within socialism, whether they voiced them explicitly or not.

“In Search of Audiences”: The ZIJ's Quest for Popular Taste

Following its birth in the immediate aftermath of World War II, DEFA had been tasked with supplying the population with works of culture, art, and entertainment and to instill in viewers a sense of class consciousness, desired behavioral norms, and identification with socialist ideals.² However, throughout its forty-year-long existence, this twofold purpose faced relentless challenges from within and beyond the GDR. Internal limitations included strict censorship of the production process, the surveillance of artists, and incidents such as the notorious Eleventh Plenum of the Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*; SED) Central Committee in 1965, in which the year's entire film crop was banned. External challenges were mostly related to Western culture, which was available in the GDR through both official and unofficial channels. Already in the 1940s and 1950s, the state “hemorrhaged” thousands of viewers each night to screenings of American films in West Berlin's border cinemas, and after the construction of the Berlin Wall, radio signals replaced them as the primary source of light entertainment.³ Despite a bumpy start, television sets began flooding the East German market in the mid-1960s, and their presence in local households grew from 69 percent of all households in 1970 to a staggering 94 percent by 1986.⁴ At

the same time, moviegoing figures plummeted from 14 annual visits in 1960 to 5.4 in 1970, and finally to a mere 4.8 in 1980.⁵ As Rosemary Stott claims, most of these cinema visits were dedicated to Western film imports, entertainment films, and the occasional East German blockbuster (such as the aforementioned *Paul und Paula*).⁶

This had severe implications for the GDR's film industry. Firstly, high attendance was necessary to cover the high costs of film production and foreign film acquisitions.⁷ Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the lack of viewers put DEFA's mission—and the propagation of socialism itself—at risk. Television's growing dominance was an especially large threat because it could not be regulated as effectively as cinema. While film production and acquisition were complex processes, bound to bureaucratic mechanisms of approval and censorship, television traveled freely and could be received by most East Germans, whose tastes had been already largely shaped by “exposure to lowbrow, but visually pleasing American cinema.”⁸ Efforts to prevent this, such as the Free German Youth's (*Freie Deutsche Jugend*; FDJ) signal-jamming activity in 1965, ultimately failed and the consumption of Western television was decriminalized in 1973, albeit frowned upon.⁹

As audiences voted with their feet, the state's cultural administration sought new ways to lure potential viewers away from Western television shows and into movie theaters. A promising solution was found in the newly established institutes for public opinion polling, which only in the mid-1960s became a legitimate tool for studying social trends in East Germany. In the GDR, like in most of the Eastern Bloc, the social sciences were considered incompatible with the socialist state because they were deemed “capitalist” and “bourgeois.”¹⁰ Unfortunately, other methods—namely surveillance by the Stasi—were unable to achieve the overarching levels of information-gathering required for accessing the “population's moods and opinions” (*Stimmungen und Meinungen der Bevölkerung*).¹¹ Thus, in light of continued failures, “social engineering” and consumer research became acceptable in the effort to dismantle capitalism with tools of its own making.

The ZIJ, which conducted the KINO surveys, was founded in 1966 by youth social psychologist Walter Friedrich as part of the GDR's 1960s “social science boom.” Its importance lay in the distinguishable position of youth as both a necessary social group and an internal enemy, and it held surveys on a wide array of topics, including but not limited to sexuality, participation in youth movements, and media consumption.¹² Although cinema, in its essence, was not exclusively a youth pastime, the KINO research project was nonetheless carried out by the ZIJ given the high percentage of youth

among the general moviegoing population: according to the institute's statistics, between 70 percent and 75 percent of all viewers in the GDR were twenty-five years old or younger.¹³ The surveys had a dual goal: first, to identify and analyze the cultural preferences and expectations of East German viewers to improve local productions to the audience's satisfaction; and second, to increase engagement with socialist cultural products by uncovering "the social relevance, social resonance, and personality-forming value of the socialist contemporary film."¹⁴ This corresponded to the ZIJ's higher scientific mission to influence public opinion for the sake of "socialist development of the personality" in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism.¹⁵ In other words, in the face of the chronic crises that had plagued the East German film industry since its inception, the Ministry of Culture (*Ministerium für Kultur*; MfK), which ordered the research, envisioned this undertaking as a way to use popular culture to stabilize the state mechanism. By learning what made cinema attractive to viewers, it hoped to improve DEFA's future productions and thus contribute to the population's morale and support for state socialism.¹⁶

The KINO project's reports and surveys can be split into two categories: those aimed at collecting and analyzing reactions to a single production and meta-reports that either gathered the results of many single-film surveys or asked questions about broader aspects of moviegoing. The responses were then demographically segmented according to age, gender, occupation, and social group—for example, members of the intelligentsia, as opposed to skilled laborers (*Facharbeiter*). This was intended to help identify the "true audiences" of films,¹⁷ and the researchers emphasized that "the awareness to the different demands from films is a necessary prerequisite for age-specific programming in our movie theaters."¹⁸ This "personality-oriented" (*persönlichkeitsorientiert*) approach, which the ZIJ championed in all its projects, diverged from the earlier institutional perception of East German citizenry and viewership as monolithic.¹⁹ More importantly, it reflected a new understanding that in order to forge a "socialist personality," the state would first need to acknowledge the existence of 'multiple socialisms' that did not necessarily adhere to the official version imagined by authorities.

Over the course of twenty years, the ZIJ's polls and methodology evolved from sporadic and not-quite-established inquiries to precise analyses of the most minute details, such as the effectiveness of various films and genres, the influence of physical conditions of movie theaters on audience experience, viewers' expectations from the cinematic experience, and moviegoers' relationship to other forms of art and entertainment.²⁰ In addition,

at least since the late 1970s, viewers were asked to rate their opinion of the artistic means (*Gestaltungsmittel*) used in each film, such as the acting, dialogue, camerawork, and music, to determine their influence on the overall cinematic experience.²¹ Contrary to the first impression it might give, this was not only instrumental: the researchers who conducted the polls were situated between the authorities and the public and had individual objectives of their own. For some of them, the “pure” study of reception mechanisms was a sufficient motivation in and of itself. For instance, the project’s head researcher, Dieter Wiedemann, who later became president of the Konrad Wolf Film University in Babelsberg, saw himself first and foremost as a film scholar, and he indeed began his training in traditional film and theater studies only to receive later a serendipitous offer to transfer to a newly established program for reception studies.²² In an interview I conducted with him in September 2021, he proclaimed that his main target in the KINO project was to “explain artistic communications processes through the use of scientific means”—an endeavor he saw as intrinsic to socialism and the improvement of East Germany.²³

Film scholars led very different lives from ordinary moviegoers: during their time at the ZIJ, the pollsters went on film-purchasing trips abroad, attended exclusive screenings of Western productions, and kept in contact with international media scholars. The pollsters’ position as low- and mid-level functionaries allowed them to inquire about specific issues also for the “pure” sake of science and leave the political implications for higher-up functionaries.²⁴ Wiedemann’s background also helped him form close contacts in the film industry, and he was well acquainted with prominent figures such as director Herrmann Zschoche and screenwriter Ulrich Plenzdorf, whose films he surveyed for the ZIJ.²⁵ However, the work at the institute was, in a sense, a double-edged sword. In addition to these rare and exciting opportunities, it was very secretive and politically sensitive, and such associations with filmmakers or foreign scholars were at the same time frowned upon. On one occasion, Wiedemann was forbidden from publishing or appearing in conferences for an entire year after Margot Honecker discovered his research was featured in a West German newspaper.²⁶ This demonstrates the precarious position they held as part empirical scientists, part functionaries, who were committed not only to their discipline and their socialist beliefs but also to a regime that was prone to question their loyalties.

All this makes evident that the KINO survey was not a site of top-down power exertion, but rather a co-productive endeavor situated between the various—and sometimes competing—desires of state officials, media schol-

ars, filmmakers, and audiences.²⁷ But while the different intermediaries are individually identifiable, and therefore can be acknowledged as subjects who both shaped their practice and were shaped by it, the participants remain a nameless mass. Moreover, their voices are rarely given in their own words: most of the data from the KINO surveys is quantitative and thus can hardly illuminate individual subjectivities. However, applying a queer lens to the numbers can uncover certain trends among East German moviegoers as they tried to make sense of this new medium, as well as the tactics they employed while interacting with them.²⁸ Through this, a multiplicity of East German subjectivities and even multiple socialisms come to light.

Standardized Polls, Individual Voices: Socialist Subjects and Participation Tactics

Until recent years, the assumption that survey data from nondemocratic socialist states was “[un]reliable and [un]valid for purposes of historical research” caused researchers to disregard these sources altogether, as Klaus Bachmann and Jens Gieseke noted in their edited volume on the topic.²⁹ Alternatively, such data has been used as a source for statistics on everyday life and opinions in the GDR, without sufficient critique of its productional processes.³⁰ This poses a challenge for historians. On the one hand, the data found in social science polls and reports can provide an invaluable glimpse into ordinary peoples’ opinions on everyday leisure activities and their experiences living in the GDR. On the other, its reliability is tarnished by a belief that responses were coerced, falsified, or both, and if not, then at least produced in an environment shrouded by suspicion and distrust.³¹

The ZIJ pollsters were also aware of this challenge and, realizing that honest comments on the cinema program were vital for improving it, adopted uncommon research methods that ensured participants’ anonymity. Most surveys in the GDR were conducted in the form of either house interviews or “classroom surveys,” in which school classes, FDJ chapters, or factory divisions were handed a survey and expected to respond on the spot while overseen by their supervisors. However, these methods proved themselves quite problematic. People at home were often wary of participating, seeing that their names and addresses were immediately known to the pollsters.³² Furthermore, classroom survey participants sometimes feared the Stasi’s involvement and employed techniques such as ripping out the questionnaire identification number or remarking that they knew fingerprints were being gathered off the form.³³ The ZIJ, which was considered the

GDR's most methodologically advanced social science institute, employed a different method here.³⁴ The KINO project pollsters sought to alleviate participants' fears with the help of on-site theater workers, who distributed the survey forms themselves to minimize contact between audiences and state officials. The forms could then be filled out at home and returned to a fictitious address.³⁵ In addition, the personal interviews conducted in the project's early days were quickly abandoned, and the survey form adamantly reassured participants, "The survey is anonymous. You do not need to state your name." Furthermore, they actively invoked the issue of sincerity in the questionnaires and encouraged potential participants to "contribute to this [study] by responding openly and honestly (*offen und ehrlich*)."³⁶ Wiedemann claims that the ZIJ's tweaks of the polling method resulted in 20 percent more negative responses compared with other surveys, which might mean that the participants were indeed more sincere, as critiques of DEFA's films went against the party line.³⁷

Moreover, the films were required to deliver their subject matter with sincerity, and audiences were frequently asked to rank their agreement with statements such as "The film is overall sincere," "The film depicts [the characters'] problems openly and sincerely," and "The film shows young people as they are in reality."³⁸ This can be understood as an attempt to encourage participants to be more honest by first offering honesty on behalf of the state through cultural products and surveys. Viewers could also write in their own responses if the preformulated ones did not suffice, and when these notions appeared in them, the pollsters sometimes typed them into the final reports with elements of emphasis, like underlining or exclamation points, that demonstrate their centrality.³⁹ With the help of these two parameters, DEFA productions could hypothetically be packed with as many models as possible for wanted and unwanted behaviors, which would also be perceived as honest and realistic enough so as not to be considered didactic.

However, *Ehrlichkeit* was difficult to achieve, and the plea for honest dialogue can also be understood as acknowledging a lack thereof. In addition, the request to reply with complete honesty could have been too puzzling to participants who were used to following authoritative speech norms when interacting with the state officials. Thus, they may have tried to fulfill what they believed the regime *genuinely* expected of them, which was to answer according to established norms.⁴⁰ The survey data contains many discrepancies that raise questions of participants' honesty. For example, many questions required participants to rate their agreement with a certain statement on a scale of 1 to 4. Although pollsters were instructed to avoid sugges-

tive questions “to ensure respondents’ desired psychological impartiality,” guessing the “correct” response could be quite intuitive in many cases.⁴¹ For instance, knowing that all socialist productions underwent censorship and were required to transmit an approved message, audiences tended to approve the films’ main messages almost unanimously (see Figure 8). On the other hand, when requested to identify what this message was, responses differed significantly (see Figure 9). This is not to say that DEFA films were propagandistic or uncritical.⁴² However, such discrepancies expose the set of mutual expectations, or perceived expectations, behind the standardized questions and plain numbers, and the participants’ belief that they should agree with the main message—whatever it may be. In doing this, they consequentially defied the goal of the survey to uncover their “true thoughts,” whether intentionally or not.

A common way to understand the reproduction of such authoritative speech is “speaking Bolshevik,” coined by Stephen Kotkin.⁴³ Some writers have used the concept to show the intersections between speech norms and daily life in the GDR as an instrument for achieving one’s personal goals.⁴⁴ However, as Anna Krylova claims, accepting the idea of “speaking Bolshevik” might lead to a reduction of the socialist subject and its positioning to being merely the analytical opposite of the Western-liberal one, along the lines of binary categories of “indoctrination/resistance, belief/disbelief, faith/cynicism.”⁴⁵ In addition, Ronald Grigor Suny has pointed out that socialists who adopted Soviet ideologies were not a brainwashed crowd but practiced their subjectivity and found personal meaning in different ways.⁴⁶

Alexei Yurchak’s research on this topic in the late socialist USSR offers a fruitful comparison that might further help clarify this point, as well as hint at its possible implications. Borrowing from performance studies and speech act theory, Yurchak claims that the young generation of Soviet citizens during late socialism utilized authoritative speech in ways that “unanchored” and “deterritorialized” it, detaching performative utterances from their constative value and imbuing them with new meaning.⁴⁷ Such uses both upheld the regime and weakened it, as fixed speech norms changed meanings and ceased to represent a factual truth. At the same time, they “inject[ed]’ [the system] with elements of new, unpredictable, imaginative, creative, ‘normal life’ that was not limited to the constative meanings of authoritative discourse” and invited an explosion of multiple socialisms that were open to interpretation.⁴⁸

This analysis maintains Soviet citizens’ agency without falling into binaries or cliché accounts of coercion, subversion, and cynical use of lan-

**Tabelle 4: Bewertung ausgewählter Gestaltungsmittel und
inhaltslicher Gesichtspunkte des Films (in %)**

Das fand ich

	<u>sehr gut</u>	<u>gut</u>	<u>weniger gut</u>	<u>nicht gut</u>
die schauspielerischen Leistungen	56	39	4	1
die Geschichte, die der Film erzählt	51	42	5	1
die Hauptaussage des Films	54	35	10	1
die Gespräche zwischen den Schauspielern	33	55	11	1
Wie die Geschichte des Films in Bildern erzählt wird	34	49	15	2
Die Musik des Films	19!	51	25!	5

Figure 8. Chart from Dieter Wiedemann, "KINO 83: Der Film 'Insel der Schwäne' und sein Publikum" (Leipzig: Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung, 1983), 6 (Credit: Courtesy of SSOAR Open Access Repository)

Tabelle 5: Akzeptanz ausgewählter Aussagen zum Hauptproblem des Films (Angaben in %)

Aussage	sehr treffend	treffend	nur ein wenig	überhaupt nicht
Es geht in erster Linie um die Verdrängung der Probleme junger Menschen, die in eine völlig neue Lebenssituation hineingestellt werden, ohne richtig darauf vorbereitet zu sein.	55	35	10	-1
Es geht in erster Linie um das Verständnis für die unterschiedlichen Vorstellungen von Alteren und der Jugend über die Struktur des Lebens in Neubaugebieten.	35	33	25	2
Es geht hauptsächlich darum, wie man sich mit einer geradlinigen Haltung eine neue Heimat erobert, Anerkennung und wirkliche Freunde findet.	24	44	26	6
Es geht vor allem um die Gestaltung eines komplizierten Konflikts zwischen zwei Jungen.	19	36	41	2

Figure 9. Chart from Dieter Wiedemann, "KINO 83: Der Film 'Insel der Schwäne' und sein Publikum" (Leipzig: Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung, 1983), 8 (Credit: Courtesy of SSOAR Open Access Repository)

guage.⁴⁹ Applying the world of formal discourse to film audiences in the GDR insinuates that not all responses that corresponded to the party line were a mere parroting of formal speech and that not all those that transgressed it were an expression of dissent. Rather, it recognizes the multiplicity of options that stood before participants as they set to fill in the questionnaire. On the one hand, discrepancies such as those detailed above can sufficiently indicate that participants incessantly looked to authoritative speech norms for a reference point—whether because of the questionnaires’ phrasing and structure, respondents’ awareness of the possible risks that participation entailed, or mere confusion. On the other, some (albeit fewer) participants offered written-in responses that added complexity and may suggest a deeper personal engagement. Not once did they diverge from the supposed “party line” and were even spiteful sometimes, for example when viewers named “the exclusively bad reviews in [the youth magazine] *Junge Welt*” as the determining factor in their decision to watch a certain film.⁵⁰ Indeed, the viewers were not a homogeneous group, and the interpretation each gave reflects their attitude not only toward cinema but also toward their understanding of the state and their interactions with it.

Another area that demonstrates this is the inquiry into films’ artistic means. In addition to identifying each film’s main message, the KINO project researchers were interested in the audience’s opinions on the acting, plot, dialogue, cinematography, and music. They then compared the results of each parameter to the overall assessment of each given film to determine how it influenced the audience’s opinion formation (*Meinungsbildung*).⁵¹ However, based on the recurring patterns in the responses and the many discrepancies they exposed, it seems that participants became confused while answering questions on the film’s parameters. For example, a meta-analysis of four films examined in 1983 showed that the three highest-rated components were the acting, main message, and story, which consistently gained over 80 percent “very good” and “good” ratings, combined. On the other hand, the dialogue, music, and cinematography achieved significantly worse results—one film’s music received only 19 percent “very good” votes, another received a similar rating for its cinematography, and a third received 21 percent “very good” votes for dialogue.⁵²

As the pollsters identified correctly, the reactions toward a film’s artistic means could not be isolated from viewers’ overall opinions on the film; however, they were probably too optimistic to assume that lay audiences could independently differentiate between the various means.⁵³ This led them to draw some questionable conclusions. For instance, when Wiedemann com-

pared the low rankings of *Insel der Schwäne's* (Island of Swans, dir. Herrmann Zschoche, 1982) nonnarrative means to the overall enthusiastic opinions on the film, he deduced that "our cinema audience" (*unser . . . Kinopublikum*) is influenced to a greater extent by the film's narrative components rather than by the music or cinematography and thus that the latter play a lesser role in viewers' overall *Meinungsbildung*.⁵⁴ Similarly, given that 93 percent of those who gave a "very good" rating for the film *Schwierig sich zu verloben* (Difficult to Get Engaged, dir. Karl-Heinz Heymann, 1982) also considered its main message "very good" (compared with only 40 percent who thought so of the music), Wiedemann concluded:

These viewers based their overall evaluation primarily on the film's story and less on its artistic realization. Visitors who liked the film less, on the other hand, based their overall evaluation primarily on their criticism of the art: approximately two-thirds of them liked the film's verbal and visual design not so much or not at all!⁵⁵

It is possible, of course, that audiences regularly enjoyed DEFA's stories and rarely enjoyed their art; nevertheless, it is unlikely that they could draw the line so clearly and consistently, and Wiedemann's explanation seems too simple and uncritical. First and foremost, it assumes that audiences watched films in the same manner as film scholars. However, average moviegoers (who were also relatively young) did not go to the theater to appreciate the cinematography or artistic motifs but rather to enjoy an entertaining experience—an expectation they reiterated on numerous occasions.⁵⁶ Second, it assumes that most responses were truthful or that the careful surveying process could even out the inaccuracies.⁵⁷ Focusing again on the gap between the overall approval of these films and their nonnarrative artistic means, an alternative explanation could be that these participants identified the narrative means, and especially the main message, as more crucial to the films' educational mission. Therefore, they ranked them consistently higher than elements such as music and cinematography, which they considered less ideologically urgent and thus safer to criticize. In other words, they might have tried to use their knowledge of authoritative speech norms in the GDR to respond according to what they perceived as the expected response.⁵⁸

Yet it seems that at the same time, participants found ways to quite freely express their critique of either cinema or state policy. They also did not hesitate to declare their love for Western entertainment and asked particularly for quicker acquisition of the most celebrated, entertaining, and spectacular blockbusters (*Spitzenfilme*) from recent years, such as *Star Wars*

and *Hair*.⁵⁹ Among the films voted most popular were mostly Western productions, including *Flatfoot in Egypt* (Italy, 1980), *The Strawberry Statement* (USA, 1970), and films from the *Sinbad* series (UK), while socialist productions from the GDR or the Eastern Bloc usually received much lower rankings.⁶⁰ Moreover, 61 percent of viewers who filled out a survey after watching a DEFA film named a Western production as their favorite film of the year. This inferiority could not be saved even by DEFA's most highly regarded productions, such as *Die Verlobte* (The Fiancée, dir. Günther Rucker and Günter Reisch, 1980)—53 percent of whose viewers still preferred Western films. As pollster Hans-Jörg Stiehler deduced, socialist productions simply could not compete: “The overall attractiveness of cinema is strongly determined by its offer [of films from the] NSW [*Nichtsozialistisches Wirtschaftsgebiet*; non-socialist economic region]!” He explained that this “reflects both the dominance of NSW films in the entertainment sector and the high expectations that DEFA productions face”—and needed to compete with.⁶¹ Thus, even a topic that was expected to arouse more caution still produced invaluable critical data the ZIJ and MfK could not ignore.

Audiences expressed their desire for more agency not only in their expectations of the filming program but also in the act of moviegoing itself. Similar to the method of mandatory classroom surveys, another tool in the GDR's basket was the holding of collective viewing events (*Kollektivveranstaltungen*), in which certain films were visited communally by organized groups of schoolchildren or workers.⁶² The ZIJ's evaluation of this phenomenon shows that audiences disliked this manner of viewing movies, and the stark differences that the report exposed between organized and unorganized audiences strengthened the regime's realization that attracting audiences was more effective than coercing them.⁶³ This seems to have heavily implicated popular opinion about cinema and was reported to dramatically influence the viewing experience. The fact that around 30 percent of the organized viewers liked the film in question “not so much” (*weniger gut*) and “not at all” (*nicht*), as opposed to the non-organized, out of whom only 10 percent voted for “not so much,” shows that although the expectation persisted, many were indeed willing to convey their negative reaction, which we can assume was in this case sincere.⁶⁴

Despite this, audiences knew that they had to regard such topics carefully.⁶⁵ Stiehler, who later became a professor of empirical communications and media research at Leipzig University, wrote in his report on the viewership of Western films that around a third of all distributed questionnaires were never returned, showing moviegoers' relative reluctance to discuss the films.⁶⁶ Among the two thousand or so that were eventually returned,

written-in responses reveal the perceived riskiness of filling out such questionnaires through respondents' careful use of language. One of Stiehler's respondents, a thirty-four-year-old skilled laborer, expressed her wish to see more Western productions while explaining that "we often go to the cinema just to see a film that shows other countries that we usually hear so little about . . . because the way of life is interesting. [The films] can or should, of course, also be socially critical."⁶⁷ Stiehler then concluded that "seen as a whole . . . one cannot speak of an uncritical reception of NSW films by cinema audiences."⁶⁸ However, it is interesting to consider to what extent this reasoning was sincere. To paraphrase Stiehler himself, it is possible that there was an uncritical reception of the responses—or rather, that pollsters also had to phrase their conclusions carefully.⁶⁹

Conclusion

Among the many themes explored by social scientists in the GDR, such as politics, consumerism, and social activities, cinema posed some of the most interesting questions because of its status as both a popular medium and an educational tool. The ZIJ studies did not challenge these sometimes competing functions but rather underscored them by integrating them at a time when GDR cinema culture was becoming the most unrestricted it had been since the SED's Eleventh Plenum in 1965. Corresponding to the realization that "the most effective and long-lasting ideologies are those that resonate in a given population, that answer important questions, give direction to life choices, and bring rewards in this life or an anticipated one,"⁷⁰ the ZIJ studies not only shed light on the entangled relationship between citizens and the state but also blur distinctions between personal tastes and propaganda, as well as those between authority and *Eigen-Sinn* (stubbornness, willfulness, or self-reliance).

Those responsible for the long-term KINO research project expected it to spearhead a change in East German moviegoing habits through the improvement of cinema. The pollsters believed that for DEFA to prevail, the studio's good reputation first had to be established. If they could learn what affected audiences positively and what did not, future DEFA films could be created accordingly and would appeal to previously skeptical audiences.⁷¹ The comprehensive view the ZIJ aimed for was intended to initiate a change in the East German cultural world and to strengthen cinema's attractiveness over other types of media and for hesitant populations. By luring people out of their homes, where many felt safer than in the supervised public sphere, the state wished to bring them to a new cultural "home" that was imbued with socialist ideals yet more attuned to the audience's wishes.⁷²

The ZIJ's involvement and aim at empirically based improvement make evident that official institutions did not idly watch by as the people slipped through their grasp. We should not let our knowledge of the GDR's looming fate blur the fact that state leaders—and citizens alike—continued to believe that improvement was possible. This faith can be seen in Honecker's inexhaustible efforts to satisfy the people's material needs and desires in the face of economic collapse, but also in the more sidelined (and sometimes rather unsophisticated) attempts by the ZIJ cinema department to master the realm of audience reception. In a different way, this belief was also prevalent among citizens who engaged with its request for honest feedback. Especially when they chose to criticize the films—whether explicitly, implicitly, or simultaneously adhering to and challenging norms—audiences proved that they, too, entertained the prospect of shaping socialism to their liking. Even if not all respondents believed this was possible, many at least showed that they did not suspect the polls so much as to merely reiterate an acceptable party line. Those who still chose to follow authoritative speech norms complete this image: even their reluctance can be considered a form of *Eigen-Sinn*, as they practiced their agency to choose whether to participate and how. Thus, despite failing to reach its declared objectives, the KINO project facilitated a new and unexpected communication channel that enabled the voicing of hopes and expectations. Although there were misunderstandings and existing suspicions between the participants and the research team, the records expose the elasticity of authoritative discourse and the multiple ways in which audiences used it for their advantage, regardless of what they perceived this advantage to be.

Notes

1. It might be that the drama surrounding its release also served as a marketing technique. See Joshua Feinstein, *The Triumph of the Ordinary: Depictions of Daily Life in the East German Cinema, 1949–1989* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 211–212; and Sebastian Heiduschke, *East German Cinema: DEFA and Film History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 103.

2. For DEFA's founding declarations, see Seán Allan, "DEFA: An Historical Overview," in *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946–1992*, ed. Seán Allan and John Stanford (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999), 3.

3. Mark Fenemore, *Fighting the Cold War in Post-Blockade, Pre-Wall Berlin: Behind Enemy Lines* (London: Routledge, 2019), 155–156.

4. Michael Meyen and Ute Nawratil, "The Viewers: Television and Everyday Life in East Germany," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 24, no. 3 (2004): 358. Most of these households could also receive signals from the West (except for those in the Tal der Ahnungslosen in the northeast and around Dresden), making the

effort to control media essentially futile and forcing local programmers to adjust. See Claudia Dittmar, "GDR Television in Competition with West German Programming," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 24, no. 3 (2004): 327–328.

5. Rosemary Stott, *Crossing the Wall: The Western Feature Film Import in East Germany* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012), 4, 37, 63–68.

6. Meyen and Nawratil, "The Viewers," 358. For a thorough history of the struggles and controversies over East German television broadcasting, see Claudia Dittmar, *Feindliches Fernsehen: Das DDR-Fernsehen und seine Strategien im Umgang mit dem westdeutschen Fernsehen* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010); and Heather L. Gumbert, *Envisioning Socialism: Television and the Cold War in the German Democratic Republic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014).

7. Stott, *Crossing the Wall*, 4–5. See also Gerd Horten, *Don't Need No Thought Control: Western Culture in East Germany and the Fall of the Berlin Wall* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2020), chap. 2. However, as Stott notes elsewhere, ticket prices were quite low at the time so it was not expected to cover their cost. Rosemary Stott, "The State-Owned Cinema Industry and Its Audience," in *Re-Imagining DEFA: East German Cinema in Its National and Transnational Contexts*, ed. Seán Allan and Sebastian Heiduschke (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 35.

8. Fenemore, *Fighting the Cold War*, 156. Also workers in other fields, such as local theater, named television a dangerous audience magnet. See Esther von Richthofen, *Bringing Culture to the Masses: Control, Compromise and Participation in the GDR* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 73–79.

9. Dittmar, "GDR Television in Competition," 336; and Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 130–131.

10. Heinz Niemann, *Hinterm Zaun: Politische Kultur und Meinungsforschung in der DDR—Die geheimen Berichte an das Politbüro der SED* (Berlin: Edition Ost, 1995), 13, 38; Michael Meyen, "Die Anfänge der empirischen Medien- und Meinungsforschung in Deutschland," *ZA-Information/Zentralarchiv für Empirische Sozialforschung* 50 (2002): 75–78; and Elena I. Bashkirova and Vicki L. Hesli, "Polling and Perestroika," in *Public Opinion and Regime Change: The New Politics of Post-Soviet Societies*, ed. Arthur H. Miller, William M. Reisinger, and Vicki L. Hesli (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 21. This perception was not entirely incorrect, seeing that the "founding fathers" of modern public opinion polling, George Gallup, Archibald Crossly, and Elmo Roper, were professional salespeople before shifting to opinion research, and their methods were strongly influenced by those of market researchers. See Sarah E. Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 103–118.

11. Niemann, *Hinterm Zaun*, 10.

12. See Dorothee Wierling, "Youth as Internal Enemy: Conflicts in the Education Dictatorship of the 1960s," in *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, ed. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 157–182.

13. Elizabeth Prommer, *Kinobesuch im Lebenslauf: Eine historische und medienbiographische Studie* (Konstanz: UVK Medien, 1999), 16.

14. "Ergebnisse einer empirischen Untersuchung zum Film 'Zeit zu leben'" (Berlin: Institut für Filmwissenschaft und Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung, 1970), 2.

It should be noted that the researchers specifically refer here to the genre of *Gegenwartsfilme*, a more accurate translation of which is “contemporary drama” or “films of contemporary life” (see Feinstein, *The Triumph of the Ordinary*, 6). I have chosen to use “contemporary film” because while assessing the *Gegenwartsfilm* might have been the initial goal of the project (the cited survey is only the third the ZIJ conducted), it later reported on films from all genres and paid particular attention to entertainment films.

15. Walter Friedrich and Werner Hennig, eds., *Der Sozialwissenschaftliche Forschungsprozess: Zur Methodologie, Methodik und Organisation Der Marxistisch-leninistischen Sozialforschung* (Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1975), 21.

16. This might also be identified with the East German “social contract,” in which the government pledged to improve aspects of life for the people’s benefit in return for their support for state socialism. See Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, 7, 269–288.

17. See Dieter Wiedemann and Hans-Jörg Stiehler, “Kino 83: DEFA-Spielfilme auf der Suche nach ihrem Publikum” (Leipzig: Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung, 1984), 10, 16.

18. Bernhard Lindner, “Der Einfluß von Filmerwartungen auf die Selektion und Rezeption von Kino-Spielfilmen: Teilbericht zur Untersuchung ‘Kino DDR 80’” (Leipzig: Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung, 1982), 9.

19. Friedrich and Hennig, *Der Sozialwissenschaftliche Forschungsprozess*, 1; Jeanette Z. Madarász, *Conflict and Compromise in East Germany, 1971–1989: A Precarious Stability* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 9 and 21; and Kyrill Kunakhovich and Pavel Skopal, “Cinema Cultures of Integration: Film Distribution and Exhibition in the GDR and Czechoslovakia from the Perspective of Two Local Cases, 1945–1960,” in *Cinema in Service of the State: Perspectives on Film Culture in the GDR and Czechoslovakia, 1945–1960*, ed. Lars Karl and Pavel Skopal (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 282 and 302.

20. “Zeit zu leben”; Dieter Wiedemann and Hans-Jörg Stiehler, “Zu Zusammenhängen zwischen Filmerwartungen und Filmrezeption Jugendlicher: Untersucht am Beispiel der Spielfilme ‘Mama, ich lebe’ und ‘Die unverbesserliche Barbara,’ Teil 1: Filmerwartungen, Filminteressen und Filmrezeptionsgewohnheiten Jugendlicher” (Leipzig: Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung, 1977); Dieter Wiedemann, “Zur Funktion des Spielfilms im geistigen Leben der Jugend—Die Entwicklung des Verhältnisses Jugendlicher zu Spielfilmen in den siebziger Jahren: Empirische Studie” (Leipzig: Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung, 1980); Klaus Winkler, “Ausgewählte Probleme der objektivmateriellen Bedingungen der Lichtspieltheater: Forschungsbericht zur Studie ‘Kino DDR 80’” (Leipzig: Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung, 1982); Lindner, “Der Einfluß von Filmerwartungen”; and Wiedemann and Stiehler, “DEFA-Spielfilme auf der Suche nach ihrem Publikum.”

21. See, for example, Wiedemann and Stiehler, “‘Mama, ich lebe’ und ‘Die unverbesserliche Barbara,’” 20–24; Hans-Jörg Stiehler, “Das Publikum von Filmen aus dem kapitalistischen Ausland: Teilbericht zur Untersuchung ‘Kino-DDR 80’” (Leipzig: Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung, 1981), 20–22; Dieter Wiedemann, “Erste Informationen zu Ergebnissen der Studie: ‘Schwierig sich zu verloben’ und sein Publikum” (Leipzig: Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung, 1983), 8–9; and Bernhard Lindner, “Kino 86: Der DEFA-Film ‘Drost’ und seine Resonanz beim Publikum” (Leipzig: Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung, 1986), 13–14.

22. Author's interview with Dieter Wiedemann on September 2, 2021; and Michael Meyen interview with Dieter Wiedemann on September 25, 2019, "Dieter Wiedemann: Forschen und leben in zwei Gesellschaften," *Forschen und leben in zwei Gesellschaften—Biografisches Lexikon der Kommunikationswissenschaft* (accessed February 23, 2024).

23. Interview with Wiedemann.

24. Indeed, many functionaries in the GDR, especially in lower and mid-levels, had different objectives and motivations from those of the regime or of higher functionaries. See Richthofen, *Bringing Culture to the Masses*, 51–58.

25. Interview with Wiedemann.

26. Interview with Wiedemann.

27. On the notion of knowledge co-production, see Sheila Jasanoff, "The Idiom of Co-Production," in *States of Knowledge: The Co-Production of Science and Social Order*, ed. Sheila Jasanoff (London: Routledge, 2004), 1–12.

28. I draw here upon Michel de Certeau's definition of "tactics" as the "art of the weak" in carving space under rulers' "strategies." Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), xii–xxi, 37.

29. Klaus Bachmann and Jens Gieseke, "Introduction," in *The Silent Majority in Communist and Post-Communist States: Opinion Polling in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe*, ed. Klaus Bachmann and Jens Gieseke (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2016), 10.

30. See, for example, Wierling, "Youth as Internal Enemy," 168–169.

31. Bachmann and Gieseke, "Introduction," 13.

32. Interview with Wiedemann.

33. Interview with Wiedemann; Jens Gieseke, "East German Popular Opinion: Problems of Reconstruction," in Bachmann and Gieseke, *The Silent Majority*, 62–63; and Heinz Niemann, *Meinungsforschung in der DDR: Die geheimen Berichte des Instituts für Meinungsforschung an das Politbüro der SED* (Cologne: Bund-Verlag, 1993), 28.

34. Hans Erxleben, "The Dilemma of the Party's Own Opinion Research in the GDR: Insights from a Former SED Pollster," in Bachmann and Gieseke, *The Silent Majority*, 219n19.

35. Stiehler, "Filmen aus dem kapitalistischen Ausland," 4–7. The early questionnaires, however, were marked with the ZIJ logo and included group discussions and personal interviews with respondents to verify the honesty of their written review. See "Zeit zu leben," 2, 322.

36. "Zeit zu leben," 322. It seems that this was understood across the board in the East German polling industry. The instruction material, for example, included an affirmation that "no one must suffer any disadvantage because of their answers." Niemann, *Hinterm Zaun*, 11.

37. Interview with Wiedemann.

38. Dieter Wiedemann, "Erste Informationen zu Ergebnissen der Studie: 'Der Aufenthalt' und sein Publikum" (Leipzig: Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung, 1983), 4–5; Wiedemann, "Schwierig sich zu verloben," 12; and Dieter Wiedemann, "KINO 83: Der Film 'Insel der Schwäne' und sein Publikum" (Leipzig: Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung, 1983), 9, 11.

39. See, for example, Wiedemann, "Insel der Schwäne," 20.

40. For example, the culture of *Eingaben*, or petitions, in which citizens appealed to state authorities using accepted formulations to achieve their goals. See Madarász, *Conflict and Compromise*, 148–153; Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 271–277; and Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), chap. 6.

41. Niemann, *Hinterm Zaun*, 12, 19–20.

42. See, for example, Daniela Berghahn, *Hollywood Behind the Wall: The Cinema of East Germany* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

43. Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 198–237.

44. See, for example, Donna Harsch, “Society, the State, and Abortion in East Germany, 1950–1972,” *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 1 (1997): 53–84; and Andrew I. Port, “Love, Lust, and Lies under Communism: Family Values and Adulterous Liaisons in Early East Germany,” *Central European History* 44, no. 3 (2011): 478–505.

45. Anna Krylova, “The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies,” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 1 (2000): 120–122.

46. Ronald G. Suny, “On Ideology, Subjectivity, and Modernity: Disparate Thoughts about Doing Soviet History,” *Russian History* 35, no. 1/2 (2008): 257.

47. See Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), chap. 3, esp. 93–98.

48. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 115.

49. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever*, 75.

50. Wiedemann, “Insel der Schwäne,” 4.

51. See, for example, Wiedemann and Stiehler, “‘Mama, ich lebe’ und ‘Die unverbesserliche Barbara,’” 20–24; Stiehler, “Filmen aus dem kapitalistischen Ausland,” 20–22; Wiedemann, “‘Schwierig sich zu verloben,’” 8–9; and Lindner, “‘Drost,’” 13–14.

52. Wiedemann, “‘Der Aufenthalt,’” 4; Wiedemann, “‘Schwierig sich zu verloben,’” 8; Wiedemann, “‘Insel der Schwäne,’” 6; and Hans-Jörg Stiehler, “Erste Informationen zu Ergebnissen der Studie ‘Einer vom Rummel’” (Leipzig: Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung, 1983), 9. Of the four, the highest-ranking film in all respects was *Der Aufenthalt*—all of whose artistic parameters received between 89 percent and 99 percent positive opinions each (“very good” and “good” combined). Interestingly, the pollsters did not attribute its success to a higher artistic level, but to its high coverage in the press, and especially the interest of the Western press in it. See Wiedemann, “‘Der Aufenthalt,’” 14.

53. See Joerg Fingerhut, “Twofoldness in Moving Images: The Philosophy and Neuroscience of Filmic Experience,” *Projections: The Journal for Movies and Mind* 14, no. 3 (2020): 7.

54. Wiedemann, “‘Insel der Schwäne,’” 7–8.

55. Wiedemann, “‘Schwierig sich zu verloben,’” 8; see also Wiedemann, “‘Insel der Schwäne,’” 7–8.

56. Stiehler, “Filmen aus dem kapitalistischen Ausland,” 14–15 and 22; “Kino DDR-80’: Teil, Rezeption von Spielfilmen aus dem sozialistischen Ausland” (Leipzig: Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung, 1981), 16–17; and Lindner, “Der Einfluss von

Filmerwartungen," 16–18. Theoretical writing on film reception also supports this claim. See Janet Staiger, "Film, Reception, and Cultural Studies," *The Centennial Review* 36, no. 1 (1992): 89; and Fingerhut, "Twofoldness in Moving Images."

57. Stiehler, "Filmen aus dem kapitalistischen Ausland," 8; and Interview with Wiedemann.

58. This is also supported by a comment made by another pollster, Hans-Jörg Stiehler, that participants tended to grant higher ratings to components they considered politically or educationally "important" than to those they did not, and to refrain from responding "in case of frustration with the cinema visit." See Stiehler, "Filmen aus dem kapitalistischen Ausland," 8.

59. Stiehler, "Filmen aus dem kapitalistischen Ausland," 11.

60. See Wiedemann, "Zur Funktion des Spielfilms," 7–9; and Wiedemann and Stiehler, "DEFA-Spielfilme auf der Suche nach ihrem Publikum," 4–5.

61. Stiehler, "Filmen aus dem kapitalistischen Ausland," 27.

62. Kunakhovich and Skopal, "Cinema Cultures of Integration," 298–299.

63. See Wiedemann, "Insel der Schwäne," 4, 6; and Wiedemann, "Zur Funktion des Spielfilms," 11.

64. On a similar note, we can assume that 40 percent and 50 percent of non-organized viewers who ranked the film "very good" (sehr gut) and "good" (gut), respectively, might have somewhat exaggerated their rating.

65. Dieter Wiedemann, "Kommunikationskulturelle Spurensicherung: Rückblick auf medienpädagogische Ansätze in der DDR," in *Handbuch der Medienpädagogik: Theorieansätze—Traditionen—Praxisfelder—Forschungsperspektiven*, ed. Susanne Hiegemann and Wolfgang H. Swoboda (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1994), 227.

66. Stiehler, "Filmen aus dem kapitalistischen Ausland," 7. Compared with other surveys, this seems like a high nonresponse rate. In the survey of the 1983 film *Schwierig sich zu verloben* (dir. Karl-Heinz Heymann), only 10 percent of the questionnaires were unanswered or incalculable. See Wiedemann, "Schwierig sich zu verloben," 3.

67. Stiehler, "Filmen aus dem kapitalistischen Ausland," 12. My italics.

68. Stiehler, "Filmen aus dem kapitalistischen Ausland," 19.

69. This was undoubtedly part of the story: in 1979, Honecker shut down the GDR's main public opinion institute, the IfM. This might have to do with the fact that the IfM reported directly to the SED's Politbüro while the ZIJ was an external institution, albeit annexed to state agencies. Some scholars, first and foremost Heinz Niemann, believe that the termination of the IfM not only foreshadowed the GDR's collapse but was also directly responsible for it: see Niemann, *Hinterm Zaun*, 38–42. As Wiedemann has since testified, the ZIJ pollsters feared a similar fate. Interview with Wiedemann.

70. Suny, "On Ideology," 254.

71. Lindner, "Der Einfluß von Filmerwartungen," 15.

72. Wiedemann, "Zur Funktion des Spielfilms," 3; Stiehler, "Filmen aus dem kapitalistischen Ausland," 21, 24; and Wiedemann, "Schwierig sich zu verloben," 5.

Section Three

Fashioning Socialist Selves

Activism, Subversion, and Public Engagement

Art, Participation, and Play in 1980s East Berlin

Briana J. Smith

In early 1977, a photomontage poster from local painter and printmaker Manfred Butzmann appeared in East Berlin. The large text at the top of the poster called out to viewers: “Citizens, Care for Your Stoops!” Below the text, a grid of twenty-eight photographs documented damaged handrails, decaying paving stones, and piles of detritus along Parkstraße, a residential street in the northern Pankow district. The artist was intimately aware of the area’s deterioration. Both his art studio and family home were located there. Though this call to action was unusual, Butzmann’s appeal to residents to better maintain the neighborhood inhabited a powerful moral high ground immune to party sanction. The poster’s message also carried a broader social and political significance in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) of the late 1970s. This poster, and the dozens that followed, conveyed Butzmann’s understanding that his neighbors were the best candidates to enlist in the project of restoring care and beauty to their surroundings. Inviting citizens to take the initiative, Butzmann encouraged a form of civic participation rooted in local spaces and scenarios. Just as Markus Wahl’s contribution to this volume details how GDR communities in the Honcker era worked to “change their local versions of socialism for the better” in their treatment of alcohol addiction, Butzmann’s posters also gestured toward a decentralized mode of everyday socialism in which citizens collectively shaped local spaces.¹

Butzmann was not alone in his use of art to encourage more active engagement with East Berlin’s urban landscape. In the late 1970s, many other art projects and artist-organized events appearing in the GDR’s capital city

drew people out of their homes to gather in streets, parks, and public art galleries. These individuals were invited to imagine new uses for both art and public space centered around moments of collective creativity, joy, and imagination. This emergent culture pointed toward a form of socialist public life in which participation in ephemeral gatherings was not a threat to socialism and instead could fortify and enliven socialist society. Furthermore, artists' colorful displays, participatory projects, and critical messages invited a greater variety of voices, aesthetic sensibilities, and perspectives to circulate in the city. This figment of a dynamic socialist society revealed to participants that life in the GDR, and their own socialist subjectivities, were more malleable than they might have thought.

Artists like Butzmann were uniquely equipped to cultivate moments of autonomous artistic and social engagement in the late GDR. During this period, young artists and gallerists grew increasingly bold in their presentation of experimental, process-based, and interactive art forms. Many drew inspiration from the Berlin Dadaists, who had dispensed with the division between art and life during the interwar period. The aesthetic philosophy of West German artist Joseph Beuys, who famously declared "everyone is an artist," also appealed to East German artists, who were working outside commercial contexts and committed to expanding access to art making. These approaches both complemented *and* contradicted the Socialist Unity Party's (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*; SED) adherence to the aesthetic principles of socialist realism, itself a moving yardstick. While party cultural officials and the Union of Visual Artists (*Verband Bildender Künstler der DDR*; VBK) prioritized social functions for art over artwork as commodity, officials also insisted that socialist art be figurative and easily legible to viewers. Acceptable forms of socialist realist art were generally limited to the traditional mediums of painting, drawing, and sculpture. Artists creating participatory, interactive, process-based, or simply illegible work fell afoul of that mandate. But this typically did not result in their exclusion from GDR cultural life, nor did it prevent them from finding viewers.²

It was a variable time to be an East German artist. By the mid-1970s, GDR artists enjoyed more opportunities to exhibit experimental work in city-run small art galleries, private art spaces, and even on the streets of East Berlin. Yet the expulsion of singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann in November 1976 left many disillusioned, prompting artists and intellectuals to apply to leave the GDR permanently. But art historian Eugen Blume also recalls how a "new pioneer spirit" emerged in the wake of the Biermann exile.³ This spirit emboldened others to take greater artistic and political risks. While artists

in the early GDR portrayed an idealized socialist future in their paintings, artists in the post-Biermann era used participatory and interactive art to (momentarily) animate alternatives in the present. Within these alternative realities, artists and intellectuals were neither forced to leave against their will nor compelled to leave to overcome the limitations on artistic expression.

The diverse first-person sources animating this volume—including opinion polls, *Eingaben* (petitions), independent publications, punk memoirs, cultural productions, interviews, and the like—highlight the variety of venues in which individual East Germans insisted on claiming space for creativity and free expression and cobbling together their own communities in the late GDR. To do so, they regularly tested the boundaries of what was permissible while responding to the contingencies that caused those boundaries to be redrawn. My contribution to this atlas of “coterminous presents and unpredictable futures” introduces readers to three East Berlin-based artists who used art to constitute a social relationship with their viewers.⁴ While operating within the official visual artists union, these creators seized upon art as a vehicle for opening new spheres of consciousness, imagination, and collective experience. In this understanding, art was fundamentally collaborative and experiential and offered an avenue for imagining forms of everyday life and local politics in which everyone had a part to play. Through these projects, artists embarked upon what Jack Halberstam characterizes as the “search for different ways of being in the world and being in relation to each other.”⁵ Having crafted their own nonnormative trajectories within socialist society, these artists were well positioned to encourage others to join them. Through this change in orientation, subjectivities also shifted, as artists and their audiences collaboratively created their own realities.⁶

Artists Manfred Butzmann (b. 1942), Karla Sachse (b. 1950), and Reinhard Zabka (b. 1950) had long experimented with “different ways of being” in the GDR. Their membership with the VBK came with the coveted freelance status, which exempted them from prosecution as “asocial” if they failed to seek other work. The VBK offered many other privileges, including access to printing equipment, subsidized studios, opportunities to participate in regional exhibitions, study trips throughout the Eastern Bloc, public art commissions, and the possibility for short-term travel to the West. While enjoying these privileges, Butzmann, Sachse, and Zabka also made work that promoted ideas and goals that transcended the VBK’s understanding of art’s proper function in socialist society.

Despite this dissonance with the party line, these artists were not lim-

ited to operating in private or underground spaces. Katharine White's chapter in this volume details how singer-songwriter Bettina Wegner insisted on performing in the prominent House of Young Talents "to bring her own vision of the artistic creative process into the folds of the state's cultural production machine."⁷ A similar claim could be made of Butzmann, Sachse, and Zabka, who sought out exhibition opportunities in VBK- and city-sponsored galleries and public art commissions, relishing the opportunity to alter GDR visual culture in the process. Through a series of photomontage posters and art actions, Butzmann promoted a spirit of civic responsibility and grassroots action at the local level that elevated the power of individuals to change their surroundings and, thus, socialism. Sachse's public murals and action art performed a similar task—reclaiming urban space as a site of communication and critique within an ambiguous visual vocabulary. In exhibitions and outdoor sculptures, Zabka staged moments of fantasy and collective discovery, while confronting viewers with absurd, humorous, and ambiguous displays. All three artists deeply understood visual art's ability to establish lines of communication with viewers on a different frequency from the state. In doing so, they destabilized the party's monopoly over urban space and public life. Most importantly, artists invited viewers to join them in this endeavor, suggesting an active reconfiguration of socialist public space accommodating a variety of forms of expression, dialogue, and action.

Archival evidence capturing these viewers and their responses to the art they encountered is fragmentary, preventing a comprehensive understanding of how this art altered socialist subjectivities. Nonetheless, traces surfacing in documentary photographs and films, internal VBK exhibition reviews, press sources, and oral histories offer a meaningful glimpse at the ways individuals interacted with this art and participated in public events. The mere presence of these audiences speaks volumes, in light of the misconception that experimental art was somehow exclusive to "underground" or private art spaces. As they assembled in the light of day, viewers participated in forms of publicness far different from their involvement in choreographed socialist rituals. People of all ages attending exhibitions in small art galleries, viewing Butzmann's photomontage posters, or taking part in actions interacted with art that was challenging and open-ended. These experiences invited viewers to collaborate on a blueprint for a socialist society that encouraged active participation, critical thinking, and civic engagement. While this vision did not contradict the basic principles of socialism, it did challenge the SED's centralization of political control.⁸ Moreover, it pushed

back against the unsatisfactory state of social life under “real-existing socialism” that led some to turn to private spaces.

Historians of East Germany commonly refer to a “retreat to the private” that accelerated in the 1970s. In apartments and summer dachas, East Germans sought a respite from the pressure to conform and the prying eyes of the Ministry for State Security (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*; MfS or Stasi).⁹ Studies of “bohemian” artists in the GDR emphasize how experimental artists took refuge in “underground” private galleries, apartments, and studios.¹⁰ Yet the artists introduced in this chapter were instead preoccupied with publicness. These artists took advantage of their privileged role as cultural producers to create occasions for East Germans to inhabit public space in new ways. Furthermore, the hundreds of participants attending these exhibitions, street actions, and festivals show how this retreat from the private in the 1980s extended beyond artists to incorporate larger publics.¹¹

These artists simultaneously prioritized the cultivation of moments of collective joy and fantasy through play. In socialist society, play offered a convenient framework for defying the status quo while remaining within the boundaries of legality.¹² Alongside the increase of leisure time for workers in the 1960s, the SED also encouraged greater participation in arts and cultural activities.¹³ Aligned with this goal, artist-organized events, actions, and festivals invited East Berlin residents and families to take part in a collective creative life. The organization of children’s events served many purposes. Public events involving young children were less threatening to the Stasi and more likely to be tolerated. Naturally, adults also assembled at these events, where activities for the children might be accompanied by an art exhibition or a jazz performance. Together, adults and children participated in social gatherings centered around shared creativity and fantasy. The frequency of children’s festivals also reflected an interest among organizers in cultivating a robust imagination among the young. This commitment complemented the GDR’s promotion of participation in amateur art making among an East German populace whose creative powers were nurtured from youth. Neighborhood festivals extended the imaginative and freewheeling spirit associated with childhood to people in all stages of life—and in conspicuous urban spaces. Rather than filling the city with temples to mass consumer society, the socialist city honored human creativity and play.

Beyond the GDR, artists and intellectuals across postwar Europe had also recognized the provocative power of play for inciting a break from ordinary life and exploring alternatives. The Dutch Provos, French Situationists,

and West Germany's Gruppe SPUR embraced play as an anarchic mode for critiquing the everyday and subverting the alienation of modern life.¹⁴ Unlike these ludic practitioners in the West, however, the socialist variant tended to be more community oriented and purposeful, prioritizing the curation of collective moments of absurdity and joy that diluted party authority over public space. A prominent example of "socialist play" beyond the GDR was the Orange Alternative in Wrocław, Poland, which staged wildly mischievous actions throughout the 1980s and invited the broader public to take part. On one occasion, the group invited Wrocław residents to dress as red-capped and bearded dwarves and take part in a large happening demanding "freedom for dwarves."¹⁵ Through their acts of role-playing and parody, participants took part in conspicuous public gatherings that demonstrated the possibility for independent forms of collective action. These surreal and amusing stunts offered a stark contrast from daily life in Poland under martial law.¹⁶ As Berenika Szymanski-Düll notes, the Orange Alternative gave participants "a chance to not only feel a sense of belonging but also a sense of involvement" extending beyond party-sanctioned forms of public gathering.¹⁷

Artists in East Berlin also made space for the contributions of others, offering East Germans the opportunity to engage with art—and their surroundings—in new ways, from Butzmann's Parkstraße posters and "greening actions" to Karla Sachse's staging of "Friedrichshain Beach" on Frankfurter Allee. Participants and passersby joined artists in this process of collectively reimaging the relationship between individuals, politics, and society in the GDR. Within this artist-curated blueprint of a new public socialism, forms of critique, dialogue, civic engagement, and collective play were not only sanctioned but essential.

In the spirit of this volume, this chapter looks beyond the black hole of 1989 by approaching the ephemeral and participatory artworks of Butzmann, Sachse, and Zabka on their own terms and within their distinctive spatial and temporal contexts. This maneuver allows a highly local but coterminous trajectory to come into focus in which East Berlin-based artists created venues for civic engagement and social assembly in the late 1970s and 1980s East German capital, prompting the formation of new subjectivities in the process. These novel forms of art and social assembly suggested for some an opening toward a more humane and grassroots-driven socialism, rather than the beginning of the end. This incongruous temporality is curiously out of step with the familiar narratives of the GDR's decline, stagnation, dissidence, and revolution. As such, this chapter can also help to explain the spectrum of responses—some euphoric, some despondent, and others quite ambivalent—to German unification and its aftermath.

For Example: Manfred Butzmann's Participatory Posters

Butzmann's 1977 poster "Citizens, Care for Your Stoops!" was the first in a series of photomontage works stretching across three decades and outlasting the GDR. Throughout the years, he sustained his focus on documenting scenes from his neighborhood in Pankow. Prior to his turn to posters, Butzmann was a painter and printmaker. He specialized in urban landscapes that captured areas off the beaten track including sites of urban decay, anticipating the types of scenes captured in his photographs. Through the pairing of photography and text in his posters, however, Butzmann issued a more explicit message, directly calling on his neighbors and fellow citizens to take the initiative to achieve a greener and more beautiful Pankow.¹⁸ Yet the posters also contained an implicit critique of the deterioration of state socialist ideals in the late 1970s, and his attempt to build new forms of collective, civic engagement from the grassroots.

Many of Butzmann's posters and art actions highlighted the ecological and architectural decay along Pankow's Parkstraße. He and his wife, Eva Hübner Butzmann, first moved to the street in 1966. By 1977, the street was in disrepair and lacked vegetation. Butzmann's second poster from 1978, "A Place for Trees," displayed areas along the street where trees had once grown. Unlike the more commanding tone of his first poster, "A Place for Trees" more implicitly suggested that neighbors could replant trees in these sites. Subsequent posters featured images of the street from the near past compared with the present. This pairing exposed previous efforts to beautify socialist space alongside visual evidence of a lack of care directed to the urban landscape. Thus, Butzmann's photographic documentation of urban space attempted to stir an affective reaction in viewers, using images of the past to confront publics with the diminished reality of the present. This included the decay of urban space and, more symbolically, the contrast between "real-existing socialist" ideals and "real-existing socialist" reality.

Beyond issuing a call to action in his posters, Butzmann also undertook actions himself, which further demonstrated the ability of individuals to intervene in society. In response to his suggestion of "A Place for Trees," Butzmann took the initiative to engage in "greening actions" in which he planted trees and ivy along the street. Using photography to document the process, he featured these actions in a series of posters appearing under the simple caption "For Example." One poster, later printed as a postcard, displayed tendrils of ivy just beginning to creep up along the street's dull gray cement light posts and utility boxes.¹⁹ Another version of "For Example" featured a photograph of a toy gun discarded in an overflowing trash bin to

denounce militarization and to call for peace as Cold War tensions reignited in the early 1980s.

In addition to the use of posters and actions to model a form of decentralized civic participation in his neighborhood, Butzmann also organized an annual children's festival at a neighborhood playground. Since 1972, Butzmann's Rabbit Flag Festival had attracted dozens of children and their parents to participate in this independently organized neighborhood event. Children attending the festival were asked to bring along a piece of their own artwork or to dress in a costume. Butzmann's intent was to encourage children to engage with creative work in preparation. Images from the festival reveal a critical mass of children in costumes overtaking the playground alongside Butzmann's colorful handsewn rabbit flags; the artist can be seen in a bespoke costume of his own (see Figure 10). The festival offered an annual occasion for homespun creativity and fantasy to take center stage in the neighborhood, while also presenting an alternative to the private entertainment and consumer culture emerging in the early Honecker era.²⁰

Butzmann's emphasis on civic participation, local engagement, and collective action in his posters, actions, and the Rabbit Flag Festival echoed previous party-sponsored initiatives to spur citizen participation. Throughout the GDR's history, the proliferation of citizen-run commissions, councils, parliamentary bodies, and other oversight and planning bodies offered the semblance of democracy and citizen participation within a highly centralized bureaucracy. The Join In! (*Mach mit!*) competition organized by the National Front in communities across the GDR since the 1960s called on socialist citizens to take the initiative to make aesthetic and functional improvements to their localities. By encouraging this involvement, the program attempted to build a stronger sense of patriotic duty and identification with socialism, while addressing local economic concerns.²¹ At the local level, Join In! extended avenues to exercise citizenship to areas far from the centers of bureaucratic power. These projects appealed to individuals' emotional ties to their local community and attempted to suture those affective ties to a more expansive socialist identity.

But the relationship between state and society could also be more readily contested and challenged at the local level and community activism did not necessarily translate to identification with the party apparatus.²² In the early 1980s, church-based environmental and gay and lesbian rights groups explored forms of civic and community engagement and coalition building beyond the SED's narrow parameters for socialist citizenship.²³ Like East Berlin's experimental artists and their gallery allies, these groups crafted



Figure 10. Rabbit Flag Festival, Berlin-Pankow, 1984. Butzmann, bottom right
(Credit: Courtesy of SLUB Dresden/Deutsche Fotothek/Christian Borchert)

a form of decentralized political participation open to the articulation of independent claims, concerns, and desires. Furthermore, as Scott Harrison details in his contribution to this volume, they sought to make these activities visible to a larger public through participation in events like the Protestant Church's Church Days series.²⁴ Butzmann inhabited a similar position with his public-facing posters. Operating out of his VBK-funded studio on Parkstraße, Butzmann's posters and art actions called upon fellow citizens to make up for the party's shortcomings by beautifying these spaces on their own. Butzmann's call for fellow citizens to "join in" introduced a spirit of collective responsibility for local spaces that dared East Germans to claim a greater authority over their neighborhoods and to fill those spaces with beauty and joy. The annual Rabbit Flag Festival, in turn, invited the neighborhood children of Pankow to do the same.

In the mid-1980s, as the city prepared to host thousands of tourists for the city's 750th anniversary celebration in 1987, East Berlin mayor Erhard Krack encountered one of Butzmann's posters in a small bookstore while on vacation in the Harz Mountains. Krack found the poster's spotlight on the disrepair of the capital city offensive and a poor representation of the city for visitors. In response, he revoked Butzmann's printing privileges for eighteen months and those of two other poster makers. By that time, Butzmann's posters had already reached thousands of viewers: they could be found hanging on the walls of East German apartments and businesses and circulating internationally in the form of postcards. Wherever they landed, his prints sounded a call to action from one citizen to another to initiate improvements where the state had failed to do so and to assert their own grassroots jurisdiction over local spaces.

Karla Sachse: Art on the Beach

In East Berlin, urban space served to both reflect and extend the SED's power through the built environment. But the potential for this control to be undermined was ever present, as Butzmann's posters and actions demonstrate. Throughout the history of the GDR, the SED sought to maintain tight control over the uses and meanings of socialist urban space but encountered numerous challenges. The thousands of young East Germans and visiting youth from across the socialist world converging on Alexanderplatz for the 1973 World Festival of Youth and Students posed a particular complication. As Katharine White argues, youth participants at the 1973 festival "reimagined the socialist ideal in their own image, rendering it once again open to

reinterpretation.”²⁵ During the festival, singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann disregarded his performance ban and presented an impromptu concert near the World Clock. In response to the volatility of urban space, party cultural officials used officially sanctioned public art projects to code the urban landscape in a unified socialist realist aesthetic. But such projects were also notoriously difficult to control because of the unstable nature of both the visual *and* urban contexts. In the 1980s, urban spaces in East Berlin were increasingly contested. Public incursions from punks, artists and, later, a nascent political opposition, grew more frequent.²⁶ As Jeff Hayton observes in this volume, “punks ended up on the streets as an increasingly disruptive feature of public life in Honecker’s Germany.”²⁷ More ominously, groups of far-right skinheads also emerged, initiating attacks against local punks.²⁸

For the East Berlin artist and art educator Karla Sachse, public art projects presented a means to overcome the party’s limitations on expression and to reclaim urban space as a site of dialogue, critique, and fantasy. To avoid censorship, Sachse encased her commissions within multiple layers of meaning. Unlike the text-based work of writers and playwrights, visual artists could more easily integrate meanings that were less perceptible to authorities or easier to deny. According to many accounts, the Stasi was notoriously bad at reading between the lines or finding meaning in illegible, abstract, and absurd art forms.²⁹ Sachse recalls how she and other artists awarded commissions for public projects had “always taken the opportunity to test how far they could go.”³⁰ Such a tactic attenuated the party’s efforts to convey a coherent and consistent message in public space.

Sachse’s experiences at Humboldt University in the wake of global student revolts deeply shaped her approach to art education and production. She entered Humboldt in 1969 and earned a doctorate in art education in 1977. Her time there was marked by student campaigns to democratize university culture and question professorial authority. The political climate helped Sachse understand how to wield art as a tool for change in society.³¹ In the 1970s, Sachse began attending Robert Rehfeldt’s Palette Nord amateur art circle in Pankow. Through Rehfeldt, she became active in the international mail art network alongside fellow Palette Nord member Joseph Huber, whom she later married. After achieving freelance status in 1982, Sachse continued to approach art as a social, collaborative, and interactive process. She was awarded commissions to paint murals on construction walls and in subway stations, schools, and other public buildings, while teaching art to schoolchildren and taking over the leadership of the Palette Nord circle. These endeavors enabled her to nurture the creative lives of amateur artists,

while pushing the boundaries of artistic expression and reaching viewers beyond those actively seeking out art.

In 1985, Sachse was commissioned to paint a 138-meter-long mural on a construction fence along the busy Frankfurter Allee. Sachse's mural presented viewers with a momentary escape from the urban crush, featuring a joyful beach scene with a group of happy families bathing and lounging on the sand. A brief article appearing in the daily newspaper *Berliner Zeitung* noted how innocent passersby "immediately discovered" the "eye-catching" mural.³² Celebrating East Germany's "free body culture," the mural also featured a few nude bathers, which anchored the composition in a distinctly East German setting.³³ Sachse secured permission from city officials to host a "dedication" for her mural on the median of Frankfurter Allee for one hour in the early evening. Building on the beach scene in her mural—already an invitation for commuters to daydream—Sachse's "dedication" was transformed into a beach party on the boulevard.

On the day of the action, a group of friends and their children appeared in bathing suits, carrying plastic buckets and sand shovels to stage "Friedrichshain Beach" among the passing cars. Like Butzmann's annual Rabbit Flag Festival, children and families were a vital part of the action's playful fantasy. The action offered children—and those viewing the scene from their cars or along the sidewalk—the unique opportunity to imagine the city as a beach within an otherwise ordinary scene of urban life. Despite the action's wholesomeness, it was also out of the ordinary in East Germany and thus a potential threat to order. Police soon arrived. Because Sachse had the proper paperwork, the dedication was permitted to continue. Nevertheless, authorities dutifully returned to close the beach when Sachse's approved sixty minutes were up.³⁴

Loopholes like the one Sachse exploited to legalize her action reveal how her artistic practice was molded around the necessity of staying one step ahead of the censors. Artists were uniquely capable of seizing opportunities to inhabit urban space in unconventional ways and invite others to join them. During the hour-long action, the crowd of beachgoers confronted passersby with the sight of bodies congregating freely on the median and creating a joyful, and absurd, urban beach scene. Along the ceremonial socialist boulevard, Sachse encouraged passersby to transport themselves elsewhere, a theme she would take up on subsequent public murals.

Sachse's selection for the mural painting project along the prominent Frankfurter Allee indicates her high standing within the municipal cultural

administration and VBK in the 1980s. In 1985, Sachse received permission to create another mural on a construction fence around the corner from Unter den Linden, near the Brandenburg Gate, the Soviet embassy, and the Berlin Wall. The mural was part of the city's broader beautification efforts ahead of the 750th anniversary celebration. Sachse's selection of a travel-oriented theme appeared innocuous on the surface but contained layers of meaning that savvy East German viewers could easily decipher.

The mural featured a collage of images related to flight, including a variety of birds, an abstract human form with arms outstretched, as well as an egg-shaped figure flying a cartoon airplane. To the right of the collage, large black words appeared on a red background listing possible destinations: "Europe, Africa, Asia, America." Above the text, paintings of eyeballs were framed by the words "a flapping wing." Alongside the theme of flight, a second collage grounded viewers in their present location and served to emphasize the GDR's limitations on travel. A series of paper strips from magazines with the word "Berlin" radiated out from a map of East Berlin. Assorted entrance tickets were glued to the map over which Sachse wrote: "I was here." The tickets were concentrated entirely in the eastern half of the city. Like all East Berlin maps appearing after the Wall's construction in 1961, West Berlin appeared as a tan void, without any cartographical information. The jagged line separating the detailed map of the East from the blank West provocatively indicated the Wall's path. Scrolling across the bottom of the map appeared the additional handwritten text "Pockets full of Berlin, do not tell me too many things!" The concentration of entrance tickets in East Berlin offered a visual representation of Sachse's limited movement, with the "I was here" declaration accentuating where she was not: West Berlin.

By deploying images and text that were simple, cryptic, or nonsensical, the mural was less likely to set off the security officials. But if it did, Sachse was prepared to affect ignorance of the potential for alternative interpretations. In a high-traffic area near the Wall's path, the mural presented viewers with a note of ambiguity, wanderlust, and frustration, which many who passed by likely shared. In doing so, Sachse reclaimed the role of urbanity as a site of social exchange, communication, and even dissent. In 1987, a crowd of East Berliners gathered nearby to listen to a David Bowie concert at the Reichstag—on the other side of the Wall. They began a spontaneous chant: "The Wall must go."³⁵ The crowd's action, like Sachse's work in public space, conveyed the rising potential for candid communication in socialist urban space as residents came to embrace a wider repertoire of public expression.

Reinhard Zabka: Playing with the Public

As experimental practices expanded into socialist public spaces, including neighborhood art galleries and regional exhibitions, Stasi operatives and unofficial collaborators (*inoffizielle Mitarbeiter*, IM) scrutinized the behaviors of artists and their social circles. Party surveillance was a regular presence in the lives of artists, although the threat was abating in the 1980s. Artists and gallery directors experienced MfS surveillance in many ways: from a cat-and-mouse game or slight annoyance to a persistent source of fear and trauma through the GDR's demise.³⁶ In the late 1980s, mail artist Lutz Wohlrab circulated a postcard for a fictitious "beer happening" merely for the purpose of misleading the Stasi.³⁷ IM reports describe how gallery visitors openly identified Stasi agents attending small gallery events and mocked them to their faces.³⁸ Perhaps this rising indifference toward surveillance officials stemmed from the Stasi's greater tolerance of visual artists, which contrasted with their harsher treatment of writers, punks, and dissidents. Instead, the MfS was often more interested in observing artists and their audiences rather than intervening to prevent future gatherings.³⁹

For Reinhard Zabka, cultivating a sense of humor and playfulness was the key to defusing Stasi attempts at intimidation and other pernicious and disruptive forms of party control. Much as Butzmann's and Sachse's non-normative subject positions as artists in the late 1970s and 1980s were constructed out of distinct lived experiences and contingencies of the 1970s (the Biermann exile in Butzmann's case), Zabka's subjectivity of defiance was constructed in response to years of police and Stasi harassment, first for his long hair and bohemian lifestyle as a young man in Erfurt and then following his sister's escape from the GDR. Her unsanctioned exit led to the rejection of Zabka's legal applications for an exit permit. While Zabka resigned himself to remaining in the GDR, he enacted a series of tactics that mocked and defied the SED in his effort to achieve greater control over his own life. On one occasion, when local police brought Zabka in for questioning, he came "armed" with a large supply of smelly garlic bread. He proceeded to present a series of bizarre poetry recitations and then spoke in gibberish until his release.⁴⁰ With his affected eccentricity, Zabka appeared harmless.

Zabka found his use of absurdity and playfulness particularly effective in disarming party officials—a lesson he extended to his subsequent artistic practice. In the late 1970s, Zabka took up residence in a back-courtyard apartment near Kollwitz Platz in Prenzlauer Berg, typical of many artists moving to the capital city. While supporting himself with odd jobs, Zabka

began painting on the side. He achieved a VBK membership as an autodidact through the sponsorship of his friend Martin Hoffmann. The membership earned him freelance status as well as a three-year stipend to pay for his apartment and studio.⁴¹ With the luxury of space and time, Zabka turned his attention to making art on his own terms, which was highly idiosyncratic for the GDR. He worked in a range of media, including fabric arts, postcard collages, and found-object sculptures, and preferred montage and juxtaposition over realist representation.

Zabka was most interested in initiating collective encounters through art and art making and creating spaces to bring people together. In doing so, he conjured a form of socialism open to parody, critique, and oppositional energies. Zabka's ability to exploit the gaps in party authority over social spaces was essential in this endeavor. The city's large network of youth and worker clubs, neighborhood galleries, and district cultural houses offered a good place to start. There, social assembly was legal. Zabka found weak party oversight at the Bödiker Club in Friedrichshain, where he organized events with locals and fellow transplants from Erfurt. Children's festivals and flea markets offered another legally sanctioned excuse to assemble neighbors for moments of collective merriment and the staging of playful displays that continued outside the club (see Figure 11). When party leaders discovered spaces lacking supervision, like the Bödiker Club, they often replaced negligent leaders. By that time, however, Zabka and his co-conspirators had discovered new spaces, including a park near Kollwitz Platz, the Gallia Church in Friedrichshain, and the Elizabeth Church in Mitte.

In 1982, East Berlin photographer and gallerist Stefan Orendt invited Zabka to present a solo exhibition at the Galerie Sophien Straße No. 8 in the eastern district of Berlin-Lichtenberg. Though the gallery was located in a quiet residential street, it was not far from the Stasi's sprawling Normanen Straße headquarters. Under Orendt's leadership, the gallery served as a hub for the GDR's young avant-garde artists, despite its proximity to the epicenter of the GDR's security and surveillance edifice.⁴² As a city-sponsored gallery, it fell under the supervision of East Berlin's Cultural Advisory Board, which approved the gallery's exhibition calendar in advance and was often more tolerant of experimentation than the VBK. Thus, the Galerie Sophien Straße was not limited to an exclusive underground scene and even attracted multigenerational crowds, including children and families.

Zabka's 1982 show, "Daydreams," featured a colorful handsewn patchwork tent, two divans covered in homemade quilts, found object sculptures, photo collages, and painted-over photography. As a review in the *Neue Ber-*



Figure 11. Children's festival outside the Bödiker Club, Friedrichshain (Credit: Courtesy of Reinhard Zabka)

liner Illustrierte noted, the range of media created “new syntheses, observations, possibilities that one could discover in this work on their own.”⁴³ Documentation from the exhibition reveals how this invitation to daydream was answered by children, adults, and teenagers, though partially as a result of the artist's clever programming decision. Zabka had organized a children's circus to coincide with the exhibition opening. The event drew three hundred children and parents to watch the children's circus Streuselschnecke (Streusel Pastry), with a special appearance from the “levitating Zabka.” Children then moved into the gallery to explore the exhibition. Zabka was on hand to answer questions while he worked on a sewing machine near a picture window. In this exhibition, a visit to the art gallery was a highly social affair. Photos reveal young girls hanging out on the beds and children leading adults around the gallery. Thus, Zabka turned the neighborhood gallery into a space for people of all ages to engage with him and his playful artwork and to share the experience with others.

During the show, Zabka also displayed work from friends who were not VBK members and lacked exhibition permissions. This move prompted the VBK to issue an exhibition ban against Zabka in the show's aftermath. Yet

the artist continued to find ways to exhibit his work. In 1985, he co-organized a group exhibition in the Berlin Cathedral's stairwell during a period of renovations at the invitation of the Berlin Evangelical Art Service. Zabka's contribution, *Psychedelica Maschinka*, featured an assemblage of wires, gears, stones, cages, lights, cut up toys, and devotional objects. Zabka characterized the sculpture as a mass of "objects of civilization, souvenirs and household kitsch, apparently senseless materiality."⁴⁴ Though the exhibition veered far from socialist realist clarity and legibility, this did not scare off viewers. Instead, the show attracted thirty-five thousand visitors. In her review in the East German newspaper *Neue Zeit*, Regina Koehler concluded it was a "good thing" the art on display might be unsettling to visitors who were unaccustomed to encountering works with such an ambiguous meaning and form. The cryptic nature of the displays, Koehler noted, had the power to awaken childhood fantasy, dreams, desires, and playfulness, unique playing fields for "thoughts and imagination," and new ways of seeing and thinking.⁴⁵

Two years after the group show at the Berlin Cathedral, the Volksbühne theater invited Zabka to install a colorful handsewn tent and found-object sculpture outside the theater on Rosa Luxemburg Platz. The prominent public location in the city center allowed Zabka's playful aesthetic and imaginative spirit to be introduced to a wider swathe of the city's residents and to tourists who found themselves in the vicinity. Images documenting the display capture the range of onlookers, including a punk clad in leather pants, teenage girls, middle-aged couples, and a few gray-haired women, who stopped to take a closer look at Zabka's chaotic arrangement of lamps, framed art, and kinetic sculptures as well as another colorful patchwork tent (see Figure 12). A pair of police officers maintain a watchful eye on the alien sculpture and the viewers, who appear unconcerned by the police presence: after all, the sculpture was staged in public, and they had the right to look. Zabka dubbed his urban installation *Perestroika Maschinka*. The title indicated a growing anticipation of change inspired by Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms in the Soviet Union. Yet the conspicuous presence of Zabka's eccentric and conspicuous installation suggested change was already underway.

Conclusion

Zabka's *Perestroika Maschinka* was one of many artistic incursions on the streets of East Berlin in the 1980s that invited viewers to engage with socialist public space in new ways and imagine alternatives to the status quo. For some, these were indisputably socialist alternatives, for others less so. Never-



Figure 12. Reinhard Zabka, *Perestroika Maschinka*, 1987, Rosa Luxemburg Platz
(Credit: Courtesy of Reinhard Zabka)

theless, art offered a platform for artists and viewers to collectively imagine, and at times enact, a more creative and playful socialist present and anticipate a more egalitarian socialist future. In the process, artists contributed to the reanimation of public life on street corners and in the small galleries of East Berlin. Participation in art actions and exhibitions offered viewers a detour from ordinary life, where they could instead actively take part in the re-production of socialist space and social life according to their own whims and imagination. These actions denied the SED complete jurisdiction over public life, while introducing a form of socialist subjecthood in which individuals were encouraged to engage with their neighbors and neighborhoods. Inciting opportunities for civic engagement, critical thinking, social exchange, and play, artists modeled a mode of socialist public life centered around collaboration and creativity rather than coercion and control. Their actions illustrate how, in the words of Harrison, Hayton, and White, “East German subjects imagined varying potentialities for the present” beginning with their own neighborhoods.⁴⁶

The frequent characterization of late socialism as gray and stagnant and the scholarly preference for histories of “underground” artists has helped

obscure the otherwise colorful forms of cultural production emerging publicly in 1980s East Berlin. Surprisingly little archival digging is necessary to uncover these playful and participatory artistic practices and their “above ground” audiences. Their absence from the historiography suggests the interpretive challenge posed by artists who did not wholly reject state support, and rather aligned *and* misaligned themselves with the VBK, socialist realism, and the SED. In fact, these artists and their complex socialist subjectivities offer a vivid example of one of many lost socialist worlds emerging on the eve of the GDR’s collapse that vanished amid the transition to market capitalism. Nevertheless, legacies of this era of artistic exploration into the radical possibilities for art in society can be detected in the extra-capitalist art practices, led by the likes of Butzmann, Sachse, and Zabka, that continued to appear in the streets of Berlin—and across the former GDR—after 1989.

Notes

1. Markus Wahl, “Treating East German Subjects: Doctors and Patients with Alcohol Addiction in Late Socialism,” in *Socialist Subjectivities: Queering East Germany under Honecker*, ed. Scott Harrison, Jeff Hayton, and Katharine White (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2025), 45.

2. See Sara Blaylock, *Parallel Public: Experimental Art in Late East Germany* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2022).

3. Eugen Blume, “In freier Luft: Die Künstlergruppe Clara Mosch und ihre Pleinairs,” in *Kunstdokumentation: SBZ/DDR 1945–1990: Aufsätze, Berichte, Materialien*, ed. Günter Feist, Eckhart Gillen, and Beatrice Vierneisel (Berlin: DuMont Verlag, 1996), 730.

4. Scott Harrison, Jeff Hayton, and Katharine White, “Beyond the Black Hole: 1989 and the Narration of East German History,” in Harrison, Hayton, and White, *Socialist Subjectivities*, 4.

5. Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 2.

6. Harrison, Hayton, and White, “Beyond the Black Hole,” 6.

7. Katharine White, “Producing Culture, Producing Socialism: An Apparatchik and a Singer-Songwriter in the *Haus der jungen Talente*,” in Harrison, Hayton, and White, *Socialist Subjectivities*, 66.

8. This mirrors Alexei Yurchak’s observation on the late Soviet era in *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 3.

9. Günter Gaus, *Wo Deutschland Liegt: Eine Ortsbestimmung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1983); Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Paul Kaiser, *Boheme in der DDR* (Dresden: DIK Verlag, 2016), 46–50.

10. Yvonne Fiedler, *Kunst im Korridor: Private Galerien in der DDR zwischen*

Autonomie und Illegalität (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2013); Wilfriede Maaß et al., *Brennzeiten: Die Keramikwerkstatt Wilfriede Maaß 1980–1989–1998: Ein Zentrum des künstlerischen Offgrounds in Ost-Berlin* (Berlin: Lukas, 2014); and Paul Kaiser and Claudia Petzold, *Boheme und Diktatur in der DDR: Gruppen, Konflikte, Quartiere 1970–1989* (Berlin: Fannei & Walz, 1995).

11. Briana J. Smith, *Free Berlin: Art, Urban Politics, and Everyday Life* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2022), 107.

12. For Marx and play, see Michael J. Roberts, “The Politics of Playtime: Reading Marx through Huizinga on the Desire to Escape from Ordinary Life,” *American Journal of Play* 11, no. 1 (2018): 46–64.

13. Helmut Hanke, ed., *Kultur und Freizeit: Zu Tendenzen und Erfordernissen eines Kulturvollen Freizeitverhaltens* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1971).

14. Mia Lee, *Utopia and Dissent in West Germany: The Resurgence of the Politics of Everyday Life in the Long 1960s* (New York: Routledge, 2019); and Timothy Scott Brown, *Sixties Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 67–101.

15. In another action, *Who’s Afraid of the Toilet Paper*, residents were invited to take part in a toilet paper exchange during a shortage. See Marek Oziewicz, “Dwarf Resistance in Communist Poland: Fantastic-Ridiculous Dwarf Aesthetic as Political Subversion in the Orange Alternative Movement and the Movie ‘Kingsize,’” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 22, no. 3 (2011): 363. See also Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 158–163; Miroslaw Peczak and Anna Krajewska-Wieczorek, “The Orange Ones, the Street, and the Background,” *Performing Arts Journal* 13, no. 2 (1991): 50–55; and Major Waldemar Fydrych, *Lives of the Orange Men: A Biographical History of the Polish Orange Alternative Movement*, trans. David French (Wivenhoe: Port Watson, 2014).

16. Bronislaw Misztal, “Between the State and Solidarity: One Movement, Two Interpretations—The Orange Alternative Movement in Poland,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 1 (1992): 55–78; and Kenney, *Carnival of Revolution*, 158–163.

17. Berenika Szymanski-Düll, “Strategies of Protest from Wrocław: The Orange Alternative or the Riot of the Gnomes,” *Journal of Urban History* 41, no. 4 (2015): 674.

18. Manfred Butzmann et al., *Heimatkunde 1979–1989–1999* (Brandenburg: Brandenburgische Kunstsammlungen, 1999), 8.

19. Detlev Lücke, “Revolutionär mit Fahrrad,” *Die Zeit* (November 22, 1991), <http://www.zeit.de/1991/48/revolutionaer-mit-fahrrad> (accessed April 29, 2014).

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21. Jan Palmowski, *Inventing a Socialist Nation: Heimat and the Politics of Everyday Life in the GDR, 1945–1990* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 152–164.

22. Jan Palmowski, “Citizenship, Identity, and Community in the German Democratic Republic,” in *Citizenship and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Germany*, ed. Geoff Eley and Jan Palmowski (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 91.

23. Julia Ault, “Defending God’s Creation? The Environment in State, Church and Society in the German Democratic Republic, 1975–1989,” *German History* 37, no.

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24. Scott Harrison, "'Expulsion from Paradise': East German Lesbian Subjectivities in the 1980s," in Harrison, Hayton, and White, *Socialist Subjectivities*, 154–155.

25. Katharine White, "East Germany's Red Woodstock: The 1973 Festival Between the 'Carnavalesque' and the Everyday," *Central European History* 51, no. 4 (2018): 592.

26. Jeff Hayton, "Härte gegen Punk: Popular Music, Western Media, and State Response in the German Democratic Republic," *German History* 31, no. 4 (2013): 527–528.

27. Jeff Hayton, "Making Punks: Subculture and Engagement in Late Socialist East Germany," in Harrison, Hayton, and White, *Socialist Subjectivities*, 154–155.

28. Michael Rauhut, *Schalmei und Lederjacke: Udo Lindenberg, BAP, Underground Rock und Politik in den achtziger Jahren* (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 1996), 182.

29. Dominic C. Boyer, "Foucault in the Bush: The Social Life of Post-Structuralist Theory in East Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg," *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 66, no. 2 (2001): 223; and Matthew Schaul, "The Impossibility of Socialist Realism: Photographer Gundula Schulze-Eldow and the East German Stasi," in *Conspiracy Dwellings: Surveillance in Contemporary Art*, ed. Outi Remes and Pam Skelton (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishers, 2010), 33.

30. Author's interview with Karla Sachse on April 15, 2015.

31. Interview with Sachse.

32. Inge Gerlich, "Fröhliches Strandleben auf den Bauzaun gemalt," *Berliner Zeitung* (August 27, 1985), 12.

33. For nudism in the GDR, see Josie McClellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 144–173.

34. Interview with Sachse.

35. Rauhut, *Schalmei und Lederjacke*, 128–129.

36. Kaiser, *Boheme in der DDR*, 150–151; and Fiedler, *Kunst im Korridor*, 228–230.

37. Author's interview with Lutz Wohlrab on April 30, 2015.

38. Bundesbeauftragter für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (hereafter BStU), Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (hereafter MfS), HA XX/9 348, *folio* 19. This archive was transferred to the Bundesarchiv Berlin in 2021 with the signature BArch replacing BStU. However, since I completed the research for this chapter before the transfer, I have kept the original signature.

39. Kaiser, *Boheme in der DDR*, 345–351.

40. Thomas Schubert, "Subversive Entfaltung und Antikunst trotz SED-Zensur," *Horch und Guck* 74, no. 4 (2011): 53.

41. Landesarchiv Berlin, C Rep. 121, Nr. 656, "Tätigkeit der Räte der Abteilung Kultur, 1981" (n.d.), n.p.

42. SAdK, Berlin, VBK-ZV, Künstlerbiographien—Reinhard Zabka, Stefan Orendt, exhibition poster, Galerie Sophien Straße Nr. 8, 1982. See also Briana J. Smith, "Grassroots Glasnost: Experimental Art, Participation, and Civic Life in 1980s East Berlin," *The American Historical Review* 126, no. 2 (2021): 623–654.

43. Reinhard Zabka Archive, Press clipping, "Reinhard Zabka: Tagträume," *Neue Berliner Illustrierte*, no. 27 (1982), n.p.
44. Richard von Gigantikow, *Lügenmuseum* (Radebeul: Notschriften, 2014), 60.
45. Regina Koehler, "Faszination durch Ironie und Parodie: Über die Exposition 'Objekte' im Berliner Dom," *Neue Zeit* (September 25, 1985), 4.
46. Harrison, Hayton, and White, "Beyond the Black Hole," 6.

Making Punks *Subculture and Provocation in Late Socialist East Germany*

Jeff Hayton

In early 1983, Dieter “Otze” Ehrlich once again found himself sitting in jail. The young man had experienced previous run-ins with the law, but this time, his predicament was more serious: *DDR von unten* (GDR from below), an East German punk record had just appeared in the West, and it included songs by his band, Schleim-Keim (Slimy Germs).¹ Upon learning of the release, East German security forces immediately mobilized, and it was only thanks to family and friends that they didn’t find any incriminating evidence at the family farm in Stotternheim, a tiny village near Erfurt. At the police station, officers grilled him about the lyrics of one song decrying a coercive dictatorship and threatened him with imprisonment for slandering the state. But Otze refused to accept their reading of his verses and insisted he was referring to South Africa. Unable to prove otherwise, state authorities were ultimately forced to let him go, although he would find himself frequently returning over the years. The events that year were instrumental in the making of Otze, Schleim-Keim, and East German punk, and they substantiate his contention, voiced in an interview near the end of his life after socialist collapse, that in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), “no one’s born a punk! One’s made a punk!”²

What does it mean to make punks? How does this happen? Does making punks differ depending on context? And what can their fabrication tell us about state socialism in the last decade of East Germany’s existence? Since its emergence, punk has often been understood as a medium of resistance. At the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham, an institution where researchers pioneered the field of cultural studies, scholars developed

a sophisticated theoretical framework for understanding subcultures in the postwar era. For the Birmingham School, subcultures weren't an expression of deviant behavior as earlier sociologists had suggested, but cultural bulwarks against fragmenting social milieus and deteriorating economic conditions. In their studies, intention, industry, and coherence were explicated by analyzing the forms, contents, and meanings produced by subcultures.³ In his classic study *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, for example, Dick Hebdige reveals how punks dismantled and reassembled elements of mainstream culture—what he called “bricolage”—to construct alternative communities guided by a logical if nonconformist edifice of values and practices.⁴ As defensive bastions erected against dominant hegemonies, Hebdige argued, subcultures worked to resist and oppose mainstream absorption, and the conflicts surrounding them were the consequences of trying to ward off convention and cooptation.

But Otze's actions disrupt these easy equations. To authorities, Schleim-Keim's members were state enemies whose acts brought dishonor and disorder to the regime. Except, for Otze, releasing *DDR von unten* was a unique opportunity to record East German punk music and make some money. As he remarked later, he only realized how much his “ass was on the line” in jail, and once he got out, he was mostly interested in getting paid for the recordings.⁵ Contradictory interpretations of this event, however, reveal not only confusion over how punks are made but also the ever-evolving nature of state socialism in the 1980s. By analyzing the myriad assumptions shaping historical actions, we can see how individuals apprehended their activities multifariously and how these understandings shaped the world around them. That Otze, even as he sat in jail for anti-state activity, was also an informant for the secret police (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*; MfS or Stasi) means we cannot simply label East German punk as oppositional and be done with it; subculture and socialism were deeply imbricated, and elucidating their intersections returns contingency and nuance to daily life in the GDR under Honecker.⁶

Consequently, despite the erudition of the Birmingham School's theories, a new cohort of critics, loosely grouped under the mantle of “post-subcultural studies,” has instead sought to illuminate how subcultures are constantly contested and contradictory, and marked not solely by opposition but also tremendous engagement with mainstream culture.⁷ Far from offering some sort of uncomplicated challenge to convention, subcultures are instead manifestations of mainstream culture and are not separate from it.⁸ These insights can help us understand the logic of subcultures and help us

make better sense of the oftentimes paradoxical nature of East German punk. For authorities, punks could either inform for the Stasi *or* release Western records, and much of their work was spent trying to force youths to engage in the former and punishing them for the latter. But for Otze, both were possible as he readily supplied authorities with information for money, while also distributing music in the West; and his release from jail meant his interrogators were forced to reluctantly agree. Otze's actions were part of larger efforts by youths to construct a space where working for the Stasi *and* illegal recordings could exist simultaneously. Thus, to understand how punks were made means to document how youths strove to unsettle normative behavior in the GDR and to foreground how citizens and authorities were repeatedly compelled to respond to their endeavors. Punk provocations—whether dressing outrageously, making loud music, or behaving in an unruly manner—were not some sort of nihilistic enterprise or resistant activity but rather the raw materials out of which their subjectivities were forged.

Punk subjectivities were shaped by a sense of possibility, a belief that their disruptions could alter the predictable rhythms of everyday life. Far from strictly rejecting or resisting state socialism, East German punks engaged in prodigious experimentation with the conventions and norms regulating socialist society and the resulting frictions helped define and construct their subculture. Punk toil, in other words, was devoted to reimagining self, subculture, and society, and punk experiments forced socialist society—citizens, authorities—to respond to their provocations. By declining to live as expected—indeed, to live unexpectedly—youths refused to be defined by the conventions of “real-existing socialism”; and their public disturbances—musical, sartorial, behavioral—announced their refusal to everyone. East German punks were infinitely more ambitious than simply rejecting mainstream society or the ruling Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*; SED). To the demise of the state and beyond, East German punk was fundamentally shaped by state socialism—and punks in turn sought to dramatically transform state socialism.

Discovery: Experimentation and Excitement

Since its emergence in the Anglo-American world in the mid-1970s, punk has been understood as a reaction to mainstream music and a world seen as apathetic and conformist.⁹ Featuring a sparse and rugged style—short and simple songs, loud and fast music—punks ostensibly sought to return popular music to a mythical era of simplicity, spontaneity, and sincerity.¹⁰

Disciples paired musical amateurism with confrontational behavior and dress to irritate wider society: style meant to disturb convention, underscore hypocrisy, and prompt reflection. From its arrival in the GDR in the late 1970s, punk became a disruptive force in the daily fabric of East German state socialism. Learning about the genre, Eastern youths were drawn to the scandal that seemed to engulf it, a striking contrast to the anodyne celebrity culture of the GDR. There was tremendous confusion about what punk was, what it meant, and why youths dressed and behaved in the ways they did. But discovering the answers to these questions was part of the game, and as Eastern youths had done time and time again when confronted with Western popular culture divorced from its original context, they set to work learning, appropriating, and making it their own: the history of punk has always been a story of encountering, revising, and refashioning.¹¹

Unsurprisingly, the new sounds and new attitudes were immediately appealing to East German youths who perceived their lives as defined by monotony and predictability. While the 1950s had seen tremendous societal changes as the socialist state sought to create a new world on the ashes of the old, such dynamism had ground to a halt by the late 1970s: those “born in year one” remained in charge, and it was their way or the highway.¹² In such circumstances, with its scandal and snot, punk was a breath of fresh air: indeed, Eastern inertia arguably made punk drama more exciting in the GDR than it had ever been in the West. For those attracted to punk, the subculture seemed to promise an escape from East German torpor: as one youth justified in the early 1980s, “The whole state youth scene pissed me off. There was nothing there. So boring.”¹³ Origin stories of youths discovering punk and being riveted by what they saw and heard abound: when Halle-area youths accidentally stumbled upon a concert and saw East Berlin punks for the first time, it seemed to them as if they had come “from another planet.”¹⁴ During these volatile moments of discovery, youths believed punk could rescue them from the ennui of the everyday: life in the GDR was “gray and boring,” one youth recalled, but punk gave her the “adventure” she craved.¹⁵ To live adventurously meant to live queerly, to go off-script—to create new practices, new spaces, new associations—to exist where normative logics, networks, and relations were suspended, upended, and overturned.¹⁶

The urgency youths felt speaks to how they experienced life in the GDR, and it suggests why they found punk appealing. In contrast to Western punks who, condemning their lack of opportunities, claimed they had “no future,” East German punks spoke of having “too much future.”¹⁷ In this formulation, they meant their lives were set in stone from birth to death without

deviation as they moved from school to work to retirement. To experience too much future meant to live life without dalliance or surprise, to inhabit a world of repetition. Except, despite the benefits, some youths chafed at the security of the “welfare dictatorship” and the certainty of *Ein ganz normales Leben* (a totally normal life).¹⁸ For those attracted to punk, “less future” meant upending expectedness in the present.¹⁹ East Berlin punks formed a band called Planlos (Without a Plan) because the goal was to jettison predictability, a daring posture in a world defined by fulfilled and overfulfilled plans.²⁰ As many youths have suggested, what they sought was not the destination, but the journey, and punk was seen as the means to hit the open road.²¹

That punk remained a minority taste was important because it gave enthusiasts a sense of distinction, which much else in the GDR seemed to deny. For SED authorities, the homogenizing hallmarks of “socialist modernity”—identical housing blocks, standardized education, mass organizations—were efforts at building a more equal and equitable society.²² Punks, however, understood these endeavors quite differently. For them, the uniformity of the planned utopia meant a loss of individuality and widespread conformity: as one youth recalled xenophobically, “Youths back then bored me. It was just like China (*chinamäßig*). They all looked the same and did the same things.”²³ In these circumstances, punk helped separate them from the herd, break with convention, and cultivate an itinerary free from normative expectations. As Jörg Löffler in Dresden later claimed, discovering punk on the radio was how he and his friends distanced themselves from their peers: “We didn’t want the same thing as the other 90 percent of our class.”²⁴ While it would be naïve to take such statements at face value, for those who felt stifled growing up in Honecker’s Germany, initial encounters with punk could be explosive. Armed with the tools to evade convention, youths suddenly had means, through punk, to reimagine expectations, and there can be no question that, at least initially, the subculture represented *terra nova*: new land to be discovered, disputed, and claimed.

Of course, *how* to be punk was up for debate, and these contests signal how music and subculture were vehicles for elaborating alternative conceptions of being in 1980s East Germany. Surviving documentation on punk is scant until the early 1980s, which makes it difficult to track exactly how youths set about fashioning themselves. Eastern youths learned about punk through the Western media or occasional encounters of Western punks on Alexanderplatz. The dribs and drabs of information slowly penetrating the Iron Curtain meant punk knowledge always remained partial and subject to rumor and hearsay. In the late 1970s, the East German press ran arti-

cles on punk, using sensational imagery to decry a capitalist, fascist, and decadent West; to the chagrin of the regime, the media coverage attracted rather than repelled youths.²⁵ Around 1980, punks begin to appear as traces in police files. Usually, these vestiges were a result of citizen complaints: vulgar clothes, inflammatory statements, loud noises, disruptive behavior. With makeshift drums, guitars strung with bicycle wires, amplifiers built from old radios, in back courtyards, filthy basements, and dusty attics, youths began experimenting with sped-up rhythms and dissonant sounds. Youths wanted music to reflect the reality of growing up in the GDR: Schleim-Keim's "Fuck Norms" (*Scheiß Norm*) on *DDR von unten* condemned a world of too much future.²⁶ For these youths, punk gave them the instruments to reimagine themselves and define their alterity, and then they took these assemblages out onto the streets to try them out on others.

Being punk meant not just singing but also looking, and fashion enabled youths to communicate heterogeneity and construct community.²⁷ Initially, youths didn't know what punks looked like: as one Halle youth put it later, "I saw someone in the tram . . . [wearing] sandals with bright stockings and the word 'punk' written on them. And I thought: 'Oh, that's a punk.'"²⁸ Confusion meant considerable experimentation: one girl didn't have boots, so she wore old granny shoes; another couldn't get hairspray, so he rubbed soap in his hair instead. They began ransacking parents' wardrobes looking for suitable clothes. They sewed bits of plastic or fur onto jeans or jackets. They ripped sleeves and hems. They used beer and glue to spike hair. They scrawled slogans across shirts with markers and paint. One kid was dismayed when his father cut up his jacket but became overjoyed when he sewed it back together and liked it even more. Another climbed into dumpsters to rescue old shoes and jackets and gave them new life: recycle, reuse, renew. The sounds of stitching and sewing and sniping and spelunking were as much the sonic architecture of the subculture as any power chord or guttural shriek. Getting dressed became a way to invent and find out what worked: finding black shoes, a problem, but black paint, a solution.²⁹ For a community valuing individual initiative and originality, making outfits provided punks with satisfaction and reinforced the legitimacy of their subculture: Löffler isn't wrong to imply that the "failures" of socialist consumerism actually helped youths engage in more rewarding subcultural experiences.³⁰

By 1981, cities began to see the coalescence of scenes. In the early years, isolation had meant that scenes developed distinct identities: Berliners were hard, Leipzigers, tame.³¹ But East Berlin soon became ground zero for punk in the GDR with its vibrant cultural scene and urban vitality: as a Weimar

youth put it, “I always had the feeling that things happened more intensely in Berlin than at home. There the clocks ran faster, the people looked more garish, you got into bar fights faster, money passed quicker through your fingers.”³² On weekends, kids from around the country streamed into the capital and hung out at the amusement park in the Plänterwald before trying to sneak into clubs at night. The first bands were formed, concerts were staged, contacts made to scenes in other socialist states, and rudimentary recording sessions undertaken: by 1982 or so, we can speak about a nationwide subculture centered in East Berlin but spreading outwards to even the smallest villages and farms like Stotternheim in the provinces.³³

Making a community, however, was not simply about similar clothes and similar ideas, but about recognition and acceptance. There was considerable competition between individuals and groups, precisely because punk remained contested. East Berlin was the early center of the subculture, but the city wasn’t always so welcoming. Outsiders were frequent targets for cruelty or even violence: stripping new punks of their clothes was called “plucking” in the capital.³⁴ A former Leipzig punk remembers how a group of them traveled to East Berlin to meet the “the real punks.” But once there, they all got punched in the face and abused because they didn’t look right.³⁵ Building community was serious work as youths negotiated the boundaries of subculture, even if these borders remained unstable as distinction worked both ways. Making scenes meant testing out which spaces would tolerate them, which relationships would last. Finding out which restaurant or club would allow them to enter was always a thrilling game: arriving at a usual haunt only to find Reserved signs on all the tables meant it was time to move on.³⁶ Of course, unpredictability was part of the fun: excitement, rejection, instability—to be punk meant to live dangerously and to be recognized as dangerous by others. Ejected from their indoor spaces, punks ended up on the streets as an increasingly disruptive feature of public life in Honecker’s Germany.

Engagement: Provocation and Societal Transformation

With the labors undertaken by East German youths in those early days, they started making space for themselves and defined the boundaries of their actions and beings. Contact with Westerners led to exchanges: texts, music, clothes, ideas. Youth experiments grew bolder: singing about their surroundings, their dissatisfactions with life in the GDR, their desire for change. Punk activities imparted alternative knowledge and proposed unconventional itineraries. As Stephen Brockmann has observed, punks put into words what

everyone was too afraid to voice: Wutanfall's "Leipzig in Ruins" (*Leipzig in Trümmern*) described the extreme disrepair of the city and condemned the policies and ideology responsible.³⁷ In their efforts to live unconventionally, punks started lifting the rug to expose all the dirt that had been swept underneath, and they increasingly forced state and society to account for the grime. On the streets, punks challenged public order and decorum. Their rowdy behavior and raucous lifestyle irritated fellow citizens. As punk provocations filled the plazas, parks, and bars of East Germany, authorities were increasingly unable to ignore them: and as the first generation of GDR punks was soon to discover, engagement saw the subculture quickly move from marginal community to public menace, at least according to the regime.

But closer inspection shows us why we should explore how youths engaged with state and society over punk meanings and how punk provocations sought to remake state socialism. While a variety of punk practices can illustrate engagement—music, concerts, politics—fashion was a crucial medium of subcultural production. For punks, fashion facilitated living life queerly, and it helped make manifest the possibilities of doing so to others: when Otze wore a T-shirt emblazoned with the slogan *Fresst Scheiße* (Eat Shit) during a concert in a Protestant church, he was goading spectators to respond.³⁸ Donning provocative clothes and engaging in provocative behavior was designed to elicit reactions, and societal response was an essential constituent of the subculture in the GDR. In this sense, punk was interactive: it was a subculture demanding external stimulus to help construct togetherness and change. And by using fashion to erase their futures, punks hoped to stretch the boundaries of acceptability and belonging in the present.

As in the West, Eastern youths quickly realized that by dressing outrageously, they could agitate onlookers and produce the reactions necessary to manufacture subculture. In this manner, punk dress induced bodies and publics to collide as they remade the conditions governing both. Critically, fashion was a way for youths not only to express themselves in ways denying the authority inherent in normative society but also to stage their own understandings of what life could look like in the GDR: as a Weimar punk later put it, when recounting the arrival of punk, "We were thrilled by the noisy, aggressive music, the accompanying rebellion, and the performative (*zur Schau*) deviation from ubiquitous norms."³⁹ The performative nature of punk dress also signaled to other youths they could be trusted. As one youth put it in the early 1980s, clothes were important since "attitude and appearances go together; you can't have one without the other."⁴⁰ Policing the bor-

ders of the subculture remained embedded in its practices, even if they were continuously questioned, disregarded, and opposed.

Piece by piece, youths made themselves punks; and the reactions they received on the streets helped to confirm they were on the right track. Indeed, the reactions of passersby were crucial elements in subcultural fabrication. Just like the artists discussed by Briana Smith in her chapter, punks' public spectacles saw youths energetically engage society: as Sven Marquardt wrote in his memoirs about growing up punk and gay in East Berlin, to be taken seriously meant "going out on the street, and demanding confrontation."⁴¹ Often appalled by their appearances, many citizens insulted them and reported them to the police for disrupting the "socialist peace."⁴² But generating outrage helped renovate the everyday and forced citizens to consider whether they were satisfied with routine, or craved something else. "In principle," one former punk explained, "you wanted these looks, these comments. The response from the people, this was actually the point, that's why you went around looking like that. You wanted to be different, to 'look weird,' to 'shock.'"⁴³

For those seeking attention, eliciting reactions was a way to effect change since out on the streets, citizens couldn't hide. As one youth explained in the early 1980s, punk was a "form of protest, a rejection of the state *as it currently exists*."⁴⁴ The conditional at the end of his formulation shows how malleable punks believed socialism really was; that under the right conditions (with the plan thrown away), the present situation could be radically transformed. In this understanding, punk engagements with society were attempts to achieve such change: as a member of Planlos put it years later, their actions weren't designed to "separate ourselves from society," but to make room for nonconformist behavior, unconventional life paths, and unusual living.⁴⁵ Punk performance, in this sense, sought to remake state socialism from the ground up.

Nor was punk spectacle solely about clothes—it was also about behavior. In a society prioritizing labor as the foundations of identity and society, loitering around all day in public made a mockery of the hard work underwriting the "worker's and peasant's state." Dressed in the discarded scraps of the past, youths ridiculed sincere efforts to build a mundane future. Unruly antics—yelling, dancing, drunkenness—shattered the discrete calm of business as usual: it was citizens looking down their noses at a pair of punks cavorting around Alexanderplatz that confirmed the latter's existences, not their dancing: "Great," they thought, "we're still alive!"⁴⁶ Public performances

helped youths to castigate onlookers for their capitulations to authority and to encourage them to reflect on how normalcy helped define and undergird socialist hegemony. And citizens constantly responded to these challenges, and often with considerable violence: as several punks recalled, they traveled in packs because it was dangerous to be alone.⁴⁷ But danger was also appealing since it substantiated that punk provocations were working: as a former East Berlin punk put it, dealing with societal rage was all “part of the fun.”⁴⁸ Indeed, the looks of disgust, the threatening comments, and the snitching to police confirmed to youths that punk efforts were succeeding: the very attempts to stifle them meant they were chipping away at the wall of silence. Confronting pedestrians on streets, stoops, and stations, punks refused to be ignored, and everyday citizens found it increasingly difficult to ignore them.

Even when citizens weren’t willing to respond to punk provocations, the state proved a more than willing partner. At first, state officials interpreted punk as an expression of capitalist exploitation, and the Eastern media spilt considerable ink using punk to lambast the West in the late 1970s.⁴⁹ Under these ideological interpretations, punks (much like the alcoholics discussed in Markus Wahl’s chapter) could not exist in socialism and were thus portrayed as Western pawns trying to sow dissent in the GDR.⁵⁰ But as punks became increasingly provocative and public, authorities became alarmed, and the Stasi categorized punk as part of the political opposition in the early 1980s. Then, between 1982 and 1983, a series of reports on Eastern punk appeared in the Western press, Eastern punk music was released in the West, and several confrontational punk concerts were held in Protestant churches.⁵¹ These events led state authorities to crack down on the subculture. In a wide-ranging directive released in the summer of 1983, Stasi chief Erich Mielke ordered his officers to move with “hardness” against punk (*Härte gegen Punk*), and what followed was a yearlong assault on the subculture, leading to arrests, forced emigrations, and military enlistments, actions designed to decimate the scene. By late 1984, the punk subculture had been devastated, and the scars of these events remain on those who survived it to this day.

What is important here is less how the state understood the subculture, but how punks responded to state actions. For those seeking excitement, state attention could turn any moment into adventure: one youth remembered hanging out on Alexanderplatz only for someone to yell, “Police!”; cornered, she quickly stuffed her buttons and badges into her underwear to make sure she didn’t lose them at the police station.⁵² Because the state understood punk as a form of anti-state opposition, all subcultural activities

became lumped into a broader framework of adversarial behavior: chains and spikes were not jewelry but weapons; amateurish guitar playing, an affront to East German musicianship; lax work habits, an effort to sabotage productivity. But these meanings meant punks could amplify or subvert state fears as necessary: when Otze claimed he was singing about South Africa, he was parroting official East German criticism of the apartheid regime.⁵³ The illegibility of punk frustrated authorities. Hauled into police stations, punks could regularly count on state (mis)understandings to get them out of jams: one youth remembered telling the Stasi how he was organizing seditious events to help speed up his exit visa, what he called “Operation Collecting Black Marks.”⁵⁴ State misconceptions about punk praxis gave youths opportunities for playing with and undermining coherent norms: when youths danced, state authorities couldn’t unravel their politics and pleasure, and punks reveled in such ambiguity.

Of course, punk incitements were complicated. State scrutiny meant youth encounters with authorities were full of chicanery and cruelty, and anxieties surrounding these experiences should not be dismissed. Trips to the police station meant the forfeiture of valuable material items, forced haircuts, potential violence, and a loss of time: punks receiving a police summons spent the coming days grappling with a future of coming hardships.⁵⁵ On the other hand, state obsessions confirmed to punks their efforts mattered—that the subculture was unsettling those in power and their vision of present and future. Their unconventionality meant state socialism could be different. If the regime had ignored punks, then youth efforts would’ve been for naught. But precisely because the state lavished attention on them, punks felt confident their endeavors were working and girded themselves for battle in a way few of their fellow citizens ever could. Standing before a court for sentencing after a song equating the SED with Nazism was judged slanderous, members of the band *Namenlos* (Without a Name) were castigated for disrupting public order and negatively influencing citizens against the state: but rather than agreeing to leave for the West, they accepted their jail sentences so they could remain in the GDR.⁵⁶ As *Planlos*’s singer Michael “Pankow” Boehlke explained years later, punks had “a mission”: “We didn’t want to go to the West, but to develop something in the GDR.”⁵⁷ Most East German punks had little interest in heading West, and those who did leave usually did so under duress; for them, the West wasn’t a bastion of freedom but a different form of oppression.⁵⁸

As the *Namenlos* case suggests, the struggle to develop something manifested itself in various ways, and youth responses to state pressures

illustrate how state actions helped confirm their punk subjectivities. The cat-and-mouse game between youths and authorities played out across Honcker's Germany. By registering concerts as birthdays, weddings, or graduations and staging them in gymnasiums, restaurants, and laundry rooms, youths evaded state efforts at prohibition. Even after being dragged to police stations, youths sneered at authorities' efforts to corrupt the subculture by lying, making and then breaking promises, refusing to cooperate, and more. Threats of punishment mostly fell on deaf ears: the leverage authorities usually used in such situations—family, education, or work—didn't always work since many punks didn't value those inducements.⁵⁹ By emphasizing the contradictions of socialist society and refusing to play by the rules, punks dramatized how the logics of everyday state socialism could be upset. And that youths could "be punk" in a variety of ways meant they could also consistently upend expectations. Authorities were regularly flummoxed by their inability to achieve "victory": after finally convincing a youth to inform on his buddies, Stasi officers were confounded when he once again refused during his next meeting with them.⁶⁰

These reactions, however, confirmed to youths that the regime was more vulnerable than it appeared: as one former youth explained, much of the fun in becoming a punk in the GDR was "realizing how great it felt to be 'negative and hostile' . . . to throw a wrench into the cogs of dictatorship."⁶¹ Indeed, state vulnerability meant youths could expand the boundaries of what was possible. Goading authorities with their behavior, accosting pedestrians on the streets, feigning ignorance during questioning—punk provocations provided immense pleasure.⁶² That punk was a series of public outbursts was a much different type of disruption than authorities were accustomed to battling: in many ways, punks helped pioneer the public spectacles which came to define late socialist protest.⁶³ While *Härte gegen Punk* devastated the first generation of East German punks, it also confirmed to youths who survived that their efforts were being taken seriously, that authorities were scared; it demonstrated that punk mattered.

Transformation? Subculture and Socialist Society

Härte gegen Punk was a searing experience. In the wake of the mass arrests, violence, and trauma, a mood of resignation settled over the remaining East German punk community. Once boisterous gatherings devolved into sullen silence as youths worried that the Stasi was listening. Many of the liminal spaces that had shielded punks were shut down. A sizable portion of

those who remained succumbed to alcohol abuse. When those who had been arrested or drafted into the army returned from jails or barracks, they didn't recognize the scene or its members. East German punk—as they had known it—was gone.

Yet something curious then happened: rather than disappearing, punk survived, and then thrived. Over the second half of the 1980s, a remarkable cultural flourishing took place in which art, music, film, literature, and more came to define East German public life; and punk was a crucial constituent of this blossoming culture.⁶⁴ Even though the Stasi had sought to eliminate punk, efforts by youths forced state authorities to incorporate the subculture into socialist society.⁶⁵ By the end of the decade, East German punk bands could be heard on the radio, seen on the covers of youth magazines, and discussed by talking heads on television. On the streets, kids lined up to watch them play in youth clubs and flooded cinemas to see them in the blockbuster DEFA (*Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft*; German Film Corporation) rock documentary *flüstern & SCHREIEN* (whisper & SHOUT, 1988). Whereas, previously, punks had been whisked away to police stations the moment they set foot in public, by the end of the decade, they were increasingly familiar public sights of late socialist East Germany.

This transformation was, in part, an outcome of the experiments undertaken by youth in the first half of the decade to queer state socialism. Engaging socialist society had forced the mainstream to come to terms with alternative thoughts and actions. Yet it was also a consequence of state officials desperately searching for much-needed economic stimulus and popular goodwill. When the Stasi proved incapable of eradicating the subculture, the SED believed supporting the underground punk scene could reinvigorate socialist music and youth culture. As Florian Lipp has meticulously investigated, many punks welcomed the state support: playing concerts; recording records; getting paid; and even performing in the West.⁶⁶ The shift from objectionable to acceptable was also a consequence of punks' understandings of themselves and their subculture. And crucially, this reorientation fundamentally transformed the nature of punk subjectivities in the GDR and the ways in which youths experienced what it meant to be punk, with ramifications extending to the fall of the Berlin Wall and beyond.

Just as the subculture was shaped by a host of competing influences in the early 1980s, so, too, was it changed at the end of the decade. Whereas in the early 1980s, youths had been chased from the streets for sporting spiked hair, by the end of the decade, when police fined punks for “decadent appearances” on the Prager Straße in Dresden, Erich Honecker demanded

answers.⁶⁷ Integration, however, meant both state and subculture needed to renegotiate their relationship: here was the consequence of understanding punk as a “rejection of the state *as it currently exists*.” Some weren’t impressed with the changed circumstances. Jürgen “Chaos” Gutjahr, Wutanfall’s former singer, observed that, by the late 1980s, the scene “had changed. Quite a few people had become punks, but they were totally different from those of us when it all began. They ran around like punks but partied in the Eden [a swanky disco]. I didn’t understand it then, and I still don’t.”⁶⁸ Others were less philosophical and more physical: Lutz Schramm, a radio DJ whose program on state radio had helped promote East German punk, remembered getting punched in the face by someone who complained his efforts at popularizing the subculture had ruined the scene.⁶⁹

While punks always remained somewhat awkward members of the socialist family, in the last years of the GDR, their unconventionality increasingly found room. Except making space also meant coming to terms with the perceived compromises necessary to achieve these opportunities, as the examples of Chaos and Schramm suggest. Whereas youths could count on being martyrs for the cause in the early 1980s, by the end of the decade, punk had changed, and so, too, had the GDR. Just as in the West, punk integration into hegemonic structures worked to tame an unruly community, at least according to those who saw its earlier unpredictability as essential to East German subcultural subjectivity. While we should be cautious about reifying punk disenchantment as a cautionary tale of assimilation, for those who experienced punk at the time, the perceived loss of subcultural authenticity through state integration helped shape their responses to the changed circumstances.⁷⁰

Punk assimilation brings us back to Otze sitting in his jail cell. When Otze emerged from the police station after weeks of incarceration, he was changed. No longer just some kid who played drums in a barn, he was now also a hero whose music was so dangerous that it threatened a dictatorship. In the years before *DDR von unten*, Schleim-Keim had cultivated a cult following with their riotous music and damaged style. But featured on the first East German punk record in history and locked up for it, Otze became, in the words of Prenzlauer Berg poet Bert Papenfuß, “the only punk-rock star of the GDR”: that practically no one in the GDR owned *DDR von unten* or ever heard it was beside the point.⁷¹ Punk integration only deepened these myths. Although it was unlikely they would ever have received it, the band refused state support after it became possible. And while Schramm could play a lot of punk music on his radio show, if he had ever played Schleim-Keim, he

admitted, that would have been the end.⁷² Even before the collapse of East Germany, Westerners took an interest in Schleim-Keim. Andreas Höhn—an independent record label owner from Lower Saxony—featured them on a series of compilation records and several albums in the 1990s. Their music and the myths surrounding the band cemented Schleim-Keim’s status as the embodiment of East German punk: as “Höhnle” put it, “[Schleim-Keim] was and remains the best. The best music that an East German punk band has ever recorded.”⁷³

Making punks was a complex intersection of competing constructions—conjunctures and contingencies whose dynamics shaped the subculture in East Germany and beyond. It was a consequence of youths engaging with socialist society. It was an outcome of youths provoking citizens and state authorities. And it saw punks work to transform state socialism. In each of these constellations, youth efforts and assessments helped shape the world they inhabited, and the responses to these constructions unsettled society around them. East German punks were not foreign to state socialism as the regime insisted, nor were they aping Western originals. But they were also not seeking to destroy the GDR: East German punk subjectivities were fundamentally constituted through state socialism and, consequently, were a part of state socialism; it is not surprising that when the GDR disappeared, so, too, did GDR punk.⁷⁴ And in seeking to define themselves and carving out room for their existences in real-existing socialism, punks sought to transform the world in which they lived. In this sense, making punks also made Honecker’s Germany.

Notes

1. On these events, see Torsten Preuß, “Zonenpunk in Scheiben: Die erste Punkplatte aus dem nahen Osten,” in *Wir wollen immer artig sein . . . : Punk, New Wave, HipHop und Independent-Szene in der DDR 1980–1990*, ed. Ronald Galenza and Heinz Havemeister (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2005), 126–135; and Seth Howes, “‘Killersatellit’ and *Randerscheinung*: Punk and the Prenzlauer Berg,” *German Studies Review* 36, no. 3 (2013): 582–589.

2. Anne Hahn and Frank Willmann, *Satan, kannst du mir noch mal verzeihen: Otze Ehrlich, Schleimkeim und der ganze Rest* (Mainz: Ventil Verlag, 2008), 158.

3. For their programmatic statement, see Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, eds., *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain* (London: Hutchinson, 1976). On the Birmingham School, see Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

4. Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979).

5. Hahn and Willmann, *Satan, kannst du mir noch mal verzeihen*, 148.
6. Hahn and Willmann, *Satan, kannst du mir noch mal verzeihen*, 55, 70–71. For an introduction to the literature on Stasi informants and their motivations, see Jens Gieseke, *The History of the Stasi: East Germany's Secret Police, 1945–1990*, trans. David Burnett (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 77–95.
7. See Paul Hodkinson and Wolfgang Deicke, eds., *Youth Cultures: Scenes, Subcultures and Tribes* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Rupa Huq, *Beyond Subculture: Pop, Youth, and Identity in a Postcolonial World* (London: Routledge, 2006); and David Muggleton, *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style* (Oxford: Berg, 2000).
8. See Subcultures Network, ed., *Fight Back: Punk, Politics and Resistance* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2014).
9. The literature on punk is large, but see Clinton Heylin, *Babylon's Burning: From Punk to Grunge* (London: Viking, 2007); Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk*, 10th anniversary ed. (New York: Grove Press, 2006); and Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond*, rev. ed. (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2002).
10. The best analysis of punk music remains Dave Laing, *One Chord Wonders: Power and Meaning in Punk Rock*, rev. ed. (Oakland: PM Press, 2015).
11. On the origins and establishment of punk in the GDR, see Jeff Hayton, *Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock in East and West Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 28–97.
12. Dorothee Wierling, *Geboren im Jahr Eins: Der Jahrgang 1949 in der DDR: Versuch einer Kollektivbiographie* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2002).
13. "Auf die Sahne," *Der Spiegel* 24 (June 24, 1982), 59.
14. Geralf Pochop, *Untergrund war Strategie: Punk in der DDR. Zwischen Rebellion und Repression* (Berlin: Hirnkost KG, 2018), 30.
15. Angela Kowalczyk, *Wir haben gelebt! Punkerinnerungen von Frauen aus Ost und West* (Berlin: CPL-Verlag, 2006), 161.
16. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 1–2.
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Envisioning a Better Future *Church-Based Environmentalism in the GDR*

Julia E. Ault

In November 1986, representatives from across the German Democratic Republic (GDR) met at the Environmental Library (*Umweltbibliothek*) in East Berlin's Zion Church for the third annual Eco-Seminar. Only six months after the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl, roughly one hundred activists—mostly young people—from thirty-six groups came to share their experiences and to learn from others.¹ The seminar's theme was “Nuclear Power in the GDR: Keep Going or Get Out?” and participants sought more ecologically just futures that reduced environmental pollution and threats.² After a long weekend of sessions, the activists returned home to their parish-based groups for further discussion and action. As the Eco-Seminar demonstrates, concerns about local devastation inspired East Germans across the country and created a dynamic culture of activism in the Protestant Church. In the shadow of Chernobyl, several dozen—perhaps as many as one hundred—church-based environmental groups sprang up around the GDR, and gatherings like the Eco-Seminar attracted up to a few thousand people.³ Although these numbers were small, they reflected a growing urgency.

In the 1980s, East Germans viewed environmental questions from a range of perspectives, including participation in party and state venues, as well as church-based groups. Party conservation groups had tens of thousands of East Germans on the rolls, though much of their work ended up being circumscribed.⁴ The Protestant Church also had a long history of thinking deeply about the relationship between science and faith, dating back to at least the founding of the Ecclesiastical Research Center in Wittenberg in 1927.⁵ East Germans' environmental action, as well as thinking about the connection between nature and faith, placed them in a longer arc

of German history than that of the GDR. A 1978 agreement between the Protestant Church and the state eased tensions between the two and ushered in a new era of activism in the church.⁶ East Germans found support for a range of causes that could become oppositional: peace, women's rights, gay rights, human rights, "third world" solidarity, and more.⁷

These issues' relationships to the church, however, were not all the same. Here, subjective experiences illuminate East Germans' affinity for church-based environmental activism. The Protestant Church provided East Germans with a semi-autonomous space to raise issues the state attempted to suppress. While the church had a less sanguine relationship with other socio-ethical groups, the institution of the church and faith were not passive vessels for activism but essential to (some) activists' subjective experiences and self-understanding.⁸

Often, scholars have considered environmental activism as an inevitable precursor to the broader protest and citizens' movements of 1989 that brought down the Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*; SED).⁹ Many participants in the environmental movement embraced public roles in the citizens' movements, and after 1989, some amplified that fact to solidify their own legacies.¹⁰ To only view environmentalism through a lens of opposition, however, obscures many East Germans' investment in environmentalism, reduces the many forms of activism they undertook, and obfuscates their visions for a better future. Rather than moving inexorably toward 1989, this chapter instead shows that East Germans had been publicly advocating for years, if not decades, for a healthier environment. East Germans' reasons for participation in environmental activism did not necessarily include ending state socialism, nor even working against the SED state. These alternative conceptions of church-based environmentalisms illustrate how diverse and at times contradictory the "environmental movement" really was. Their subjective experiences informed their activism and how they responded to the situations in which they found themselves. Instead of a monolithic, anti-state movement that reproduces the Ministry for State Security's (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*; MfS or Stasi) understanding of the environmental movement, activists acted out of various concerns: faith, scientific conviction, protest, "socio-ethical" issues, and yes, sometimes also opposition.

Subjectivity reveals environmentalists' views of themselves and their goals to be complex and varied, queering our understandings of environmental activism in the GDR. Location, background, faith, political positioning, personal relationships, priorities, opportunities, Stasi interference, and more

influenced individuals' subjective experience of activism. At the Third Berlin Eco-Seminar, this variation was clear. Participants included well-known oppositional figures, as well as activists not based in East Berlin or who did not explicitly criticize the SED's monopoly on power.¹¹ Yet they were all drawn to church-based environmentalism. To gain a sense of activists' subjective experiences, I read not only what activists said and wrote but also trace who they interacted with, what topics they were interested in, and what protests they contributed to. At times, I interpret silences, actions, and inaction to get at their subjective experiences. The activists were diverse, pursuing their own paths to a cleaner environment. Collectively and individually, these activists reject stereotypes of East German apathy and inertia.

To elucidate such dynamism, this chapter analyzes three church-based activists who attended the Third Berlin Eco-Seminar in November 1986. All three were deeply involved in church-based environmentalism but engaged with it differently based on their own subjective experiences. Annette Beleites attended from Schwerin. She was a university-trained biologist. She worked for the state in a scientific capacity while remaining committed to a Christian environmentalism. Her younger cousin, Michael, attended from Gera. He trained as a taxidermist and became increasingly involved in oppositional groups. A third participant, one of the seminar's organizers, was Wolfgang Rüdtenklau, who balanced environmental and gay rights activism in the Protestant Church in East Berlin. They are not representative of all activists, but they are useful for understanding the variety of people and approaches advocating for a cleaner environment. All three came from a Protestant milieu, though some engaged with faith more than others. Annette and Michael were related.¹² Michael and Wolfgang were the sons of pastors, and both were denied admission to university. They were all subject to the Stasi's scrutiny. And for all three, activism became all-consuming with organizing and hosting events; researching and writing articles, newsletters, and exposés; and otherwise advocating for a cleaner environment. While many activists participated more casually, these three hint at the many opportunities for environmental activism in late socialism.

Church-based activists prioritized different issues and envisioned different forms of ecological reckoning. As such, they navigated their physical and sociopolitical worlds in a myriad of ways that, sometimes, created tensions among each other and with the state. At the same time, church-based environmentalism did not necessarily equate to opposition or even preclude working with the state. More than anything, the activists' experiences illuminate the fact that East Germans were not idly waiting for the end to come.

Instead, activists usually prioritized improving environmental conditions regardless of political system. It could happen in the GDR, or not, depending on the activist. More crucially, their subject positions break down the scholarly literature's—and the Stasi's—monolithic understandings of opposition and activism. In doing so, they queer standard narratives of a single environmentalism in the GDR to reveal activists' complex and nuanced engagement with nature, faith (or not), and socialist politics.

A Christian and Scientific Environmental Ethic: Annette Beleites

Since the 1970s, some church-based environmental activists pursued a deep engagement with theology and science. For example, the Ecclesiastical Research Center (*Kirchliches Forschungsheim*; KFH) in Wittenberg supported this approach, though proponents were found across the GDR. The KFH sponsored working groups that addressed issues such as agriculture and forestry, examined their religious implications, and investigated their impact in the GDR.¹³ This type of activity tended to emphasize environmental improvement within the existing socialist structure. Historical scholarship in the 1990s was dismissive of this approach to environmentalism because it was not explicitly oppositional.¹⁴ In contrast to that stance, I argue that it was one means—among many—of addressing environmental ills. Moreover, the church was not a passive vessel for environmentalism but a vibrant space that actively attracted concerned East Germans. Annette Beleites, an attendee of the Third Berlin Eco-Seminar, exemplifies this mode of activism, becoming a leader of environmental activism in Schwerin in the 1980s. Her Christian and scientific approach existed side by side within state socialism as she navigated a path to protecting nature.

Born in 1959, Annette Beleites was deeply involved in the church as well as in peace and environmental circles, all three of which were intimately interwoven in the early 1980s. With an uncle who was a Protestant minister, Michael's father, Annette grew up in the church.¹⁵ But where some of her contemporaries were denied admission to university, she completed her *Abitur* (the pre-university high school degree) and studied biology in Leipzig. While there, she participated in the Protestant Youth Ministry (*Evangelische Studentengemeinde*; ESG) and, in 1982, took over leadership of the ESG's peace group.¹⁶ Her emphasis on peace coincided with the height of the protest movement against the stationing of intermediate range missiles in Europe. In the following years, she became more explicitly devoted to environmental issues. Among her files at the Robert Havemann Society

archive are documents about the 1984 “Mobile without a Car” campaign in Leipzig, which suggests she took part.¹⁷ Later, “Mobile without a Car” became a recurring form of protest that she organized.¹⁸

Annette’s activism consumed much of her time. Upon graduating, she received a job at the district medical clinic (*Bezirkspoliklinik*) as a biologist in Schwerin and moved there. Within a year, Annette had reconstituted a church-based environmental group and began organizing local events. Under the leadership of Jörn Mothes, an environmental group had existed in Schwerin since 1981, but after Annette became involved, the group’s focus changed.¹⁹ Their 1985 Eco-Seminar was devoted to “foreign substances in our food,” reflecting her emphasis on the science behind additives and pollutants rather than a primarily theological approach.²⁰

Over the next several years, she and Mothes invigorated activism in and around Schwerin, focusing on small-scale events that did not directly challenge the state. Perhaps her permission to attend university predisposed her to working with party and state (official) organizations. Annette and Mothes often drew on official methods and topics. Tree-planting campaigns are a clear example of that type of activity. They were small-scale and local, and the SED’s Society for Nature and Environment (*Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt*; GNU) used them too.²¹ They beautified neighborhoods but did not address the pollution that killed off so many trees, which points to a quietly acknowledged limit to collaboration and criticism. Annette and Mothes also wrote petitions to state ministries and published texts in church newspapers and in underground samizdat newsletters.²² Neither Annette nor Mothes acted in a way that suggested they wished to end the GDR. At a church synod in 1984, for example, some of the more oppositional Berliners attended events in Schwerin. Afterwards, they complained that they were scolded for “their actions,” presumably because they had been too antagonistic toward authorities or outspoken in their critiques of environmental conditions.²³ Concern about the Berliners’ instigation likely came from Mothes in reference to an incident before Annette arrived in Schwerin. Still, it underscores variation in activists’ attitudes toward the state and how they envisioned achieving their goals.

Photos from the 1980s reveal Annette to be physically and symbolically at the center of environmental activism in the northern GDR. In a series of photos from 1985, she leads a fall hike to observe cranes near Barth and holds binoculars to her eyes as she watches whooper swans on the Darss Peninsula.²⁴ In a photo from 1987, Annette and others stand around a newly planted tree in a prefabricated settlement.²⁵ Much like the artists

discussed by Briana Smith, activists like Annette staked out territory from the state—removing the state’s position of sole authority for environmental protection—and assumed personal and collective, church-based responsibility for improving living conditions.²⁶ The 1987 campaign was part of a weekend-long, sixty-person seminar on “City Green not Gray.”²⁷ With registrations going personally to Annette, the invitation claimed, “In the city, nature has lost most of its original facade. This and other questions are what we want to confront in presentations and discussions.”²⁸ Conversations about the challenges of living in drab prefabricated settlements with little green space typically accompanied these campaigns. They contested not the state-supplied housing but the aesthetics and quality of life.

Annette’s subject position emerges not only through her education and convictions, however, but also the Stasi’s surveillance of her activities and its pressure on her to conform. Her deep faith in a Christian environmental ethic and her pursuit of better environmental policies led her to run afoul of the Stasi, though she never declared herself to be “anti-state.” Even while the Stasi spied on her, it acknowledged this position. A report from a “Mobile without a Car” event in 1989 noted that she told participants to “follow the state’s expectations for behavior, and she personally rejected provocative actions.”²⁹ Yet the Stasi could not reject its own understanding of her as a threat to the security of the state and its vision of a socialist future. In Annette’s case, the Stasi created a binary between state and anti-state that she tried to defy by working in multiple capacities.

By 1987, the Stasi categorized Annette’s work as “anti-state incitement” (*staatsfeindliche Hetze*) and opened an ongoing surveillance operation against her, “Operation Biologist.”³⁰ Within a year, Annette left her job at the medical clinic—whether by choice or not is unclear—and took a fellowship at the KFH. Though her employment was in Wittenberg, she maintained her residence in Schwerin and continued her activism. As part of her fellowship, she also worked on a project about agriculture on church lands.³¹ This task underscored the KFH’s long-standing interest in the intersection of faith and science. The director, Dr. Hans-Peter Gensichen, respected Annette’s expertise in biology, and as a confirmed Christian, her faith opened up the KFH’s resources in a way that would not have been available to someone less established in the church.³²

Once the church employed Annette, demands for her expertise increased. Annette was shaped by the experience of gaining prominent status in environmental circles in a way that so few other women did. Her degree in biology surely boosted her credentials on that front. One request

stated that “my wife, among others, strongly recommended you as an expert (*Fachfrau*) for environmental questions,” then asked for informational materials and invited her to speak at a retreat.³³ In another instance, someone from Biberschlag in Thuringia asked her to send materials regarding “environmental protection, ecology, and peace groups” because “we are all interested in furthering the aforementioned themes.” The letter included postage to mail the materials.³⁴ Annette explained that she and her environmental group did not produce any regular publications, but she sent a copy of *Info-Blatt*, the samizdat publication from a Berlin-based working group and a report from the most recent Eco-Seminar in Berlin. She further encouraged members of the Biberschlag youth group to attend Schwerin’s next environmental seminar on agriculture, a topic connected to her KFH fellowship.³⁵

While other activists were increasingly pulled toward oppositional activities in 1989, Annette remained dedicated to a faith-based and scientific environmentalism. She operated within—or on the edges of—the system to effect change in her position at the KFH. Annette participated in GDR-wide Ecumenical Assemblies on “Peace, Justice, and Conservation of Creation.” These assemblies gathered faith-based East Germans from a range of religious backgrounds, not just the main Protestant Church, to tackle environmental and related problems. Participants drafted resolutions on “energy for the future,” “ecology and economy,” and “the value of information for environmental consciousness and engagement,” among others.³⁶ Annette’s exact participation is unclear, but she relayed relevant information back to her church-based group in Schwerin. The Eighth Eco-Seminar that she organized in Schwerin in 1989 cited the Ecumenical Assemblies’ resolutions in reference to the GDR’s agriculture. The event’s materials critiqued, “The agricultural production processes—marked by intensive livestock farming, large-scale land use, and chemicalization—are noticeable in the soil and water quality.”³⁷ She remained deeply embedded in the connections between faith, science, and activism to create a more environmentally just future.

As the GDR collapsed, Annette’s work gained political recognition, but her activism remained primarily local in character, not challenging the system as a whole on a national stage. In December 1989, the Berlin-based oppositional figure Carlo Jordan recommended her to be part of a film and television production on “the situation of ecological engagement in the GDR.”³⁸ Yet she stayed in Schwerin. In 1990, she participated in the city of Schwerin’s Round Table as a member of the Green League, an environmental group that emerged in the fall of 1989. Thereafter, she held elected office as a member of the city council and various professional nature conservation positions.³⁹

Her engagement in the GDR and afterwards focused on individual actions and grassroots improvements. Environmental protection remained her goal, not an instrument for political change as it was for others. Annette's positioning is confirmed in the memoirs and reflections of more oppositional figures. Other than her cousin Michael's account of the church-based environmental movement, *Dicke Luft*, she is absent from those pieces because, especially in retrospect, they did not see her as having the same political objectives.⁴⁰

Confronting the State from the Margins: Michael Beleites

Annette's cousin, Michael, came from a similar background but followed a different environmental path. His subject formation differed because of his individual experiences, starting with being denied admission to university after finishing high school. Perhaps influenced by this early and combative relationship with the state, Michael took a more explicitly oppositional stance when he opted to research a taboo topic in the GDR: the effects of uranium mining. Responding to the church-based movement's call for individual action to confront the pollution in front of him (or anyone), Michael dove into this topic. His environmentalism was rooted in the problems around Gera, where he lived after finishing school. His 1988 publication on uranium mining, however, had a GDR-wide reach that drew attention within the church, as well as the Stasi's ire. A consequence of this increasing publicity is that it is easier to trace his positions, activities, and decisions. Being raised in a Protestant milieu was important in shaping Michael's options and informing his decisions, and the structures of the church were essential in supporting him. Yet faith did not seem to be at the core of Michael's environmentalism, and he did not draw on it as extensively as Annette, which reveals the possibility for multiple modes of environmental engagement within the church. His more antagonistic environmental activism explicitly challenged the state and he rejected socialism as an environmental guardian.

Born in Halle in 1964, Michael grew up in the area.⁴¹ His father was a pastor, and for political reasons, Michael was denied either an *Abitur* or admission to university.⁴² As one of the few options open to him, Michael trained in taxidermy at the Natural History Museum in Gera. During those years, he volunteered in both SED environmental organizations and in church circles. Notes and fliers from the SED Friends of Nature and Heimat (*Natur- und Heimatfreunde*), and then from the 1980-constituted GNU, litter his early files at the Robert Havemann Society archive.⁴³ As each dis-

trict (*Bezirk*) and county (*Kreis*) developed its own GNU chapter, figures like Michael were initially welcomed. He even worked with the GNU to create an interest group for environmental protection (as opposed to ornithology, nature conservation, and other more technical interest groups) in 1986.⁴⁴ By 1987, though, this cooperation was no longer feasible. Party officials black-listed him from events, and the interest group he helped found was dissolved.⁴⁵ His participation, though, acknowledges that church-based activists still relied on party and state organizations for information, and at times, put the environment ahead of politics. Moreover, the state found him incompatible with its vision of environmentalism, not the other way around.

When he was twenty-one, Michael became increasingly involved in church-based peace and environmental groups, which the Stasi quickly noted. Almost as soon as he joined such groups, and years before the Stasi began spying on Annette, the Stasi opened an ongoing operation against him in 1982.⁴⁶ Michael was active not only in Gera, but also frequently attended events across the GDR since he did not enjoy an active, grassroots, church-based group in Gera as Annette did in Schwerin. Mobility of people and information was a key threat for the Stasi. Michael did not limit himself to locally oriented activism but looked at the larger, structural reasons for environmental devastation in the GDR. He took part in Eco-Seminars in Berlin starting in 1984.⁴⁷ He also represented the Church Province of Saxony at “Peace, Justice, and Conservation of Creation” events in Magdeburg and Erfurt in 1985 and 1986, respectively.⁴⁸ At that time, he also attended the Fifth Ecology Seminar in Schwerin, which was Annette’s first in an organizing role. She included a handwritten note at the top of the invitation, “Fond greetings! I hope you’ll be there. Yours, Annette.”⁴⁹ Personal connections—in this case, family ties—played an important role in maintaining community and purpose amid Stasi surveillance and constant suspicion.

Already under Stasi surveillance, Michael shifted his focus around the time of Chernobyl and the Third Berlin Eco-Seminar: he began to secretly research uranium mining in the joint Soviet–East German stock company (*Sowjetisch-Deutsche Aktiengesellschaft*; SDAG) Wismut.⁵⁰ Having grown up in a brown coal mining region of the GDR, he had lived experience with the “filth” of coal pollution. In school, “nuclear energy was always presented as the future.”⁵¹ But upon moving to Gera for his vocational training, he was confronted with the problems surrounding uranium mining and its culture of secrecy. He found it quite different from the open discussion of brown coal around Halle. At first, Michael feared that uranium mining was too controversial, but two developments in the mid-1980s prompted him to take it up.

First, the church-based environmental movement was moving from raising general awareness to confronting problems directly in front of them as they sought to fashion a “critical public.” The second was the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl on April 26, 1986.⁵² Chernobyl was an immediate and existential catastrophe with domestic implications, because the GDR used similar reactors. The disaster was a subject forming moment that shaped his interests and future actions. With this problem at his door, Michael pursued it.

In coordination with the KFH and a church-based group Doctors for Peace in Berlin, Michael published an explosive sixty-page booklet, *Pechblende* (Uraninite), in 1988. Named for the uranium-rich mineral found in the western Ore Mountains and eastern Thuringia, Michael worked closely with the peace activist and physicist Sebastian Pflugbeil to learn the science behind uranium mining and the dangers it posed.⁵³ From the first page, Michael framed the project in terms of fears about the “military and civilian use of nuclear energy” and the “appalling consequences of the reactor catastrophe at Chernobyl.”⁵⁴ The work recounted the history of the SDAG Wismut, its environmental impact, and its effects on miners. At the end, Michael’s conclusions spoke to his understanding of a religious and political environmentalism. He blamed the “limitless science that developed faster than a societal consciousness of responsibility” and contended that “only if we view world problems in relation to one another and we share our own individual expertise can we achieve a solution.”⁵⁵ Here, Michael echoed the individual and collective responsibility for action that was so prominent in the church-based movement. In contrast to his cousin, however, he seemed warier of science’s “limitless” potential to solve problems.

Pechblende’s publication run in church presses was limited, but its contents rocked the environmental community, and Michael was soon in high demand in church circles. The work was an “absolute rarity,” according to a member of the West German Green Party, who got ahold of it and began to pay attention.⁵⁶ At the 1988 Ecumenical Assembly in Dresden, Michael spoke as a “witness to the shock” of uranium mining’s consequences in the GDR. He gave further talks about *Pechblende* in Gera, Altenburg, and Berlin. And, partially as a result of the booklet, in 1988, a church-based group was founded in Ronneberg, east of Gera, in between multiple uranium mines.⁵⁷ As Michael became busier, Annette reminded him—in a note about the Eighth Eco-Seminar in Schwerin—to “give a sign of life.”⁵⁸ Michael’s subject position in that moment—the workload and stress of Stasi surveillance—made it difficult to maintain personal relationships, even with his cousin.

After *Pechblende*’s publication, Michael’s life became challenging if not

downright precarious. The Stasi took “extensive offense measures” against him with repeated bans on travel both abroad and to East Berlin.⁵⁹ The end of the GDR was certainly not apparent to Michael in 1988 or even through most of 1989. The Stasi directed state experts to write letters of outrage to him, or sometimes, they simply penned threats to him. Multiple times, Michael was ordered to attend Stasi disciplinary meetings in which he was discouraged from his research topic and forbidden from speaking about it.⁶⁰ Only when he was also employed by the KFH as a fellow, between December 1988 and April 1989, did these confrontations ease, suggesting that church employment offered some measure of protection. Later in 1989, Michael faced criminal charges for having acquired a Geiger counter from a West German colleague since independent measuring of radiation was illegal in the GDR. As the regime faced other challenges in the fall, however, the Stasi had to back off these repressive measures.⁶¹

In late 1989 and early 1990, Michael eagerly joined the changing political landscape, which also shaped his later career. He joined the Citizens’ Committee to Dissolve the Ministry for State Security in Gera in December. Based on his expertise on Wismut, he also served as an adviser to the New Forum in the Central Round Table discussions between the SED and the citizens’ movements in January 1990.⁶² Unlike Annette, Michael’s post-1989 work then turned toward maintaining his legacy and that of the opposition, including serving as Saxony’s Commissioner for Stasi Records.⁶³ While also engaging with the environment primarily through the Protestant Church, Michael’s decisions, especially to publicly criticize uranium mining and the system as a whole, led him to be a greater target of the Stasi. This experience of Stasi repression, moreover, shaped his later perspectives on his youth and the GDR more generally. Though he was once known as a human rights activist and environmentalist, his politics since have drifted further to the right, comparing PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West) demonstrations to the peaceful demonstrations of 1989 and speaking at events connected with the right-wing populist party Alternative for Germany.⁶⁴

Betwixt and Between: Wolfgang Rüdtenklau

East Berlin activist Wolfgang Rüdtenklau represents a third way of participating in church-based environmentalism, one that breaks down monolithic interpretations of “causes” or movements in that space. A number of factors set his experience apart from that of the Beleites cousins, even as they all

protested pollution and participated in the same events. First, he relied on the church's space to find refuge as both a gay man and an environmental activist. Though gay rights and ecology movements had both been active in the church since the 1970s, historical scholarship has not devoted much attention to exploring their intersections, inadvertently reaffirming Stasi categorization.⁶⁵ Rüdtenklau's navigation of these two movements reveals solidarity and tension as his focus shifted between gay rights and environmentalism. A second major difference from the Beleiteses is that Rüdtenklau spent most of the 1980s in East Berlin, at the heart of alternative scenes and a growing opposition movement. Yet, as in the other two cases, Rüdtenklau participated in and created a vibrant culture of activism that sought a differently imagined future. His environmentalism, informed by his experience with gay rights advocacy, and in contrast to the Beleites cousins, did not envision a future in which state socialism could improve the environment or that he could fully participate in as a gay man.

Born in 1953, Wolfgang Rüdtenklau was the son of a pastor and raised in Erfurt, Thuringia, in a Protestant milieu like the Beleiteses.⁶⁶ After finishing school in nearby Eisenach, he refused to complete the required military service, which foreclosed any possibility of studying at a university. For a time, he studied theology at a seminary in East Berlin and eventually completed his training in youth work in a "church capacity" (*im kirchlichen Dienst*). He then moved between various jobs: night watchman, custodian, and cemetery worker.⁶⁷ Starting in the 1970s, Rüdtenklau grew interested in gay rights and environmental groups. He participated both in Gays in the Church at the Confessing Church (*Bekennniskirche*) in Berlin-Treptow and was a founding member of the Peace and Environmental Circle at the Church of Faith (*Glaubenskirche*) in Berlin-Lichtenberg in 1983.

Rüdtenklau's engagement with gay rights in the church started when he joined a "men's group." Being in conversation with this community of older gay men who spoke about their Nazi-era persecution convinced him to research the topic in more depth. He eventually wrote a book on the subject and had it smuggled into the West for publication.⁶⁸ In 1984, Rüdtenklau co-organized related exhibitions in Berlin and Leipzig. A third was planned for Jena, in coordination with a well-known gay rights activist named Alf, but before that could happen, Rüdtenklau was arrested under Paragraph 151 (sex with or abuse of minors).⁶⁹ His supposition is that his arrest came as a reaction to the exhibitions, which raised a taboo topic. Rüdtenklau was convicted and spent a year in prison. The conviction strained old relationships and forced him to reconsider his position in Gays in the Church because a

Paragraph 151 conviction could make one suspicious in the church-based gay community, where respectability was important to gaining acceptance. As Rüdtenklau later commented in an interview, being arrested under that statute “could really wreck someone’s life” (*jemand kaput machen*).⁷⁰ Respectability politics did not allow space for Rüdtenklau’s Paragraph 151 conviction.

Rüdtenklau’s incarceration proved to be a turning point in his subject formation. The stigma of Paragraph 151 made him a target of other inmates as well as isolating him from his previous social circles. In contrast, Rüdtenklau’s environmental circles supported him through his time in prison and then after. Carlo Jordan, a prominent oppositional environmental activist, and his girlfriend at the time, visited and took care of Rüdtenklau while he was in prison. Upon his release, another prominent activist, Wolfgang Templin, vouched for Rüdtenklau in East Berlin environmental circles, explaining that Rüdtenklau had been a victim of Stasi machinations.⁷¹ Rüdtenklau found these activists had a deep sense of solidarity for him, and so he participated more in environmental circles. The respectability concerns among gay rights activists in the church were not an issue for the primarily straight, cisgender activists in the environmental movement; their acceptance in the church was not questioned in the same way.

Amid these tensions, on November 3, 1985, Wolfgang Rüdtenklau resigned from Gays in the Church and stopped participating in its working groups or events. He had had an argument with one of its leaders, Christian Pulz. According to Rüdtenklau, Pulz claimed that “gay work” (*Schwulenearbeit*) was “more important than peace and environmental work and that those other groups privileged the alternative scene within the Protestant Church,” which prompted Rüdtenklau’s resignation.⁷² He declared that he would start a new group, potentially called Gays for Peace, that brought together his two interests. Rüdtenklau drew on his research of same-sex desiring men in the Weimar Republic and Third Reich to highlight—in his view—the lack of solidarity between the issues in the past. His Gays for Peace idea was also perhaps informed by the successful Women for Peace (*Frauen für den Frieden*) group that was most active between 1982 and 1985.⁷³ Rüdtenklau claimed the new group would bring together “inner peace” and “outer peace” for “engagement toward a true societal emancipation.”⁷⁴ Whether or not Rüdtenklau successfully founded this group, or just proposed it after falling out with Pulz is unclear. Still, his notion of “true societal emancipation” suggests a vision of the future that was radically different from his present, one that was more inclusive and in which he did not have to choose between his two deeply held passions.

Rüddenklau's relationship to gay rights groups became increasingly uneasy in the second half of the 1980s, reinforcing his decision to devote more attention to environmental activism. Though he participated in a well-attended church-based event on the experiences of same-sex desiring individuals in prison, he recalls an apparent nervousness in the room. He later described the audience's rapt attention but also their unwillingness to ask questions or discuss the topic openly. He characterized the audience as not being brave enough to speak up, though there were obviously potential consequences for doing so.⁷⁵ Within the church, engaging with the topic might have called the speaker's respectability into question (only individuals guilty of Paragraph 151 would be suspect), and with informants undoubtedly in attendance, talking might have initiated a Stasi investigation. Still, in retrospect, Rüddenklau expressed frustration with the gay community in the church. Given the friction between Rüddenklau and Pulz and others, it seems that Rüddenklau did not entirely regain acceptance in church-based gay rights circles.

In 1986, perhaps as a consequence of his conflict with Pulz, Rüddenklau became a founding member of the Environmental Library in East Berlin. There, he organized events, including the Third Eco-Seminar in November 1986, and raised awareness about the devastating effects of the GDR's pollution. He was also intimately involved in publishing the underground newsletter *Umweltblätter*. Both the Environmental Library and the *Umweltblätter* found a ready welcome from church-based and oppositional circles. The Environmental Library quickly became a leading oppositional group; its use of environmental devastation to critique the SED became well-known in the GDR and abroad. The group quickly drew the Stasi's attention, and in November 1987, the Stasi raided its headquarters in the basement of the Zion Church. As part of that "action," Rüddenklau was arrested along with six others.⁷⁶ This arrest, however, was different from his earlier experience. This time, there was international outcry and the arrested were released within days.⁷⁷ In a 2015 interview, Rüddenklau suggested that the SED was already losing its grip on the population and that arrests did not have the same effect on East German citizens at this time.⁷⁸

Yet cooperation within the Environmental Library, much less the larger movement or between movements, proved difficult. As in other scenarios, Stasi infiltration played an influential role. Only a year and a half after the Environmental Library's founding, a faction led by Carlo Jordan split off and started the Green-Ecological Network Ark (*Grün-ökologische Netzwerk Arche*, or *Arche*, for short), which focused solely on environmental issues

rather than a range of related oppositional topics. Though they claimed not to be working at cross purposes, tensions remained high between the two groups, and the pastor of the Zion Church was asked to mediate. In one incident, Rüdtenklau and Arche activist Matthias Voigt came to blows in the churchyard with Rüdtenklau allegedly shouting, "If you don't resign as custodian here, you'll get it in the nose daily. That's how we did it in the slammer."⁷⁹ The divisions between the two organizations were slow to heal, and suspicion remained. Personal animosities and discord pervaded environmental circles throughout the GDR's final years. The Stasi's explicit interference in the groups and in activists' lives stymied the wider-ranging results that Rüdtenklau and others like him sought.

Rüdtenklau's movement between groups illuminates how East Germans navigated a complex and, at times, punishing system. Acceptance within official structures, on the one hand, and the church, on the other, meant something different at various moments in time. As individuals found themselves welcomed in one place—and perhaps distrusted in another—they moved to find community and solidarity. They chose carefully between their options, seeking to engage with causes they felt committed to but also where they would not be ostracized. For Rüdtenklau, being both gay and active in the environmental movement presented challenges that shaped his decisions, his understanding of his position in the church, and his relationship to East German society. Yet the dynamism of these movements provided him with a space, however fraught, that he may not have found elsewhere in the GDR.

Even after unification, his work in gay rights groups and in environmental circles continued to be treated separately in the memoirs of former activists and in academic scholarship. In some ways, the divide has been reinforced. In the 1990s, Rüdtenklau published a book based on his experiences in the environmental movement of the 1980s and its role in protesting SED rule; it devotes little to no attention to his advocacy for the acceptance for same-sex attraction.⁸⁰ Similarly, archival documents about his activities are often catalogued by topic, almost cutting one off from the other. Given this (self-)representation in memoirs and in archival holdings, it is not surprising that publications about the GDR opposition from the 1990s and early 2000s continued this trend. Yet as the intersections of the peace, human rights, environment, and even women's rights groups have gained more traction, Rüdtenklau's experiences—in a holistic light—are essential to uncovering an obscured complexity about the dynamics of church-based activism in the 1980s.⁸¹

Conclusion

The three activists discussed in this chapter underscore the diverse ways in which they pursued a better environmental future in late socialism and hints at even more paths to that end. Even those activists who opposed the system and highlighted its failings still lived and worked within socialism to push for more environmental protection. They did not see the end coming nor did they know what it would look like. They emphasized an environmentally cleaner future, and their experiences shaped what that vision of change looked like. The Beleites cousins and Rüdtenklau do not represent all environmental activists in the GDR, or even those in church-based groups, but their intentions, actions, and experiences sketch out a range of possible forms of engagement. While scholars have long recognized the presence of environmental protest in the GDR, and often linked it to 1989, they often overlook the myriad of experiences that activists could and did have. Environmental activism was vibrant and dynamic in the 1980s.

These experiences of the 1980s, though, also shaped activists' post-1990 trajectories. Here, in some ways, Annette is most representative of a larger group. Many involved in church-based environmental activism did not take on national personas afterward but remained only active on the local level. With time, one might argue that they faded into obscurity. For Rüdtenklau and Michael, preserving their legacies of activism became essential. In different capacities, they both took up work to bring awareness to the Stasi's repressive role in East Germans' lives. Michael became the Commissioner for Stasi Records in Saxony while Rüdtenklau has been a tour guide at the Stasi prison Hohenschönhausen since 2001.³² In the case of Michael Beleites, though, the politics of the past have led to eco-conservative positions about present-day politics. As the activists' subjective experiences led them to adopt and act on different forms of environmentalism before 1989, so have they pursued divergent paths in the decades since. Interestingly, Michael and Rüdtenklau—who vociferously advocated for the GDR's demise—subjectively remain more closely tied to that past.

Notes

1. "3. Berliner Ökologieseminar (28. bis 30. November 1986)," *Umweltblätter: Info-Papier des Friedens- und Umweltkreises* (n.d.), n.p.

2. Robert Havemann Gesellschaft (hereafter RHG), RG B 19/01, "3. Berliner Ökologie Seminar: Informieren, Koordinieren" (n.d.), n.p.

3. RHG, Ki 18/02, "Die Karteibroschüre der kirchlichen Umweltgruppen in der DDR: Stand vom November 1988" (n.d.), n.p.

4. According to Hermann Behrens, the SED's Society for Nature and Environment (*Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt*; GNU) had nearly sixty thousand members in 1990. See Hermann Behrens, Ulrike Benkert, Jürgen Hopfmann, and Uwe Maechler, *Wurzeln der Umweltbewegung: Die "Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt" (GNU) im Kulturbund der DDR* (Magdeburg: BDWi-Verlag, 1993), 14.

5. Julia E. Ault, *Saving Nature under Socialism: Transnational Environmentalism in East Germany, 1968–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 102–103.

6. Ault, *Saving Nature under Socialism*, 98–102.

7. Some older scholarships refer to these as "socio-ethical" movements, drawing on Western European social science literature. See Hubertus Knabe, "Neue Soziale Bewegungen im Sozialismus: Zur Genesis alternativer politischer Orientierungen in der DDR," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, no. 40 (1988): 551–553; Karl-Werner Brand, "'Neue Soziale Bewegungen' auch in der DDR? Zur Erklärungskraft eines Konzepts," in *Zwischen Verweigerung und Opposition: Politischer Protest in der DDR, 1970–1989*, ed. Detlef Pollack and Dieter Rink (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1997), 235–251; and Andrew I. Port, "Introduction: The Banalities of East German Historiography," in *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler*, ed. Mary Fulbrook and Andrew I. Port (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 10.

8. Ault, *Saving Nature under Socialism*; Gareth Dale, *Popular Protest in East Germany, 1945–1989* (London: Routledge, 2005); Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949–1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Steven Pfaff, "The Politics of Peace in the GDR: The Independent Peace Movement, the Church, and the Origins of the East German Opposition," *Peace & Change* 26, no. 3 (2001): 280–300; and Ned Richardson-Little, *The Human Rights Dictatorship: Socialism, Global Solidarity and Revolution in East Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

9. Ehrhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR, 1949–1989* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1997); Detlef Pollack and Dieter Rink, eds., *Zwischen Verweigerung und Opposition: Politischer Protest in der DDR, 1970–1989* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1997).

10. Carlo Jordan and Hans Michael Kloth, *Arche Nova: Opposition in der DDR—Das "Grün-ökologische Netzwerk Arche" 1988–90. Mit den Texten der "Arche Nova,"* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1995); Wolfgang Rüdtenklau, *Störenfried: DDR-Opposition mit Texten aus den "Umweltblättern"* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1992); and Michael Beleites, *Dicke Luft: Zwischen Ruß und Revolte—Die unabhängige Umweltbewegung in der DDR* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016).

11. Bundesarchiv Berlin (hereafter BArch), Ministerium für Staatssicherheit, BV Bln, AG XXII 275, "Erste Erkenntnisse zum sogenannten 3. 'Berliner Ökologieseminar' vom 28.11.1986 bis zum 30.11.1986 in der Evangelischen Kirchgemeinde Zion" (November 30, 1986), n.p.

12. To avoid confusion in the text, I refer to them by their first names.

13. "Die Erde ist zu retten" (Wittenberg: Kirchliches Forschungsheim, 1980), "Agrarwirtschaft und Umwelt" (Wittenberg: Kirchliches Forschungsheim, 1984), "Energie und Umwelt" (Wittenberg: Kirchliches Forschungsheim, 1988), among others.
14. Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 227, cited in Dale, *Popular Protest in East Germany*, 103.
15. BArch, DO 4/805, "Schriftwechsel zwischen Carl Beleites und Rat der Bezirk, Abteilung Umweltschutz und Wasserwirtschaft, 1978–1984" (n.d.), n.p.
16. "Annette Beleites," *Mutige Frauen: Widerständiges Verhalten in Zeiten von Diktaturen*, Denkstätte Teehaus Trebbow, <http://teehaus-trebbow.de/projekte/2012/tafeln/> (accessed March 3, 2023).
17. RHG, AB 08, "Aktion 'Mobil ohne Auto' Leipzig" (1984), n.p.
18. RHG, AB 06, "Gegenwärtige Strukturen und Selbstverständnis der Kirchliche Umweltgruppe Schwerin" (1989), n.p.
19. Jugendopposition in der DDR, "Jörn Mothes," <https://www.jugendopposition.de/lexikon/personen/148126/joern-mothes> (accessed March 3, 2023).
20. RHG, AB 10, "Ökoseminar '85" (n.d.), n.p.
21. Stadtarchiv Halle, A.40 Nr. 19, Bd. 1, "Jahresbericht 1983" (February 3, 1984), n.p.
22. "Annette Beleites."
23. RHG, SWV 02/02, "2. Beiträge aus den Gruppen" (1984), n.p.
24. Beleites, *Dicke Luft*, 146–147.
25. Beleites, *Dicke Luft*, 71.
26. RHG, AB 08, "Nicht nur Hunde brauchen Bäume—3. Baumpflanzaktion" (1980), n.p.
27. There's wordplay in the original German: "Stadtgrün statt grau."
28. RHG, AB 08, "Einladung zum VI. Ökologieseminar: Stadtgrün statt grau" (March 1987), n.p. Some of the discussed images can also be found as part of an online exhibition: <http://teehaus-trebbow.de/projekte/2012/tafeln/> (accessed February 22, 2023).
29. RHG, AB 08, "BStU-OV 'Biologe'—Annette Beleites—Mobil ohne Auto" (June 1, 1989), n.p.
30. "Annette Beleites."
31. Beleites, *Dicke Luft*, 85.
32. BArch, DO 4/801, Gräfe, "Entwurf: Zur Tätigkeit der 'Ökologie- und Umweltschutzgruppen im kirchlichen Raum" (November 16, 1984), n.p.
33. RHG, AB 03, "Correspondence between Martin Schmiedt (Pastor, Rostock) and Annette Beleites" (December 10, 1988), n.p.
34. RHG, AB 03, "Letter from Erwin Westphal to Annette Beleites" (February 1, 1989), n.p.
35. RHG, AB 03, "Letter from Annette Beleites to Erwin Westphal" (February 17, 1989), n.p.
36. "Ökumenische Versammlung für Gerechtigkeit, Frieden und Bewahrung der Schöpfung" (1989), https://www.ekmd.de/attachment/Texte_Oekumenische_Versammlung_1989.pdf (accessed March 7, 2023).

37. RHG, SWV 02/02, "VIII. Schweriner Ökologieseminar, 11.3.–12.3.1989—"Das geht auf keine Kuhhaut"" (n.d.), n.p.

38. RHG, AB 03, "Letter from Hochschule für Film—Und Fernsehen der DDR. 'K. Wolf' to Annette Beleites" (December 12, 1989), n.p.

39. "Annette Beleites."

40. Beleites, *Dicke Luft*.

41. "Carl Beleites, 1932–2021," Archiv der DDR-Opposition, Robert Havemann Gesellschaft, <https://www.havemann-gesellschaft.de/aktuelles/in-memoriam/carl-beleites-1932-2021/> (accessed February 10, 2023).

42. *Jugendopposition in der DDR*, "Michael Beleites," <https://www.jugendopposition.de/lexikon/personen/148006/michael-beleites> (accessed March 7, 2023).

43. RHG MB 01, "Wir gestatten uns, Sie zur Sitzung der Gesellschaft für Natur und Umwelt" (February 17, 1987).

44. Beleites, *Dicke Luft*, 20. For more on the idea of dual participation, see Ault, *Saving Nature under Socialism*, 92.

45. "Leben mit der Wismut," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HfVyD_hQ1c&t=1210s (accessed February 10, 2023). Quoted around 15:00.

46. *Jugendopposition in der DDR*, "Michael Beleites."

47. RHG, MB 02, "September 84—Ökologie-Seminar. Thema: 'Leben in der Stadt'" (1984), n.p.

48. RHG, MB 02, "An Vertreter von Gruppen in der KPS, die im Problemkreis 'Frieden' Gerechtigkeit und Bewahrung der Schöpfung engagiert sind" (April 25, 1985), n.p.; and RHG, MB 02, "Letter from the 'Protestant Provost of the Altmark'" (February 2, 1986), n.p.

49. RHG, MB 02, "V. Schweriner Ökologieseminar—Wir haben Deine Anmeldung erhalten" (n.d.), n.p.

50. The SDAG Wismut was a joint stock company, which came to be shared fifty-fifty between the Soviet Union and the GDR starting in 1953. From 1946 to 1953, control had been solely in the hands of the Soviets. Under the direct control of Lavrentii Beria and the NKVD, the Soviet secret police, Wismut had been crucial in the early Cold War atomic race. See Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, *Wismut: Landscapes Designed and Preserved*, <https://www.bmwk.de/Redaktion/EN/Publikationen/wismut-brochure.pdf> (accessed March 7, 2023). See also Michael Beleites, *Pechblende: Der Uranbergbau in der DDR und seine Folgen* (Wittenberg: Kirchliches Forschungsheim, 1988), 9.

51. "Leben mit der Wismut." Quote between minutes 1 and 3.

52. "Leben mit der Wismut." Quote between minutes 3 and 5.

53. Michael Beleites, "Pechblende: Das Wismut-Tabu wird gebrochen," in *Pflanzzeit: Eine Ausstellung von Michael Beleites* (Wittenberg: Kirchliches Forschungsheim, 1998–1999), 22.

54. Beleites, *Pechblende*, 1.

55. Beleites, *Pechblende*, 60.

56. Archiv Grünes Gedächtnis (hereafter AGG), A Caritas Hensel 1008, "Uranabbau zwei und Schluß (Ost-Berlin)—'Erz für den Frieden'—Gesundheitssorgen wegen Braunkohlewerk" (1988), n.p.

57. Beleites, *Pechblende*, 13; and Beleites, *Dicke Luft*, 170.
58. RHG, MB 02, Handwritten note on the back of a flyer for the “VIII. Schweriner Ökologieseminar—‘Das geht auf keine Kuhhaut’” (1989), n.p.
59. Beleites, *Dicke Luft*, 169. See also *Jugendopposition in der DDR*, “Michael Beleites.”
60. Beleites, *Dicke Luft*, 170–174.
61. Beleites, *Dicke Luft*, 170–174.
62. *Jugendopposition in der DDR*, “Michael Beleites.”
63. Michael Beleites, “Michael Beleites—Ökologisch denken und handeln,” <http://www.michael-beleites.de/?menu=60> (accessed March 8, 2023).
64. In the last decade, Michael Beleites’s politics have also taken an eco-fascist turn, leading him to make multiple unrepentant and controversial statements. See Stefan Locke, “Boykottaufruf gegen Bauern,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (March 20, 2021), <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/boykottaufruf-gegen-den-saechsischen-bauern-michael-beleites-17243451.html> (accessed March 1, 2023); and Konstantin von Hammerstein, “Warum ehemalige Bürgerrechtler jetzt mit den Rechten sympathieren,” *Der Spiegel* (January 7, 2018), <https://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/warum-ddr-buergerrechtler-sich-bei-der-afd-engagieren-a-1186288.html> (accessed March 1, 2023).
65. Josie McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and Samuel Clowes Huneke, *States of Liberation: Gay Men between Dictatorship and Democracy in Cold War Germany* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022).
66. Gedenkstätte Berlin-Hohenschönhausen, “Wolfgang Rüdtenklau,” <https://www.stiftung-hsh.de/service/fuehrungen/zeitzeugen/inhaftierte-der-80er-jahre/wolfgang-rueddenklau/> (accessed September 7, 2022).
67. *Jugendopposition in der DDR*, “Wolfgang Rüdtenklau,” <https://www.jugendopposition.de/wolfgang-rueddenklau> (accessed September 7, 2022).
68. “Interview mit Wolfgang Rüdtenklau über homosexuellen Widerstand und Anpassung in der DDR,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ueci1JYyRHI&t=770s> (accessed September 9, 2022).
69. RHG, WR 02, “Schriftwechsel mit Alf” (April 15, 1984), n.p. See also McLellan, *Love in the Time of Communism*, 117–118; and Huneke, *States of Liberation*, 144.
70. “Interview mit Wolfgang Rüdtenklau.” In this interview, Rüdtenklau also talks about the difficulties of being same-sex desiring in prison.
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73. Christa Sengespeick-Roos, *Das ganz Normale tun. Widerstandsräume in der DDR-Kirche* (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1997), 495, 579.
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77. “Stasi Razzia in der Umweltbibliothek,” Stasi Unterlagen Archiv, <https://www.stasi-unterlagen-archiv.de/informationen-zur-stasi/die-umweltbibliothek/> (accessed March 24, 2023).

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Dissonances

Rudolf Bahro Between Red and Green

Timothy Scott Brown

This chapter considers the political career of the East German dissident Rudolf Bahro, whose 1977 book *The Alternative in Eastern Europe*—banned in the East and published in the West—sketched out a socialist alternative to the bureaucratic rule of the Communist Party in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). After his 1979 deportation to the Federal Republic, Bahro became a cause célèbre for the West German left and the international intelligentsia, leading to the founding of “Bahro Committees” and a letter to *The Times of London* signed by figures like Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass, Arthur Miller, and Graham Greene. Bahro’s theories represent an important and often overlooked tendency in the state socialist societies of the Eastern Bloc: the search for a non-capitalist departure from bureaucratic party rule. In East Germany, Bahro’s activities were part of a border-crossing impulse toward socialist democracy that characterized the period around 1968 and continued into the 1970s and 1980s. During his West German exile, Bahro was a key figure in an emergent politics of green socialism and later in the shift toward an ecological mysticism with New Age inflections. If Bahro’s career underlines the porousness of the boundaries between the two halves of divided Germany (and by extension, the two Cold War blocs), it also suggests that East German imaginaries were far from strictly East German. Indeed, they could hold within themselves possibilities of which a reform of state socialism was only one.¹

Bahro’s initial intervention was rooted in a belief that democratic renewal was possible in the GDR. “Democracy” for Bahro was not liberal Western democracy, but a renewal of the potential lost—but not irrevocably damaged—in the traditions passed down from Bolshevism. His conviction

was based not just on a belief in the political possibilities of the GDR but on an assessment of the entire European revolutionary tradition stretching back to 1917 and further. In this respect, Bahro's thought coincided with broader currents in the state socialist bloc, notably in Poland and Czechoslovakia. That goal, for Bahro, expressed a commitment to socialism broadly conceived, which, he believed, was embodied in principle in the GDR even if it was wanting in practice.

Later, with respect to the GDR and state socialism as a whole, Bahro came to reject the existing system, recognizing its fundamental imperviousness to change. He came to this conclusion in response to the crushing of the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia, which represented for him an important attempt at reform that continued to reject capitalism even as it sought to escape the authoritarian traditions of Stalinism. Here, Bahro broke with his belief in the party as encoded in the Leninist tradition, seeking to build horizontal connections in response to new conditions. After his emigration, experiencing the broader context of the West German Green movement and the world it opened out onto—not least by dint of its international and especially transatlantic connections—Bahro sought new intellectual and social terrain that allowed him to bring his experience of life in the GDR onto a broader stage. His political work came to embody a transmogrification of possibility, not only that arising out of his experiences in the GDR, but of the Federal Republic and the broader world onto which it opened.

If *The Alternative* proposed a socialist future in which the goal of communism was decoupled from the leadership of a party bureaucracy, Bahro's subsequent activities as a leading figure in the early West German Greens initially centered on the attempt to forge a new path combining "red" and "green." The "red" part of the equation ultimately died mostly away, replaced by a post-Marxist critique of industrial society focused on the threat of an industrial "megamachine" that would lead eventually to the destruction of human life on earth.² Abandoning the core Marxist dream of a proletarian seizure of control over *industrial* society, Bahro came to reject industrial society as such. As an early ally of the charismatic Petra Kelly in the Fundi (fundamentalist) wing of the Greens, Bahro eventually came to stress more and more the need for a cultural shift to underpin the political one. His embrace of a holistic, ecologically focused spiritualism was far from universally embraced by his left-wing fellow travelers. Yet Bahro's successive identities—East German dissident, West German eco-socialist, opponent of "exterminism," and avatar of green spirituality—generated and responded to

hopes and anxieties stretching far beyond the man himself. An examination of Bahro's life and work, thus, helps us not only reflect on how the drive for socialist renewal in the East was received in the West, or to trace the complex of interrelated concerns that could be mapped onto the coordinates he helped lay out, but to examine how he constructed and reconstructed his own subjecthood as he navigated across boundaries at once national, political, and cultural.

The Alternative in Eastern (and Western) Europe

Bahro's critique of "real-existing socialism" in the GDR was born out of a strong commitment to Marxist politics. He had been a member of the East German Communist Party from the age of sixteen. After a period as a journalist, he enrolled as a doctoral student, producing a dissertation that would later become *The Alternative*. Smuggled to the West in 1977, the book quickly became a bestseller in the Federal Republic, leading to Bahro's arrest and imprisonment in the GDR. Bahro was released from prison in 1979 and the following year was allowed to emigrate to West Germany. As for so many young intellectuals in the Eastern Bloc, the crushing of the Prague Spring in August 1968 was a liminal moment for him that underlined the impossibility of change. "It is and remains the greatest political crime of the Soviet leadership since the Second World War," wrote Bahro, "to have deprived the peoples of Eastern Europe, including its own country, and the whole of progressive humanity as well, of the irreplaceable experiences that would have been gained from the success of the Czechoslovak experiment."³ Bahro's emphasis on experience in this formulation expressed the underlying idea that it could be only by *doing* that a new form of *being* could be established. The experience of democratic renewal contained its own logics.

The Alternative was but one of a series of manifestos by which intellectual life in the late GDR was marked. These included the various interventions of Robert Havemann—above all the 1982 "Berliner Appell" coauthored with Rainer Eppelmann—as well as Rolf Henrichs's *Der Vormundschaftliche Staat. Vom Versagen des real existierenden Sozialismus* (The Custodial State: On the Failure of Real Existing Socialism).⁴ If Bahro's reach and impact, like that of his dissident contemporaries, was constrained in the GDR, his intellectual celebrity, unlike that of figures like Havemann and Eppelmann, extended into the Federal Republic and quickly into the world beyond.

Key figures of the international intelligentsia quickly embraced *The*

Alternative as a step toward a socialist humanism that could break the Cold War impulse. Here Bahro can be seen as part of a broader group of intellectuals in search of

another socialism or another communism, and notably influenced critical and alternative social movements up until the 1980s: Murray Bookchin, Cornelius Castoriadis, Guy Debord, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Michel Foucault, . . . Wolfgang Harich, and Toni Negri—authors whose writings were representative of the historical period that goes from 1969 to 1980, one of whose main debates was precisely whether the rebellion of the late 1960s was to be interpreted as a renaissance of social utopia in a positive sense or, instead, as the swan song of the old socialism as ideology.⁵

Unlike many of those figures, Bahro initially retained faith in the party as the form *par excellence* for creating social change.

Bahro's later thought came to rest, in one form or another, on the premise that the upheavals of the 1960s were important above all as a cultural revolution that would prepare the ground for an extension of Marxism's concerns to encompass nature and humankind's relationship to it. Bahro's book, conceived as an answer to a problem within state socialism, was quickly adapted in the West to a different set of problems. These were rooted, first and foremost, in attempts to find new radical paths after the high-water mark of 1968 in the Federal Republic; but they were also shaped by the possibility of abandoning the Marxist project altogether in search of new lifeways.

Bahro's goal in *The Alternative* was "the analysis of a social formation from the revolutionary standpoint."⁶ Rather than rejecting state socialism out of hand, he proposed a path toward its renewal. "Today the peoples of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries are recognizing more and more," wrote Bahro, "that the new system only corresponds in a small way to the principles it proclaims, betraying its own goals and no longer achieving anything new."⁷ To correct this situation, Bahro argued, would require the rise of a new, multinational intelligentsia to restructure communism from within.⁸ This "League of Communists," as Bahro called it, would strive to create what Douglas Kellner called a "new consciousness . . . which could see the discrepancy between 'what is' and 'what could be.'"⁹ Bahro did not reject the Leninist model of a vanguard party *per se*; rather, he hoped to revitalize it from within through the rise of a new revolutionary culture.

Rudi Dutschke, a former East German who became one of Bahro's most prominent supporters in the West, emphasized what he saw as a fundamen-

tal problem in Bahro's thought: "On the question of Leninism," he wrote, "Bahro and I are of contrary opinions. He tries to impute a 'humanistic perspective' to Leninism which the Stalin period had deprived it of. However, this can hardly be inferred from Lenin's failure to understand the categories of 'freedom' and 'democracy,' both fundamental ingredients of socialist consciousness."¹⁰ One of Bahro's most perceptive Western interlocutors and a veteran of the student revolt of 1968, Dutschke had few illusions where state socialism was concerned. "The path proposed by Bahro, namely, to take charge of things through a better communist program," he wrote, "is in my view completely unrealistic, because the real relations of production and the possibilities and limitations they offer for struggle remain unaffected."¹¹

This difference between the two men arose out of their respective experiences: Dutschke had emigrated to the Federal Republic early on, becoming a leader in the West German student movement, while Bahro remained in the GDR pursuing a transformation that would never come. Inherent in those two paths was a choice between old and new visions of socialism. The New Left in the Federal Republic and elsewhere was *new* because it valorized experience as a path toward a transformed consciousness, but also because, initially at least, it rejected the *party* as a vehicle of change. Bahro had seen the possibility for a transformation of consciousness in the Czechoslovakian experiment, but unlike Dutschke, he continued to believe in the party as its most effective expression. This was one reason, as we will see, for Bahro's fevered reception by young party-building Marxist-Leninists in the Federal Republic, even if they were quickly to be disappointed by this turn toward new concerns outside the scope of Marxist politics.

Bahro had concerned himself with the problem of consciousness already in *The Alternative*. Central to his analysis was the early Marxian conception of the "Asiatic mode of production," a primitive, pre-capitalist despotism marked by the existence of a ruling stratum directly exploiting agrarian subalterns. For Bahro, the concept helped explain the deep background of unfettered autocracy that made true emancipation in Russia difficult or impossible and to which he traced the "deformed" nature of state socialism in Eastern Europe. "The origin of [the] non-capitalist road" to modernity as it had developed in the Soviet Union lay, for Bahro, in the specifics of "Russia's progress from agricultural to industrial despotism."¹² The situation in the USSR had been produced not just by the "semi-Asiatic past of Russia," argued Bahro, but by "the political traditions of Tsarist autocracy going back to the despotism of [the Mongols]" and—drawing on Freud—"the psychology of the masses still trapped to a large extent in primary patriarchy."¹³ From

this perspective, what was required was not just a political reconfiguration, but again, a shift in consciousness—a cultural revolution. “Bahro,” as an early assessment of his work put it, “asserts that it is folly to expect an oppressed class of immediate producers to possess the attributes required of a ruling class. He concludes that in reality, Marx’s vision of a society by and for the formerly oppressed, the workers, ‘can only be realized in a process of post-revolutionary transformation’ that will require generations.”¹⁴

This “comprehensive cultural revolution . . . already maturing in the womb of actually existing socialism,” wrote Bahro, would involve “the transformation of the entire former division of labor, way of life and mentality that Marx and Engels envisioned.”¹⁵ This transformation would entail a movement against the lack of a critical education that made socialist democratic participation possible, against “the patriarchal model of childhood that restricts development,” and against bureaucracy, understood in the specific state socialist sense. The cultural revolution would establish “the conditions for a new communal life,” which would allow “for the socialization (democratization) of the general process of knowledge and decision-making.”¹⁶ The drive for a shift in consciousness that would characterize Bahro’s later environmental activism was thus present early on. His later revision of Marxism was there as well. As Jeffrey Lee Canfield has put it: “In demanding the predominance of the idea over the material base as the progressive force of history, he has essentially rejected the Marxist tenet of historical materialism. While it seems superficially similar, the perspective is not Hegelian, in that it is not the World Spirit realizing itself, but rather mankind realizing itself through a ‘cultural revolution’ which will transform all relationships within society.”¹⁷

Bahro evoked a strong resonance in the Federal Republic of Germany not least because he seemed to offer a way out of a post-1968 impasse in which the left(s) sought new theoretical perspectives and regenerative strategies. Already before his emigration, Bahro’s cause was taken up enthusiastically in West Germany. An interview with him appeared in *Der Spiegel* at the end of August 1977 accompanied by excerpts from the book, which was set to be published by Europäische Verlagsanstalt. This feature introduced Bahro’s writings to the public for the first time. Bahro was arrested the next day. Knowing what would happen when the book appeared, he prepared carefully for his arrest, arranging for taped interviews to appear on the West German television networks ARD and ZDF. These reached not only a West German audience but an East German one as well. Bahro had also prepared

a fifty-page summary of his main theses and arranged for a condensed version of his book to be distributed through clandestine channels in the GDR.¹⁸

Bahro was not released from prison until October 1979, but his celebrity only increased as his prison term dragged on. The year 1978 saw over one hundred news reports or editorials about Bahro appear in West Germany.¹⁹ Public appeals in favor of Bahro came from, among others,

Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass, Graham Greene, Arthur Miller, Carola Stern, and Wolf Biermann; with political leaders such as Willy Brandt, Philip Whitehead and Eric Heffer; and with intellectuals such as Robert Havemann, Herbert Marcuse, and Lucio Lombardo-Radice. Organizations which participated actively in calling attention to the fate of Rudolf Bahro included the International PEN Club, individual chapters of Amnesty International, and “Bahro Committees” in Berlin, Paris, London, Florence, and elsewhere.²⁰

Rudi Dutschke, who had received a typewritten manuscript of what would become *The Alternative* during a visit to East Berlin in 1976, became aware of its contents considerably earlier than the broader public.²¹ In an essay written in the form of an open letter to Ministry for State Security (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*; MfS or Stasi) official Paul Verner, Dutschke wrote: “By various ways you can well imagine, the first two parts of the manuscript were soon delivered to me in Denmark. After perusal, I became quite certain about one thing: whoever had written it was indeed closer to me than to you.”²² When Bahro was imprisoned, Dutschke led a campaign for his release, subsequently co-organizing the well-attended International Congress on and for Rudolf Bahro of November 1978.²³

When Bahro’s book was published the same year under its English title, *The Alternative in Eastern Europe*, it received both the Isaac Deutscher Memorial Prize and the Carl von Ossietzky Medal of the Berlin section of the International League for Human Rights.²⁴ Fresh from prison on his arrival in West Berlin in 1979, Bahro was seen almost as a messianic figure who could breathe fresh life into the fractured West German left. After the insurrectionary explosion of 1968, driven by student Marxists and countercultural subversives aiming to upset the Federal Republic’s status quo, the left had split into its constituent parts: the socialist feminist and gay liberation movements; the anarchist-flavored Sponti (spontaneous) scene; small Marxist-Leninist parties, the so-called K-Gruppen; the GDR-oriented DKP (German

Communist Party); a countercultural underground with back-to-the-land tendencies similar to its counterparts elsewhere in Europe and America; and a host of urban guerrilla groups, notably the Red Army Faction and the Movement 2nd June.²⁵ Received with high hopes by portions of those disparate lefts, Bahro subverted expectations by moving in the direction of the emerging Green movement, itself a product of the locally-based *Basis-Gruppen* (Rank-and-File Groups).²⁶ The highly variegated Green movement provided Bahro with ample room for maneuver as he developed an eco-Marxism that would make him “the key figure in creating a theoretical as well as practical bridge between German socialist groups and the new perspective of ecology.”²⁷

From Red to Green

From the beginning, Bahro rejected the role of GDR dissident. Rather, he strove to create a new fusion of environmentalism and socialism that would resonate far beyond the borders of divided Germany.²⁸ In the 1980s, environmentalism was developing in both Germanies, but with a different valence in each. By 1983, the West German Greens were in parliament. In East Germany, it was not until later in the decade that environmental activism—linked to a broader drive for democracy and human rights—emerged as a significant force. The Protestant Church provided a limited safe space for dissent, protecting nonconformist youth, fostering the development of artistic and cultural-political subcultures, and making room for underground initiatives. Groups and organizations such as the *Umweltbibliothek* (Environmental Library), *Arche Nova* (New Ark), and the *Projektgruppe Ökologie und Menschenrechte* (Project Group Ecology and Human Rights) made the environment a centerpiece of their activism. “Social-ecological partnership” meetings took in East Berlin churches,²⁹ while the so-called *Kirche von Unten* (Church from Below) collected together rank-and-file activists who wished to demand more reform than the official church could offer.³⁰ In all cases, environmentalism served as a metaphor for transcending old models of class struggle in favor of a new politics in which the personal and the planetary were part of an indissoluble whole.

Bahro’s activities in the West at the beginning of the 1980s were thus only an accelerated version of slowly brewing tendencies in the East, with an important caveat: the more or less open environment of the Federal Republic provided greater freedom of action and, as Bahro’s subsequent career

would show, opportunities for contention.³¹ Bahro joined the nascent West German Green movement in 1979, serving as a member of the executive committee from 1982 to 1984. An early advocate of combining socialism with ecology, he also had a very ecumenical understanding of green politics. Environmentalism was by no means the sole province of the left. Early groups such as *Aktion Dritter Weg* (Action Third Way), aspired to develop a “third way” between capitalism and communism and, with other groups, provided a forum for far-right ideas and personnel. Another early “third way” group was the *Aktionsgemeinschaft Unabhängiger Deutscher* (Action Alliance of Independent Germans; AUD). Founded in 1965 by former CSU member August Haußleiter, it made overtures to the burgeoning New Left. Yet its conservationist and anti-nuclear positions sat uneasily with—for example—demands for the release of imprisoned Nazi leader Rudolf Hess. The more explicitly right-wing planks in the party platform gradually fell away, although the party remained fundamentally conservative in outlook.³² In 1975, leadership was assumed by another former CDU politician: Herbert Gruhl. The author of the best-selling book *A Planet Plundered*, Gruhl went on to leave the party in July 1978 to found *Grüne Aktion Zukunft* (Green Action Future; GAZ). GAZ was an important influence in the founding of the Greens, and it was Gruhl who allegedly coined the Green slogan “Neither right, nor left, but out in front.”³³ Gruhl quit the movement quickly, however, when it became apparent that his positions were out of step with the more radical demands of some Greens.

Bahro’s willingness to work with Gruhl and other conservatives did not endear him to the radical left in the Federal Republic. Yet Bahro persisted in the attempt to breach the boundaries between right and left. Bahro believed that the Greens, in the words of James Hart and Ullrich Melle, “had to . . . comprise all forces and represent all people who subscribed to the apocalyptic analysis of the industrial system and were convinced of its fundamental unsustainability.”³⁴ For Bahro, this could not be only activists of the radical left. That left, Bahro argued, had to accept the fact that it was not capitalism alone but the industrial system itself—both in terms of mass production and mass consumption—that had to be overcome. Accommodation with the right was crucial to this project. Citing the danger of an “exterminationist megamachine”³⁵ to the future of life on the planet, Bahro argued that *any* alliance that could stop it was justified and necessary. The goal, again in Hart and Melle’s words, was a “new synthesis of a revolutionary cultural movement to dismantle the industrial system and reconstruct human society and

cultural reproduction on a communitarian basis.”³⁶ Here, Bahro’s iconoclasm was on full display and would become even more pronounced as he followed his conclusions toward their logical endpoint.

In Search of Wholeness

The future existence of humanity was a key concern of *The Alternative*, and this was one reason that Bahro’s work had such border-crossing appeal. Activists and thinkers at the intersection of ecological science and New Age movements were particularly taken by his calls for a new civilization to replace the old. In the wake of Bahro’s 1983 trip to the United States accompanied by Petra Kelly and Gert Bastian, the scientist Fritjof Capra and the New Age eco-feminist Charlene Spretnak published one of the earliest assessments of the West German Greens, speculating on their importance for green politics in the United States. That same year, in a special issue on the West German Greens, the (post) New Left journal *Radical America* wrote approvingly of Bahro’s call for a “transformation [involving] a complete break with the industrial system as we know it.”³⁷ The American environmentalist Brian Tokar was likewise impressed by “Bahro’s call for an ecological civilization that would transcend the stale divisions between East and West” as well as by Petra Kelly’s insistence on the need to bring together the environmental and peace movements. “For many US activists,” he wrote, “the emergence of Green politics in Europe seemed nothing less than the renewal and expansion of just the kind of visionary, ecological politics that many in this country had argued for, but few saw a way to practically implement.” Particularly influential in this regard were Bahro’s *From Red to Green* (1984) and Kelly’s *Fighting for Hope* (1984).³⁸

Bahro’s popularity was a natural outcome of his turn from purely Marxist concerns to those that converged with the growing New Age movement of the 1980s. By 1985, Bahro had broken with the West German Greens, in part because of its position on animal testing. Bahro accused the Greens of being sellouts who would do nothing to alter environmental policy.³⁹ The Green Party, Bahro claimed, lacked any “basic ecological position; it is not a party for the protection of life, and I know now that it will never be, for it is rapidly distancing itself from that position.”⁴⁰ Bahro inveighed:

[I am against] people trying . . . to save a party—no matter what kind of party, and no matter for what purpose. The main thing is for it to get re-elected to parliament. . . . At last, I have understood that a party is a

counter-productive tool, that the given political space is a trap into which life energy disappears, indeed, where it is re-dedicated to the spiral of death. This is not a general but a quite concrete type of despair. It is directed not at the original project which is today called “fundamental[ist],” but at the party. I’ve finished with it now.⁴¹

Bahro’s move away from the Greens may be seen as of a piece with his rejection of the party-building aspirations of a portion of the West German left who initially greeted him with great enthusiasm. What concerned Bahro above all, however, was not the existence of parties *per se*, but the failure of parties to live up to their utopian promises. In this respect, his rejection of the Greens echoed his earlier rejection of the ruling Socialist Unity Party in the GDR.

Bahro’s decision to leave the Greens was related to a broader set of claims he was making at the beginning of the 1980s. What was at issue was “not . . . a superficial critique of (contemporary) political economy, but a more fundamental critique of human nature itself,” Bahro argued.⁴² “So long as we continue to see class struggle as the key to the contemporary crisis,” he continued, “we will only remain trapped in the very circle out of which it is imperative to break. Even the goal of socialism shares the same limitation in a decisive respect: it sets out sights on a classless *industrial* society, without stopping to criticize the origins and consequences of industrialism.”⁴³ In view of existing conditions, Bahro argued, “the whole question of human emancipation has taken on a new form.”⁴⁴ Here, emancipation, formerly embedded in a historical materialist framework with adherents on both sides of the East-West divide, took on a new meaning that transcended one set of priorities to replace them with another.

The urgency for a new way of being was rooted in very visible threats facing the human race. Bahro had elaborated on these threats several years earlier in his contribution to a discussion in *New Left Review* on “Exterminism,” a concept first elaborated by E. P. Thompson to denote, in Bahro’s words, “an impulse towards mass destruction, annihilation and extinction that is generated by . . . industrial civilization.”⁴⁵ This claim was made in the lead-up to the so-called Second Cold War represented by the heightening of tensions around the stationing of land-based nuclear ICBM missiles in Europe on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Here, the highest stage of capitalism might not be imperialism, as per Lenin’s formulation, but the “premature self-destruction of the human race.”⁴⁶ The nuclear threat was, in Bahro’s view, not even the most dangerous. “It is ultimately with the motor car and

washing machine detergents that we do the damage rather than with bombs, nuclear power stations and dioxins,” Bahro wrote.⁴⁷ Extending the prosperity of the West to the whole world, he argued, would destroy that world: “A private dwelling full of comforts necessarily confirms the whole worldwide infrastructure—including the need for armaments, because in face of monstrous differences in standards it is a threatened luxury.”⁴⁸

In a 1983 talk at the University of Toronto, reported on in the Canadian anarchist journal *Kick It Over*, Bahro insisted on the need to place the arms race in a broader context; nuclear militarism was but one expression of “the mentality of domination,” linked to “the ruthless conquest of nature.” The “industrial system” in which that will to power over nature was embodied, Bahro argued, was common to systems in both East and West. “Marxism could not provide the necessary critique of technocracy,” he continued, because “it was itself a variant of technocratic ideology.”⁴⁹ In the Federal Republic, this claim clashed significantly not only with those of the Marxist-Leninist left but also with those of many Greens who saw in Bahro’s turn to the subjective and unquantifiable an abnegation of the commitment to reason on which emancipatory politics must be based. Nevertheless, in moving in this direction, Bahro continued to move away from the party as a model, replacing it with a more amorphous commitment to the survival of human and nonhuman species alike.

Bahro’s turn away from Marxist materialism should come as no real surprise to those who had followed his career. As early as his post-emigration press conference in 1980, Bahro shocked an audience heavily made up of activists of the post-1968 formations of the New Left by proclaiming the importance of Jesus Christ as an avatar of social transformation. Already in *The Alternative*, Bahro placed diverse thinkers such as Sigmund Freud, Wilhelm Reich, and Lao Tzu into dialogue with more traditionally left-wing theorists such as Antonio Gramsci and Rosa Luxemburg.⁵⁰ Simultaneously, he drew on diverse disciplines, from ecology to feminist studies, from psychology to international affairs. As early as 1978, it was reported that Bahro was working on a follow-up to *The Alternative* that would explore the relationship between Christianity and communism.⁵¹ It should be noted that Bahro was not alone on the German left in seeing Jesus Christ as an avatar for emancipatory political longings. Rudi Dutschke openly proclaimed himself a Christian socialist, writing in his open letter to Stasi official Paul Verner that, “in the Bolshevik seizure of power over the international workers movement, [w]e socialists, communists, democrats, and Christians suffered a blow from which we have not yet recovered.”⁵² Elsewhere in the letter he called for a

discussion on “the problem of the relationship between socialists, communists, democrats, and Christians in the GDR and the FRG, in Western and Eastern Europe, in order to define more precisely the frame of reference for political class struggle—and perhaps even to define it for the first time.”⁵³

Dutschke’s dual identity as Christian and socialist was not out of step with the oppositional currents flowing through East Germany during the 1980s. As we have seen, the Evangelical Church in the GDR, and to a lesser extent the Catholic Church, extended a protective umbrella over a diverse collection of dissident groups. More generally, ideas of Christian social justice provided a potent critique in a situation where alternative socialisms came up against the regime’s insistence on its exclusive claim to the socialist tradition. To be sure, Bahro gave this tradition a new inflection in the Federal Republic, where confession, free of official pressure, could expand outward in new and interesting ways. He elaborated on his position in an interview for *History Workshop*: “God for me [is] a metaphor for potential forces in human beings.”⁵⁴ Christ, Bahro continued, was important because he “assumed that it takes courage to break with the existing mode of [existence], and to avoid being tied up with the existing state of affairs, and to avoid being distracted from the true calling of man.”⁵⁵

Here, religion was bound up with Bahro’s long-standing search for an emancipatory shift of consciousness. As early as *The Alternative*, his focus had been on the need to re-envision mankind’s place in the world. For Bahro, “the proper territory for political action is the psyche rather than the parliamentary chamber.”⁵⁶ He envisioned change potentially generated by a contagion of exemplary action:

The accumulation of spiritual forces, the association of people who create a common field of energy which confronts the old world with a pole of attraction, will at a particular point in time which can’t be foreseen exceed a threshold size. Such a “critical mass,” once accumulated, then acquires under certain circumstances a transformative influence over the whole society.⁵⁷

From this perspective, “the need for psychic or spiritual rather than political renewal [remained] central to Bahro’s thought.”⁵⁸

By 1984, Bahro was insisting on a shift of emphasis “from politics and the question of power towards the cultural level . . . to the prophetic level. . . . Our aim has to be the reconstruction of God.”⁵⁹ This motivation underlay Bahro’s co-founding in 1989 of an educational center and commune near

Trier in southwestern Germany. This so-called *Lernwerkstatt* (Learning Workshop) was to function as an “ecological academy for one world,” aiming to create a synthesis of spirituality and politics. The curriculum included “lectures, cultural events, and weekend workshops on various New Age themes, including deep ecology, ecofeminism, Zen Buddhism, holistic nutrition, Sufism, and the like—as well as German identity.”⁶⁰ The latter territory was one Bahro trod at his peril, in no small part because of its indelible association with Nazism. Bahro’s books of this period—notably 1987’s *The Logic of Salvation*, “marked an overt embrace of authoritarian theological concepts” that sat uneasily alongside his calls for spiritual renewal.⁶¹ Here, it is possible to detect traces of his earlier Leninism, which assumed the task of mobilizing entire populations according to utopian logics.

Most controversial of all was Bahro’s assertion that “there is a call in the depths of the *Volk* for a Green Adolf” who would mobilize society and its resources to save the planet and thus the human race.⁶² The concept of a *Volk* held strong right-wing–extremist connotations given the biological ethnic nationalism that was influential in preparing the ground for the Nazis. The call for a “Green Adolf” was even more controversial, although for Bahro it was not a call for the rehabilitation of Nazism. Rather, it was a (highly criticized) metaphor for a mass-based spiritual awakening capable of producing rapid large-scale change. It also touched on the question of hierarchy and authority, a concern of Bahro’s stretching back to *The Alternative*. Greens like Petra Kelly theorized a turn to a feminist, nonhierarchical, holistically minded approach, a prefigurative politics concerned more with the spiritual character of the journey than with its destination. Yet they did not deal with the question of power—that is, with the question of how the desired changes would be enacted against the opposition of vested interests. As with his earlier calls for a League of Communists to revitalize Marxism-Leninism, Bahro continued to seek a cultural transformation that would become a political one. What could such a goal demand in the context of ecological renewal?

It was Bahro’s concern with this question that led him to reflect on what would *actually* be required to effect an ecological transformation: a draw-down of industrial society itself. And it was this goal that motivated Bahro to flirt with ideas of authoritarianism as a likely prerequisite for any realistic attempt to prevent ecological catastrophe. His allusion to the example of Nazism as a popular movement with powers of mass mobilization—an example he believed must be drawn upon, at least metaphorically, to rein in and ultimately destroy industrial society—must be understood in the context of the long-standing problem of revolutionary organization he grappled with

in *The Alternative*. Key for Bahro was organization: “How a millenary movement can be led, or can lead itself, and with what organs: that is the question.”⁶³

Numerous commentators have accused Bahro of “eco-fascism;”⁶⁴ others have defended what they perceive as his true aims.⁶⁵ Either way, the question of whether it was possible or desirable to wring democratic ends out of authoritarian means was not Bahro’s alone but part and parcel of all conversations about transformative politics in the modern era. Whatever the case, it is hard to disagree with David Orton’s judgment that Bahro was crucial for having “explored with a ruthless honesty the real contradictions for a left-wing person of becoming a green.”⁶⁶ His efforts in this regard responded to the old Leninist question of the role of the state and the role of power. Yet, again, the state *per se* was no longer Bahro’s operational perspective. Rather, Bahro was one participant in a horizontal reworking of politics that responded to new needs with (hoped for) new values and new organizational tools.

Conclusion

As we have seen, Rudolf Bahro operated outside the categories imposed on him by state socialism in the GDR, not least because of his personal (but widely shared) reaction to the crushing of the Prague Spring. Subsequently, Bahro disrupted another set of certainties as he disputed the party as a model in the long aftermath of the West German 1968. In this respect, he expressed concerns that cut across both the borders between East and West and the boundaries between various forms of leftist concern. His experience of state socialism convinced him of the need for fundamental change not only in the reigning political system of the Eastern Bloc but also of new approaches in the West. Intellectual currents in the GDR were not bounded. The experience of state socialism could spread and be adapted to other contexts. The late GDR was not stagnant, from this perspective, but dynamic and alive with possibility.

This is one reason why the history of East Germany cannot be read solely through the lens of 1989. Temporal signifiers gesture toward conjunctural shifts, beginnings and endings; but they fail to capture the larger political and cultural trajectories for which they stand in. Structures of political thought and feeling exist on their own timetables. They inhere in the subjective experience of their protagonists, their hopes and utopian longings. As an activist in both East and West, Bahro insisted that systemic transformation could be initiated from below—or outside—institutional systems of authority

and knowledge. In this sense, his subject position remained stable; for having proposed a reinvigoration of Marxism-Leninism in the East and a spiritual-ecological transformation in the West, Bahro sought the utopian potential in those settings in which he found himself.

Those two systems were not closed in any case. A critique of conditions inside the GDR could be a critique of conditions outside it. The problems of the GDR in the 1970s and 1980s were not merely those of an isolated and soon-to-be-defunct state socialist backwater, but those of industrial modernity *tout court*. Here, the preoccupations of the early Bahro were of a piece with those of the later, for in each case, they involved a search for avenues out of an untenable situation. Already in the introduction to *The Alternative*, Bahro had proclaimed his concern not only for the future of the communist project but for the “true horizon of further human development on this planet.”⁶⁷ As he would many times later, Bahro worried about the compatibility of industrial modernity with human survival, arguing that the continued spread of “the late bourgeois way of life” was “irreconcilable with the existence of humanity.”⁶⁸ Even as he tried to rescue Marxian socialism, it seems, Bahro was contemplating a move beyond it.

Ultimately, as we have seen, Bahro rejected historical materialism as just another prop to industrial society. But his concerns were never strictly material to begin with. The call for a “cultural revolution”—understood as a turn away from destructive and self-limiting mindsets at both the personal and societal level—runs like a thread through all his work. It was but a small step from insisting on the need for a cultural revolution to demanding a *spiritual* one, and Bahro’s later career came to revolve around that goal. If he occasionally fell prey, like so many other seekers of the 1980s, to dubious New Age influences, his recognition of the inextricable link between social change and new lifeways beyond mechanistic materialism were pregnant with future significance, raising questions of far-reaching relevance then—and now.

Notes

1. For a recent treatment of Bahro, see Alexander Petrussek, “The Practice of Ideals: Erich Honecker, Rudolf Bahro, and East Germany’s Socialist Imaginary,” *Central European History* 55, no. 2 (2022): 223–241.

2. See Rudolf Bahro, *From Red to Green: Interviews with New Left Review*, trans. Gus Fagan and Richard Hurst (London: Verso, 1984).

3. Rudolf Bahro, *The Alternative in Eastern Europe* (London: New Left Books, 1978), 305.

4. Michael Lühmann, "Aufbruch 89—NEUES FORUM. Der Katalysator der friedlichen Revolution," in *Manifeste: Geschichte und Gegenwart des politischen Appells*, ed. Johanna Klatt and Robert Lorenz (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010), 315–345.

5. Francisco Fernandez Buey, "Utopia and Natural Illusions," in *Political Uses of Utopia. New Marxist, Anarchist, and Radical Democratic Perspectives*, ed. S. D. Chrostowska and James D. Ingram (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 80–114.

6. Bahro, *The Alternative*, 12.

7. Bahro, *The Alternative*, 9.

8. Jeffrey Lee Canfield, "Marxist Revisionism in East Germany: The Case of Rudolf Bahro," *The Fletcher Forum* 4, no. 1 (1980): 23–48, 38.

9. Douglas Kellner, "Marcuse and the Quest for Radical Subjectivity," *Social Thought and Research* 22, no. 1/2 (1999): 1–24, 17.

10. Rudi Dutschke, "Against the Popes: How Hard It Is to Discuss Bahro's Book," in "Rudolf Bahro: Critical Responses," special issue, *International Journal of Politics* 10, no. 2/3 (1980): 186–212, 207–208.

11. Dutschke, "Against the Popes," 210.

12. Bahro, *The Alternative*, 13.

13. Bahro, *The Alternative*, 131.

14. Canfield, "Marxist Revisionism," 38.

15. Bahro, *The Alternative*, 14.

16. Bahro, *The Alternative*, 14.

17. Canfield, "Marxist Revisionism," 40.

18. Canfield, "Marxist Revisionism," 40.

19. Canfield, "Marxist Revisionism," 28.

20. Canfield, "Marxist Revisionism," 28.

21. Dutschke originally believed the book was a forgery by the Stasi, so closely did it resemble his own doctoral dissertation: see Alexander Amberger, *Bahro—Harich—Havemann. Marxistische Systemkritik und politische Utopie in der DDR* (Leiden: Brill/Schöningh, 2014), 147.

22. Dutschke, "Against the Popes," 187.

23. Rudi Steinke, Walter Süß, Ulf Wolter, and Michel Vale, "His Refrain Is Heard around the World: An Initial Assessment of the Bahro Congress," in "Rudolf Bahro: Critical Responses," special issue, *International Journal of Politics* 10, no. 2/3 (1980): 213–233.

24. Bahro, *The Alternative*.

25. For a detailed discussion of the involvement of the constituent groupings of the early Green movement, see Andreas Pettenkofer, *Die Entstehung der grünen Politik. Kulturosoziologie der westdeutschen Umweltbewegung* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2014), 99–132; see also the discussion in Joachim Raschke, *Die Grünen. Wie sie wurden, was sie sind* (Cologne: Bund-Verlag, 1993), 17–36.

26. Christoph Becker-Schaum, "The Origins of the German Greens," in *Green Parties: Reflections on the first three Decades*, ed. Frank Zelko and Carolin Brinkmann (Washington, DC: Heinrich Böll Foundation North America in cooperation with the German Historical Institute, 2006), 21–30.

27. Horst Mewes, "The West German Green Party," *New German Critique*, no. 28 (1983): 51–85.

28. Amberger, *Bahro*, 135.
29. Carlo Jordan, "Akteure und Aktionen der Arche," in *Arche Nova: Opposition in der DDR—Das "Grün-ökologische Netzwerk Arche," 1988–90. Mir den Texten der "Arche Nova,"* ed. Carlo Jordan and Hans Michael Kloth (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1995), 37–70, here 52.
30. Arvan Gordon, "Kirche von Unten and Other Basis Groups in the GDR, 1987–88," 'Dokumenta Zion,' *Epd-Dokumentation*. On environmentalism in the GDR, see Julia E. Ault, *Saving Nature under Socialism: Transnational Environmentalism in East Germany, 1968–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).
31. Contention was not foreign to environmentalism in East Germany, either—see the discussion in Jordan, "Akteure und Aktionen der Arche"—but the totalizing character of the regime provided a common enemy.
32. Becker-Schaum, "The Origins of the German Greens," 22.
33. Becker-Schaum, "The Origins of the German Greens," 22.
34. James Hart and Ullrich Melle, "On Rudolf Bahro," *Democracy and Nature: The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy* 4, nos. 2/3 (issue 11/12, 1998).
35. The idea of a "Megamachine" was introduced by the American historian Lewis Mumford. See Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine, Volume I: Technics and Human Development* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967); and Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine, Volume II: The Pentagon of Power* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970).
36. Hart and Melle, "On Rudolf Bahro."
37. Carl Boggs, "The Greens, Anti-Militarism and the Global Crisis," *Radical America* 17, no. 1 (1983): 14.
38. Brian Tokar, "The Greens as a Social Movement: Values and Conflicts," in Zelko and Brinkmann, *Green Parties*, 21–30, here 22.
39. This was in no small part because of its position on animal testing.
40. Rudolf Bahro, *Building the Green Movement* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1986).
41. Quoted in W. G. Knill, "Green Thinking: Politics or Paradigm?," *Area: The Royal Geographical Society* 23, no. 3 (1991): 238–244.
42. Knill, "Green Thinking," 88.
43. Knill, "Green Thinking," 88. Italics in original.
44. Knill, "Green Thinking," 88.
45. Later republished as Rudolf Bahro, "A New Approach for the Peace Movement in Germany," in *Exterminism and Cold War*, ed. New Left Review (London: Verso, 1982), 87–116, here 87. For a critique of Bahro's use of the concept of exterminism, see Boris Frankel, *The Post-Industrial Utopians* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 120–124. On Bahro and "Exterminism," see also Peter Hay, *A Companion to Environmental Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002).
46. Bahro, "A New Approach for the Peace Movement in Germany," 87.
47. Quoted in Timothy J. Gorringer, "The Decline of Nature: Natural Theology, Theology of Nature, and the Built Environment," in *Without Nature? A New Condition for Theology*, ed. David Albertson and Cabell King (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 214.
48. Gorringer, "The Decline of Nature," 214.

49. Ron Hayley, "Greens Bahro Speaks in T. O.," *Kick It Over*, no. 9 (1983): 19.
50. Canfield, "Marxist Revisionism," 45.
51. Canfield, "Marxist Revisionism," 45.
52. Dutschke, "Against the Popes," 207.
53. Dutschke, "Against the Popes," 211.
54. Rudolf Bahro, "Socialism, Ecology and Utopia: An Interview with Rudolf Bahro," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 16 (1983): 91–99, here 97.
55. Bahro, "Socialism, Ecology and Utopia," 97.
56. Andrew Dobson, *Green Political Thought: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge 1990), 143.
57. Bahro, *Building the Green Movement*, 98.
58. Andrew Dobson, quoted in Hay, *A Companion to Environmental Thought*, 194.
59. Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 220–221.
60. Bahro, *From Red to Green*, 122.
61. Rudolf Bahro, *Logik der Rettung: Wer kann die Apokalypse aufhalten?—Ein Versuch über die Grundlagen ökologischer Politik* (Stuttgart: Weibrecht, 1987).
62. Bahro, *Logik der Rettung*.
63. Rudolf Bahro, *Avoiding Social and Ecological Disaster* (Chicago: Gateway Books, 1994), 278. Emphasis in original.
64. Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier, while not denying the normative left-wing character of environmentalism, dub Bahro an eco-fascist with a clear "resemblance to the *Völkisch* Germanic spirituality of the 1920s." Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier, *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience* (San Francisco: AK Press, 1995), 48. On the eco-fascism question, see also Roger Niedenfür, "New Age: Die spirituelle Rehabilitierung der Nationalsozialisten durch Rudolf Bahro, Rainer Langhans und J. Kirchoff," in *In bester Gesellschaft: Antifa-Recherche zwischen Konservatismus und Neo-faschismus*, ed. Raimund Hethey and Peter Kratz (Göttingen: Verlag die Werkstatt, 1991), 141–154.
65. Hart and Melle, "On Rudolf Bahro"; David Orton, "Ecofascism: What Is It? A Left Biocentric Analysis," *Green Web Bulletin*, no. 68 (2000).
66. David Orton, "Rudolf Bahro (1935–1997): A Tribute," *Canadian Dimension* 32, no. 2 (1998).
67. Bahro, *The Alternative*, 8.
68. Bahro, *The Alternative*, 9.

Epilogue

Doing Straight Time in the GDR

Eli Rubin

There was a place reserved for me in this world. If for no other reason than work was an obligation and self-determination wasn't part of the master plan for [East Germany's] ideal state. To have no future wasn't what I feared. The terrible certainty crept up on me that there was too much future ahead of me—an outlook without an outlook, not helping me in the realization of my needs and interests, instead offering me bonding friendship with the Soviet Union, the unity of the party and people and an end time that wasn't ending.

—Henryk Gericke, “Too Much Future”³

The value of volumes like *Socialist Subjectivities* is that they allow us to take stock of where a particular field is, where it has come from, and perhaps in which direction or directions it is heading. They become signposts in the development of a field, a snapshot in time of its development for future generations of scholars. How do we take stock of the field of German Democratic Republic (GDR) studies at this particular point in its development? What does the work presented in this volume tell us about the field? What might future generations of scholars see here looking back years, or decades, at this snapshot?

From very early on, much of the scholarship on the GDR was framed by the “totalitarianism” debates. This debate was really a spillover from the Cold War and was centered around Western debates about the Cold War. It was focused on the nature of socialism in the GDR and where the “limits of the dictatorship” could be found. Was the Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*; SED) a malevolent, totalitarian force, attempting to (and for a long time, succeeding in) controlling every aspect of life in the GDR? Was the GDR an *Unrechtsstaat* (unlawful state), a shameful leg-

acy of the German *Sonderweg* (special path) which had been transcended—thankfully—in the West after 1945? Was there a direct line of transmission of the illiberal streak in German history from the Third Reich to the GDR? Or were East Germans able to carve out niches, or private spheres, free of the nefarious influence of the party and state? Was there, in fact, joy, color, whimsy, happiness, and self-actualization within actual East German lives?

One side of the debate was represented by a group of mostly West German, often conservative, historians allied with former East German activists and dissidents. These historians emphasized the oppressive aspects of the GDR state, especially the ubiquitous secret police (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*; MfS or Stasi) and thus are referred to sometimes as the “totalitarians.” They framed the GDR as a binary: there was the state (and the party) on top and the oppressed populace below; everything was couched in terms of “domination” (*Herrschaft*) and to what extent ordinary people resisted this domination, versus how and to what extent this domination took over and corrupted people’s lives. Many of the proponents of this view had pre-existing political commitments, either within a West German framework or as dissidents, which carried over from the Cold War into their work as historians in the 1990s and early 2000s.²

On another side were a group of historians who had pioneered what one of them, historian Alf Lüdtke, termed *Alltagsgeschichte* (history of everyday life), a project that grew out of the “history workshop” movement and sought to reclaim the agency and autonomy of the working class under Nazism; they were aligned much further to the left during the Cold War. In the 1990s, they extended their work into the GDR, exploring aspects of East German everyday life that did not prominently feature tales of state oppression or human rights violation.³ The *Alltagsgeschichte* position proved to be much more popular in the Anglophone world, leading to volumes like *Socialist Modern*, edited by Katherine Pence and Paul Betts.⁴ The contributions therein put forth the idea that there could be an alternative modernity—a socialist modernity—that was advanced, but different, yet neither lesser nor better *per se* than Western modernity.

Yet the publication of *Socialist Modern* was significant also because it was around that time—the end of the 2000s—that the post-Cold War debates seemed to die away. The dwindling discourse even moved historians like Thomas Lindenberger to ask whether the GDR was “all researched out” (*ausgeforscht*).⁵ But it seems like there is another reason why things shifted in the field of GDR historiography and studies: a new generation of scholars stepped onto the scene with a vast new toolbox of methodologies, questions,

frameworks, and interests inspired by changes within and outside the academy. This was a generation that had come of age only after the end of the Cold War and had been socialized and then trained professionally in the late 1990s, 2000s, and even into the 2010s. For them, the stakes of the Cold War did not seem to apply as much. Instead, this was a generation that was influenced by the cultural turn and the increasing emphasis within the academy on interdisciplinarity. Graduate seminars, workshops, and colloquia were influenced by fields outside of history, such as gender studies, anthropology, critical theory, linguistics, queer studies, environmental studies, film and media studies, literary criticism, art history, architectural history, critical geography and more. Far from being *ausgeforscht*, the field of GDR history was about to blossom as a new generation of scholars with a vastly richer toolbox of methodologies began researching and publishing about it, producing works about the GDR focused on environmental history,⁶ history of material culture and consumption,⁷ urban and spatial history,⁸ transnational history, and the history of race.⁹

And, of course, throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the study of gender and sexuality, and especially queer studies and queer histories, blossomed—in part thanks to the influence of Michel Foucault and the cultural turn but also because of the growth of the gay liberation movement, the fight for gay marriage, and even the current struggle for trans rights. Theorists like Judith Butler, Jack Halberstam, Lee Edelman, Ann Cvetkovich, Elizabeth Freeman, Sara Ahmed, and many others inspired a powerful new subfield in German history and in German studies, including work on the GDR.¹⁰ The deepening engagement of queer theory and queer studies with history, and in this case the history of Germany and the GDR, has been especially significant because of the way historians have borrowed concepts that queer theorists have developed and applied them to German history and the GDR. Specifically, the use of the word “queer” as a transitive verb—to queer *something*—and the notion of “queer” temporality and “queer” phenomenology have proven to be especially thought-provoking for the purposes of GDR history and studies. The notion of “queering” East German history, investigating “queer temporalities,” and even the very notion of “socialist subjectivities” are central to this volume, and are also deeply connected to the interdisciplinary kaleidoscope of approaches to studying the GDR which have proliferated in the last decade and a half.

To “queer” a history in its simplest terms is to look at a history from a different “orientation” point, to look at it “slantwise,” categorically question-

ing the very frameworks that have been essential to understandings of that history in the past.¹¹ Jennifer Evans summed this up nicely in 2016:

A critical approach drawing on the insights of “queer theory” sheds light on the processes by which hierarchies of meaning and experience generally are made and remade in different spaces and places, including how it is that they sometimes come to be regarded as unchanging and immutable. A queered history questions claims to a singular, linear march of time and universal experience and points out the unconscious ways in which progressive narrative arcs often seep into our analyses. To queer the past is to view it skeptically, to pull apart its constitutive pieces and analyses them from a variety of perspectives, taking nothing for granted.¹²

At first blush this might seem no different than the idea of simply reading “against the grain” or “deconstructing” or “unpacking” histories, reading critically or even the ages-old notion of *Quellenkritik* (source criticism). The fact, however, that this terminology emerges from the field of queer studies points us to some of the reasons why this is not simply warmed-over Derrida or White. Here, Sara Ahmed helps us understand the link with her concept of a “queer phenomenology.” For Ahmed, the question of *orientation* is fundamental to sexual desire, yes, but stretches far beyond the concept of purely *sexual* desire. Thinking along with Ann Banfield, Ahmed describes the classic example used by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, namely, their writing table or desk, which Husserl uses as a heuristic to make one of his central points: we can never see an object from all angles at once. In fact, we often can see only a small portion of the world that we *think* we perceive—our minds and our imaginations, constituted by our experiences, fill in the rest, and so much of the world we think we perceive is really a predicted and constructed mental model based on the small fraction we do sense.¹³ But, change your orientation, look at things from a radically different angle, and you never know—you might see *hinter den Kulissen* (behind the scenes)—you might be very surprised at just how off your perception of the unseen part of the world really was. And this can be a devastating experience, or by turns, a liberating one—or both. Of course, she means to apply this insight to the experience of “deviant” or “queer” desires and to suggest how these might just change the angle from which you perceive and imagine the world, and thus, how they might change just about *everything*. But really, the change of any orientation point will have the same effect.

However, perception is not static; it isn't frozen or excised from the flow of temporality, of time. A change in orientation—a change in desire, sexual or otherwise—might also fundamentally impact a subject's sense of time, because of just how personal time is, or can be. That is, our lives are bound up with temporality, because we have a lifespan, a life story, a narrative that might stretch from the past into the future (or might not). This concept of a queered temporality, a concept that subsumes both queer as a sexual orientation and queer in its more original and capacious sense, is something that theorists such as Ahmed, Halberstam, Edelman, Freeman, and others have explored over the last couple decades.

For all of them, “queer temporality” means something like this: heteronormativity implies a life narrative built around procreation, around the expectation that people will form heterosexual couples and have babies at a certain stage of life, and the way time passes, or is expected or imagined to pass in the future, is demarcated and bounded by the passage of “heteronormative procreative” time, or as Edelman names it, “reproductive futurism.”¹⁴ And this is not purely an individual matter: in a broad sense, many elements of many societies are scaffolded around this heteronormative temporality, from the housing market to the structure of higher education to government policies promoting the welfare of the family.¹⁵ But step outside of that heteronormative positionality or orientation and you change your perception of the temporality of your own life, and thus, you find yourself outside the temporality around which society has been structured. Halberstam described queer time in relation to the AIDS crisis and conventional notions of lifetime:

Queer time perhaps emerges most spectacularly, at the end of the twentieth century, from within those gay communities whose horizons of possibility have been severely diminished by the AIDS epidemic. In his memoir of his lover's death from AIDS, poet Mark Doty writes: “All my life I've lived with a future which constantly diminishes but never vanishes.” The constantly diminishing future creates a new emphasis on the here, the present, the now. . . . Queer time, even as it emerges from the AIDS crisis, is not only about compression and annihilation; it is also about the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing.¹⁶

And it follows that this also impacts spatiality, since time and space are linked. Ahmed shares her insight that it is not necessarily just a coincidence that “heterosexual” is often replaced with the spatial metaphor of “straight”

or “straightness,” because following a straight line implies a telos, a spatial and temporal destination that is *already prepared*, invested in, and that this straight line allows for no deviation, or deviancy, lest an individual subject fail to repay the investment made in them by society:

When you give an order or an instruction (especially a set of instructions guiding the use of equipment) you give directions. Directions are instructions about “where,” but they are also about “how” and “what”: directions take us somewhere by the very requirement that we follow a line that is drawn in advance. A direction is thus produced over time; a direction is what we are asked to follow. The etymology of “direct” relates to “being straight” or getting “straight to the point.” To go directly is to follow a line without a detour, without mediation. Within the concept of direction is a concept of “straightness.” . . .

Following lines also involves forms of social investment. Such investments “promise” return (if we follow this line, then “this” or “that” will follow), which might sustain the very will to keep going. Through such investments in the promise of return, subjects *reproduce the lines that they follow*.¹⁷

And the implication is, when you are no longer “straight,” you are no longer following the directions laid out for you in advance and you are deviating from the lines prepared for you both temporally and spatially.

These shifts in temporal and spatial orientation also are reflected in shifts in *subjectivity*, and now we start to touch on one of the core ideas of this volume: when you deviate from the telos, when the future isn’t always governing the present moment, the present moment multiplies in potentialities. It’s almost akin to a kind of Zen-like philosophical position—the moment becomes centered, and this has a lot of ramifications for the subject that is experiencing the flow of time in the first place. With no clear-cut destination, there is time to explore and dabble, to become mindful, we might even say, of the many intertwined subjectivities that compose what might initially seem to be “one” solid self. Ahmed, working through both Butler and Louis Althusser, draws this same point out from her discussion of the temporal and spatial phenomenology of queer desire:

One becomes a subject by “turning around.” . . . We could reflect on the difference it makes *which way subjects turn*. Life, after all, is full of turning points. . . . Depending on which way one turns, different worlds might even come into view.¹⁸

So, how then does this apply to the GDR, both historically and historiographically? Part of what the editors of this volume are exploring is the dialectical tension between the “lines” laid out by the GDR for its citizens, for example, in the form of the planned economy and the many deviations and *Umwege* (detours) that they ended up taking—not only sexually but in all the ways desire can be “unruly” and work against the “plan.” The GDR was indeed quite teleological, perhaps more so than any Western country. “As you work today, so you live tomorrow” or even simply “Building socialism” were catchphrases and slogans that the state and the party and many others used in both a literal and figurative sense. Many societies have witnessed the use of phrases like “a better tomorrow” to impart a telos, a straight temporality to, for example, new technologies or medical research or infrastructure projects. But for the GDR and its leaders, the idea of a “destination utopia,” a collective goal of communism was especially powerful, something that has often been true of Marxism and Marxist states.

There is no shortage of examples of just how powerfully that temporality shaped the lives and the physical spaces in East Germany. The *Wohnungsbauprogramm* (Housing Construction Program) is a good example because it shows specifically how such teleology operated not just in East Germany, but specifically in East Germany during the Honecker era. Honecker came to power in 1971 with a vision of accelerating the arrival of this distant socialist utopia. His signature policy initiative, the Unity of Social and Economic Policy, sometimes assigned the sobriquet “real-existing socialism,” sought to collapse the future and the present. It did so through programs like marriage credits for young couples, vastly more spending on consumer products, and through the *Wohnungsbauprogramm*, an extremely ambitious plan with the goal of providing all East Germans a newly built or newly renovated dwelling by 1990. Begun in 1973, the *Wohnungsbauprogramm* built entire satellite cities such as Berlin-Marzahn, Leipzig-Grünau, Karl-Marx-Stadt’s Fritz Heckert, and many, many more. These were built with ruthless efficiency and at a breakneck tempo, using prefabricated panels (*Platten*) assembled in a classic Fordist assembly-line fashion developed in the USSR (the Slobin method).¹⁹ The single-minded drive to the future, the urgency of the telos of socialism, was reified and encased in the physical reality of the speed and efficiency it used to build this new world: in the case of *Plattenbausiedlungen* (Prefabricated Housing Estates), identical buildings stretching into the distance along straight lines froze the relentless tempo of construction into a permanent reality, always already radiating the drive to the future in the present.

These spaces were the spaces of the future, and they were clearly intended for couples with children, who received priority on waiting lists above childless or single citizens. In fact, Marzahn-Hellersdorf, the largest of these with almost three hundred thousand residents by 1989, had the highest concentration of children in East Germany, including the highest concentration of twins and triplets—as if the Fordism that produced the seemingly endless rows of identical WBS-70 *Plattenbauten* was reflected in the endless and sometimes identical children who lived in, played around, and went to Kita and school near them (see Figures 13.1, 13.2). In places like Marzahn, spaces of socialism's future, socialist temporality, and socialist spatiality were very much defined by Edelman's reproductive futurism, or Ahmed's straight lines—it was socialist straight time (see Figures 14.1, 14.2).

Children who grew up here definitely got the message that their existence, and the existence of the buildings springing up all around them, were all part of a collective journey to a utopian destination. One boy, Christian, who grew up there, reflected upon this many years after the end of the GDR:

When I went to school, I could choose between two paths. Both were about equal in length and both paved with asphalt, so I could keep my feet dry. One led straight along the edge of the new housing settlement. That was the way that almost all the kids used. Every morning there was a kind of procession. To the left stood tall and proud the new housing settlement, and in front of us lay the school. When I took this path, I felt as if I were developing a socialist personality, which would fit into a huge socialist project.²⁰

But this is only one part of the story of Christian's childhood: Scott Harrison, Jeff Hayton, and Katharine White want to explore the other side, the ways in which people *also* deviated from the straight lines and the straight time, the ways they lingered, dallied, found their own paths—not necessarily in opposition or “resistance” to the state but simply as an expression of their desire, and the manifestation or self-actualization of that desire. So as Christian reflected, there was another path to school he could take:

The other way snaked through the small garden colony. There, I could linger (*nachhängen*) in peace and alone with my thoughts. In the summer, plum trees grew over the fences, dogs ran barking through the gardens, and on one corner there was a crazy old man who carved wooden figurines. The figurines were colorfully painted, and funny to look at, and



Marzahn

Figure 13.1 & Figure 13.2. Children and Plattenbauten (Credit: Courtesy of Evelyn Marquardt (left) and Barbara Diehl (right))



Figure 14.1 & Figure 14.2. Left, Marzahn-Hellersdorf; right, Marzahn construction teams greeting Erich Honecker in 1978 (Credit: Courtesy of Bezirksmuseum Marzahn-Hellersdorf)

then there was a small water mill that still turned round and round. That was really the path of *self-discovery*.²¹

The key thing to emphasize here, which flows from the point that the editors of this volume are making, is not just that Christian, as a subject, could choose between two paths, literally and metaphorically. It is more to the point to say that Christian *contained both paths inside him*. After all, the paths we walk every day form paths in the neural circuitry of our minds in the same way that a path frequently traversed by pedestrians across a grassy field becomes reinforced and worn down—a phenomenon referred to as a “*desire path*.” And for Christian, these two paths, two different ways to the same destination, became part of him, in many senses: emotionally, ontologically, neurologically. These two paths not only represented two different socialist subjectivities that constituted different parts of the Deleuzian “desiring machine” we can call “Christian,” these paths *helped constitute* that very machine—as the editors (referencing Joan Scott) point out in the introduction to this volume, subjects don’t “have” experiences, they are constituted *through* experience. Moreover, even once the future of the GDR became foreclosed, a future “of the past” as it were, these paths to that future *remained inside him*, and became a part of how he narrated the arc of his lifetime—in the end, the telos of the socialist straight time/path itself became a tangent, though no less valuable to the meaning of his own life than any of the “time wasting” paths he also liked to take.

The notion here is of a subject constituted by a nuanced mixture of desires—desire for self-actualization *as well as* a desire to *Mach mit!* (Join in!) and walk the straight path, do the straight time, of state socialism.²² This notion is actually not far off from the concept of *Eigen-Sinn* (stubbornness, willfulness, or self-reliance) formulated originally by Alf Lüdtke. But it is important to note that Lüdtke’s concept often *has* been misinterpreted in a “state vs. society” or “state vs. individual” binary; it has come to stand in for “resistance,” something more akin to the “weapons of the weak.” But this isn’t quite right. Most people did not want to “resist” the state, but they also did not find the grandiose socialist project capable of satisfying their most personal dreams and desires. Even people who fit in perfectly to the “plan” that the GDR had in store for them, like Christian, still needed time for *Irrungen und Wirrungen* (wrong turns and tangled paths), to opt out of (or at least seek temporary refuge from) the daily productivism and Fordism, the *Jeden Tag guten Bilanz* (good results every day) mentality, to use their imaginations, to experiment, to waste time, to make mistakes, to be weird or antisocial or

contrarian or nomadic or curious, and to get a respite from always being oriented to the future. This was the impetus for the punk slogans “Too much future” and “Don’t die in the waiting room of the future.”²³ In other words, it wasn’t just queer people who experienced the dissonance of “queer time” in socialism—it was nearly everyone, at some point in their lives. There was almost always some process of experience and subjectivity that positioned a person outside the norms of socialist straight time—some deviant desire, whether sexually or because of a concern for the natural environment, or a desire for western entertainment, or simply a growing sense of disappointment in the lack of return on their investment and faith in following the straight path. Each of the contributions in this volume represents some way in which East Germans experienced their own queering of state socialism *as a part of* the constitution and formation of their own subjectivities, their own sense of self, even as these were mercurial, contradictory, and shifting, neither in outright resistance nor outright compliance with the state.



The contributions to this volume almost entirely stem from the newer generation of scholars who bring to bear a much richer blend of historical and cultural methodologies—film and media studies, environmental studies, queer studies, urban and spatial history, art history, and more. As a result, this volume gives us many more angles to view the Husserlian “philosopher’s desk” and more complete and nuanced views of how subjects were constituted, and ever reconstituted, from their experiences in the GDR. We see a narrative of socialist subjects who contained Whitmanesque multitudes, who clashed with the GDR state, especially the SED and *especially* the MfS, but who also refused to give up on the dream of socialism, even when it seemed that dream had given up on them. We see people whose opposition to the GDR was born not of dissidence but, rather, of disappointment—disappointment in the vastness by which the GDR state fell short of the promise of socialism that it itself had made. We see people who took very seriously the original, stirring vision of socialism formulated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels:

Whereas in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just

as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.²⁴

For many East Germans, as this volume shows, what they wanted was socialism—almost nowhere in this research do we find East Germans who wanted Western-style capitalism. But they wanted it in a way that was personally meaningful, that made room for the many subjectivities within themselves, that allowed them to contribute to the grand but very abstract goal of “building socialism” in a way that was also personally fulfilling, that allowed them to achieve self-actualization and real, authentic happiness, *through* socialism. They were opposed to the Kafkaesque bureaucracy staffed by crass careerists, the absurd censorship of truth that everyone could see, the unwarranted paranoia of the Stasi, not because these represented socialism, but because they represented a *betrayal* of socialism, at least of their vision of socialism. Undoubtedly, there were many, like Rudolf Bahro or Gert Neumann, for whom that betrayal ultimately led to a complete loss of faith that socialism could *ever* allow for enough individual autonomy, that it could *ever* find a way not just to balance the needs of the collective with the needs of the individual but also to allow the two to synergistically reinforce each other. Clearly, the events of 1989–1990 show us that many East Germans saw the West as having become the more promising system for allowing them to develop their own sense of self-actualization. But within the two extremes lay the lives of most East Germans, and understanding the flow of East German history as shaped by the dialectic between individual self-actualization and collective building has proven to offer a very fruitful new direction for how the next generation of scholars has come to frame their work on the GDR.

The work in this volume represents the methodological enrichment of a field that has benefitted from a quarter century of exploration of many different orientations, both within and well beyond the field of East German history. How might it orient future scholars of the GDR? When we no longer view the GDR through a binary of “state vs. individual” but instead consider the many ways that East Germans both participated in the collective project of the state but/and also sought to interpret socialism in their own ways, in ways that allowed them to self-actualize and self-discover, in ways that corresponded to their sexual and nonsexual desires, we are in some ways moving *closer* to the original sense of the term *Eigen-Sinn*. Doing so helps us to queer the history of East Germany, or rather, to use a vastly expanded methodological skillset to understand how East Germans already queered it themselves.

There is more at stake than simply achieving a deeper understanding of a particular—and particularly important—nation, however. The Cold War debates were often more about the debaters' orientations and positions, usually inherited from the years before the *Wende*, than they really were about understanding the GDR itself. This might not seem like a novel insight, but we should also consider that this statement is true of *each* generation that studies anything, in this case, the GDR. For both this generation right now and future ones, their orientation, their subject position, proceeds from the temporality in which they find themselves at that moment. This is not merely the much-derided “presentism.” Scholars have become motivated and equipped to investigate gender, sexual orientation, film and media, the environment, race, and the like because these are frequently the conversations that have surrounded and shaped them in this generation. It is not the case, however, that such changes are mere fads—they emerge from a Western society trying to come to grips with its own power structures, inconsistencies, and inequalities. But as research on the GDR has increasingly shown, there is a continuum between East Germany, and state socialism in general, and the “West.” The binary between the two can hardly be reduced to a single one. If old debates about everyday life vs. the *Unrechtsstaat* were at least partially proxies for debates about power and ideology in the West, then the same is true today. There is no escaping that fact. Every researcher also has their own “socialist subjectivity” in this field. What might be new, however, is a more transparent recognition of this fact. But what might *that* mean? Not every article or book that comes out on the history of the GDR needs to indulge in navel-gazing introspection about the researchers' own positionality.

Moreover, not every new research theme needs to be justified by its utility for contemporary debates—that *would* actually be a form of presentism. But it helps to think about the ways in which studying an “alternative modernity” like the socialist GDR helps us to queer our *own* histories, temporalities, and subjectivities, even as we do the same to the GDR. We have had comparative or connected histories of the GDR and the Federal Republic; less frequently have there appeared connected histories of the GDR and other socialist nations in the Soviet Bloc and even less frequently, between the GDR and nonaligned countries. There is space for many more, however. What would a connected history of the GDR and the United States look like?²⁵ Or Scandinavia? Or any number of other places? There are now many vectors or angles from which to engage such comparisons—we've discussed many of them in this volume and in this essay.

Or, by way of a closing thought, what would it look like to explore this socialist state from the standpoint of a history of political economy, capitalism, Marxism, and modernity? Desire, *Eigen-Sinn*, self-actualization, wanderings, and deviances—the irony is that in Marx and Engels’ vision, it was the transcending of capitalism by communism that was supposed to make space for precisely these kinds of multiple subjectivities and temporalities, even within the same person. It was *capitalism* that commodified every aspect of labor and life, profaning all that was once holy, alienating people from their potential as fully developed human beings, from their very selves, flattening human subjects into two-dimensional objects, fit only for their commensurability and exchange value. Does it still? Did East German socialism manage in some ways to overcome that alienation? The work in this volume suggests that, yes, it might have, though often only in spite of itself. How we should read that fact in the reflected light of our own temporality is a puzzle for the coming generation of scholars to solve.

Notes

1. Henryk Gericke, “Too Much Future,” in *Punk in der DDR: Too much future*, ed. Michael Boehlke and Henryk Gericke (Berlin: Verbrecher Verlag, 2007), 9; see also Jeff Hayton, “Ignoring Dictatorship? Punk Rock, Subculture, and Entanglement in the GDR,” in *Dropping Out of Socialism: The Creation of Alternative Spheres in the Soviet Bloc*, ed. Juliane Fürst and Josie McLellan (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2017), 207–232, here 207; as well as his recently published *Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock in East and West Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); and Ruth Aardsma-Benton, “Punks in the Church: The Relationship between the Punk Subculture and Church in East Germany” (MA thesis, Western Michigan University, 2018).

2. See among many other works: Manfred Agethen, Eckhard Jesse, and Ehrhart Neubert, eds., *Der Missbrauchte Antifaschismus: DDR-Staatsdoktrin und Lebenslüge der deutschen Linken* (Freiburg: Herder, 2002); and Hubertus Knabe, *Die Täter sind unter uns* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2007).

3. See among many other works: Jürgen Kocka, Hartmut Kaeble, and Hartmut Zwahr, eds., *Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994); and Thomas Lindenberger, ed., *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur: Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999). A recent and very helpful synthesis and commentary is Samuel Clowes Huneke, “East German History and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy,” *Central European History* 55, no. 4 (2022): 576–586.

4. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, eds., *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

5. See Martin Sabrow and Thomas Lindenberger, “Zwischen Verinselung und Europäisierung: Die Zukunft der DDR-Geschichte,” *Deutschland Archiv* 37 (2004): 123–127. This conversation continued for almost a decade before dying out—see Thomas Lindenberger, “Ist die DDR ausgeforscht? Phasen, Trends und ein optimistischer Ausblick,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 24–26 (2014).

6. See Tobias Huff, *Natur und Industrie im Sozialismus: Eine Umweltgeschichte der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015); Astrid Eckert, *West Germany and the Iron Curtain: Environment, Economy, and Culture in the Borderlands* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); and Julia E. Ault, *Saving Nature under Socialism: Transnational Environmentalism in East Germany, 1968–1990* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021). See also Eli Rubin, Scott Moranda, and Sabine Mödersheim, eds., *Ecologies of Socialisms: Germany, Nature, and the Left in History, Politics, and Culture* (New York: Peter Lang, 2019); and Thomas Fleischman, *Communist Pigs: An Animal History of East Germany's Rise and Fall* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020).

7. See Ina Merkel, ed., *Wunderwirtschaft: DDR Konsumkultur in den 60er Jahren* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1996); Ina Merkel, *Utopie und Bedürfnis: Die Geschichte der Konsumkultur in der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999); Andreas Ludwig, ed., *Fortschritt, Norm und Eigensinn: Erkundungen im Alltag der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1999); Andreas Ludwig, ed., *Zeitgeschichte der Dinge: Spurensuchen in der Materiellen Kultur der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2019); Eli Rubin, *Synthetic Socialism: Plastics and Dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Jonathan Bach, *What Remains: Everyday Encounters with the Socialist Past in Germany* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); and Milena Veenis, *Material Fantasies: Expectations of the Western Consumer World among East Germans* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012).

8. See Eli Rubin, *Amnesiopolis: Modernity, Space, and Memory in East Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Andrew Demshuk *Bowling for Communism: Urban Ingenuity at the End of East Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020); Paul Stangl, *Risen from the Ruins: The Cultural Politics of Rebuilding East Berlin* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018); Annemarie Sammartino “Mass Housing, Late Modernism, and the Forging of Community in New York City and East Berlin, 1965–1989,” *The American Historical Review* 121, no. 2 (2016): 492–521; and Florian Urban, *Neo-historical Berlin: Architecture and Urban Design in the German Democratic Republic 1970–1990* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009).

9. See Quinn Slobodian, ed., *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015); Christina Schwenkel *Building Socialism: The Afterlife of East German Architecture in Vietnam* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020); Young-Sun Hong, *Cold War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Sara Pugach, *African Students in East Germany, 1949–1975* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022); and Ned Richardson-Little, *The Human Rights Dictatorship: Socialism, Global Solidarity and Revolution in East Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

10. See Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Josie McClellan, *Love in the Time of Communism: Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Kyle Frackman, “Persistent Ambivalence: Theorizing Queer East German Studies,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 66, no. 5 (2019): 669–689; and Christopher Ewing, “‘Toward a Better World for Gays’: Race, Tourism, and the Internationalization of the West German Gay Rights Movement, 1969–1983,” *GHI Forum* 61 (2017): 109–132. Most recently, see Samuel Clowes Huneke, *States of Libera-*

tion: *Gay Men between Dictatorship and Democracy in Cold War Germany* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022).

11. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 4, 23.

12. Jennifer V. Evans, "Introduction: Why Queer German History?," *German History* 34, no. 3 (2016): 371–384, here 371. Evans expands upon and deepens these points in her *The Queer Art of History: Queer Kinship after Fascism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2023), 13.

13. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 3–4, 35–40.

14. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 2–3.

15. Lisa Baraitser has explored the implications of understanding the way bodily, physical orientations, and positions, including gender, change concepts of time and this in turn has societal and ultimately political ramifications, what she terms "chronobiopolitics." See Lisa Baraitser, *Enduring Time* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 3.

16. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 2.

17. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 16–17, 68–87.

18. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 15.

19. Rubin, *Amnesiopolis*, 60.

20. Christian Domnitz, "Jetzt packen wir hier alles zusammen," in *(Keine) Platten Geschichten*, ed. Katrin Rohnstock (Berlin: Rohnstock Biografien, 2004), 41–44, here 43.

21. Domnitz, "Packen," 43. My emphasis.

22. The *Mach mit!* program was one that asked residents of neighborhoods and *Plattenbausiedlungen* to volunteer their labor to beautify, build, or otherwise take part in local community projects.

23. Christoph Tannert, "Von Renft bis AG Geige," in *Wir wollen immer artig sein . . . : Punk, New Wave, HipHop und Independent-Szene in der DDR 1980–1990*, ed. Ronald Galenza and Heinz Havemeister (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2005), 20–29, here 21. See also Hayton, *Culture from the Slums*, 82.

24. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1998), 53.

25. There are some initial clues as to what a history like this might look like: see Kate Brown, *Plutopia: Nuclear Families, Atomic Cities, and the Great Soviet and American Plutonium Disasters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); and specific to East Germany and the US, see Sammartino, "Mass Housing, Late Modernism."

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Contributors

Julia E. Ault is Associate Professor of History at the University of Utah. Her first book, *Saving Nature under Socialism: Transnational Environmentalism in East Germany, 1968–1990*, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2021. Her work has also appeared in numerous edited volumes as well as the journals *German History* and *Central European History*. Her research interests include the environment, transnational networks, socialisms, continuities across the 1945 divide, and the Cold War.

Timothy Scott Brown is Professor of History at Northeastern University and Senior Fellow at the Institute for European Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. He was a 2018–2019 Writing Fellow of the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society in Munich, Germany, a 2016–2017 Berlin Prize Fellow of the American Academy in Berlin, and a 2016–2017 Fellow of the American Council of Learned Societies. His publications include *Sixties Europe* (Cambridge, 2021), *West Germany and the Global Sixties* (Cambridge, 2013), and *Weimar Radicals* (Berghahn, 2009). He is co-editor of *The Global Sixties in Sound and Vision* (Palgrave, 2014), and *Between the Avant-Garde and the Everyday* (Berghahn, 2011).

Catrina de Rivera is Assistant Professor of German at Valparaiso University. She has previously taught at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Her research interests include the Holocaust and World War II, memory studies, trauma theory, and affect.

Mary Fulbrook, FBA, is Professor of German History at University College London (UCL) and former Executive Dean of the UCL Faculty of Social and Historical Sciences. A graduate of Cambridge and Harvard, Fulbrook has received numerous research grants and has written or edited more than twenty-five books. Her early pathbreaking books on the GDR include *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949–1989* (Oxford, 1995), and *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (Yale, 2005). Major recent monographs include *Bystander Society: Conformity and Complicity in Nazi Germany and the Holocaust* (Oxford, 2023); the Wolfson History Prize-winning *Reckonings: Legacies of Nazi Persecution and the Quest for Justice* (Oxford, 2018); the Fraenkel Prize-winning *A Small Town near Auschwitz: Ordinary Nazis and the Holocaust* (Oxford, 2012); and *Dissonant Lives: Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships* (Oxford 2011; in 2 vols., 2017). She is currently writing about patterns of power, relations between communities, and chances of survival in Europe under Nazi domination.

Mor Geller is a PhD student in History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and a fellow in the George L. Mosse Program in History and the Richard Koebner Minerva Center for German History. Her research interests include cinema, urbanism, and the history of the social sciences.

Scott Harrison is Faculty in Liberal Studies at Boston Architectural College, where he regularly offers courses on history, theory, and research-based writing. He received his PhD in modern European history in 2019 from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. His research interests include modern German history, LGBTQ+ histories, and global and world histories. He is currently completing a series of article-length projects focused on the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, and citizenship in the GDR during the 1970s and 1980s.

Jeff Hayton is Associate Professor of History at Wichita State University. He has published widely on popular culture, rock 'n' roll, and German history. His first book, *Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock in East and West Germany*, appeared with Oxford University Press in 2022. He is currently writing several books on the history of mountains in Central Europe: *Socialist Summits: Mountaineering in the German Democratic Republic, 1945–1990*, and *Peaks of Destiny: Mountains and the Making of Modern Germany*.

Kyryll Kunakhovich is Associate Professor of History at the University of Virginia. He is the author of *Communism's Public Sphere: Culture as Politics in Cold War Poland and East Germany* (Cornell, 2022) and the co-editor, with Piotr Kosicki, of *The Long 1989: Decades of Global Revolution* (CEU, 2019). His current project examines the origins of heritage discourse through the lens of UNESCO, its most influential promoter.

Eli Rubin is Professor of History at Western Michigan University. He is the author of *Synthetic Socialism: Plastics and Dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic* (North Carolina, 2008) and *Amnesiopolis: Modernity, Space, and Memory in East Germany* (Oxford, 2016), as well as co-editor (with Scott Moranda and Sabine Mödersheim) of *Ecologies of Socialisms: Germany, Nature, and the Left in History, Politics, and Culture* (Peter Lang, 2019). He is also co-author, with Annemarie Sammartino, of *Stepping into the Past* (Oxford, 2024), a collection of hands-on activities for the Western Civilizations classroom. He is writing a third book on the material culture of destruction during World War II in Germany entitled *The Arc of Destruction: Urban Space, War, and Memory in Germany, 1937–1945*.

Briana J. Smith is Program Manager for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Minnesota and is the author of *Free Berlin: Art, Urban Politics, and Everyday Life* (MIT, 2022). Her current book project, *DIY Internet*, examines intersections between German punk and digital cultures.

Tom Smith is Senior Lecturer in German at the University of St Andrews in the United Kingdom. He researches on queer studies in postwar German culture, with a particular focus on the literature, film and culture of East Germany and post-unification Germany. His book *Comrades in Arms: Military Masculinities in East German Culture* was published by Berghahn Books in 2020. He is an AHRC/BBC New Generation Thinker and regularly presents his work on BBC Radio.

Larissa R. Stiglich is Assistant Professor in the History and Religious Studies Department at Young Harris College. Before joining YHC's Faculty, she received her PhD in European history from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2020. Larissa's research interests include the process of German unification and post-socialist transition, as well as urban history and

the history of everyday life in a united Germany and the former Communist Bloc. She is currently preparing a book manuscript entitled *After Socialism: Navigating German Unification in a Former Model City*, which examines the long-term processes and experiences of post-socialist transformation in the former socialist model city Eisenhüttenstadt.

Markus Wahl is Research Fellow in the History of Medicine at the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg. He received his PhD in 2017 from the University of Kent and has since been publishing on the social history of the GDR, patient history in postwar Germany, and memory studies. In 2019, he published *Medical Memories and Experiences in Postwar East Germany: Treatments of the Past* with Routledge. His new field of interest is the knowledge transfer of health, body, and gender concepts across the Atlantic between Brazil and Germany in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Katharine White is a staff scholar in the Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. She received her PhD in 2018 in modern German history from the George Washington University. She is completing a book manuscript tentatively titled, *Red Youth, Anti-Imperialist Politics, and Musical Lifeworlds of East Berlin, 1970s-80s*. Her broader research interests include German transnational history, youth culture in the “long 1960s,” anti-colonialism and peace activism, and the impacts of Nazism globally.

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