MIMICRY AS CRITIQUE:

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE PRENZLAUER BERG, AVANTGARDE AESTHETICS AND COMMUNIST CULTURES OF DISSIDENCE

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This dissertation reappraises the literary and artistic production of the East German cultural formation known as the "Prenzlauer Berg poets," a shorthand referring to a loosely associated collective of poets and artists, all producing work in self-publishing (*samizdat*) throughout the last decade of the German Democratic Republic (1979 – 1989). It challenges the general scholarly consensus, which either regards the Prenzlauer Berg (PB) poets as radical dissidents who refused to partake in the critical amelioration of socialism, as it had been attempted by previous generations of East German writers (e.g. Heiner Müller and Christa Wolf), or as fully complicit with oppressive state surveillance, particularly after the post-Wall revelation that PB poets Sascha Anderson and Rainer Schedlinski had been informants for the East German secret police.

Focusing on texts by the PB poets Jan Faktor, Bert Papenfuß-Gorek, Karla Sachse, Uwe Warnke, and others, the dissertation instead situates the PB texts in relation to the GDR via what I call the PB poets' formal mimicry of the historical, political and cultural context whence they emerged. Such mimicry is comprised of conflicting gestures of imitation, rejection, and critique, which, I subsequently argue, these poets appropriate from the transnational avantgardes. The dissertation argues that the PB poets adapt these practices to the context of the late twentieth-GDR in three key ways. First, they subvert the "really existing socialist" (Rudolf Bahro) state's

self-legitimizing claims to guarantee steady progress toward communism, and thus continue a dialogue among three successive generations of East German avantgardists and the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (Chapter One). Second, the PB poets manipulate through their aesthetic exploration of fragmentation and the index the decaying official media language, Party slogans and GDR cultural paraphernalia, with an eye to reforming a flawed referentiality undergirding official East German discourse (Chapter Two). Finally, efforts to revive East Germany's socialist project and language situate the PB collective within a canon of committed twentieth-century avantgardes, extending from the Russian Futurists to the Weimar-era photomonteur John Heartfield, and finally to the playwrights Bertolt Brecht and Heiner Müller (Chapters One and Three).

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Anna Horakova holds a B.A. in Philosophy and Modern Languages and an M.St. in Medieval and Modern Languages from St. Peter's College, and St. Cross College, University of Oxford, UK. From 2010 to 2016, Anna studied German literature at Cornell University, receiving her M.A. in 2013 and her Ph.D in August 2016, and having spent a year as a research fellow at the Humboldt Universität in Berlin, Germany. In August 2016, Anna began her appointment as a College Fellow at the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures at Harvard University.

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INTRODUCTION

"Mimicry as Critique"

Shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the East German underground started circulating a new magazine. The inaugural volume of the journal included introductory remarks, in which the journal's editor, Asteris Kutulas, positions the new literary project in relation to a mounting perception of stagnation within the German Democratic Republic (GDR, East Germany), and on which he elaborates in a series of pithy vignettes:

> Die Zeit [ist] voll Verbitterung (und Gallenbeschwerden), in sich zusammengesackter Aktivität, emphatischer Nabelschau, verquollener Phrasen, Langstreckenläufer, Gartensparten, metaphysischer Aussagesätze, Trabanten, Betonklötzer, der Zukunft sicher ins Auge sehen, Seifenschaum im Gesicht des Bauarbeiters auf dem Alexanderplatz, das stimmt nicht, höre ich die einen rufen, es ist ganz gut so, erwidern die anderen, mag sein, die Zeit ist so, doch was kann ich dafür?[1]

The passage, which was written in 1987, describes the East German state, two years before its unexpected demise, as a place of disillusionment and inaction. Kutulas paints a picture of a country mired in the everyday, drab realities of inadequate consumer products and architectural projects with a penchant for concrete (*Beton*), and suffused with empty proclamations of a communist future forever deferred. Despite such proclamations, the preface suggests, many East German citizens are disappointed and embittered by the apparently insurmountable distance separating the country thirty-seven years after its foundation from its erstwhile goals of building a more egalitarian and just society. At the same time, Kutulas proposes, the GDR is a place in which at least some are still committed to the state's foundational task of transforming East German society into a better one, by refusing to accept this picture. Consequently, whether the country's socialist project can still be achieved is contested with a vehemence that thwarts opportunities for productive debate among discordant factions ("der Konsens ist raus aus der

[1] Kutulas, Asteris. "Vorwort." *Bizarre Städte 1* (October 1987): n. pag.

Gesellschaft"). In the editor's view, however, projects such as his might create a literary forum in which the current stagnation, the concomitant cultural malaise ("verquollener Phrasen"), and the future of East German socialism could be meaningfully debated.

Bizarre Städte (1987 – 89), the journal under discussion and one of many underground projects produced in East Germany at the time, set out to explore such avenues for productive contestation within the modest confines of its own production in *samizdat* or self-publishing.[2] The journal brought together literary voices from across the GDR's literary landscape and history – officially sanctioned authors of considerable repute as well as others unpublished outside East Germany's *samizdat* network. Some authors were old enough to have experienced the state's inception under antifascist auspices and amidst postwar hopes for a better society; some were "born into" an already established socialist state.[3] True to its aspirations, *Bizarre Städte* brought together East German authors of all stripes. Leafing through the volume, one finds, for example, a speech by leading poet and playwright Heiner Müller (b. 1929), in which Müller positions the ongoing reforms in the Soviet Union ("das Gorbatschow-Programm") as an emergent "alternative to capitalism"; a poem by Heinz Czechowski (b. 1935) that is critical of the dogmatic communism of the state's early years (*Aufbau*); Bert Papenfuß-Gorek's (b. 1956) poem "ausdrückliche klage aus der inneren immigration"; and a satire that the cabaret artist Steffen Mensching (b. 1958) wrote about the state newspaper *Neues Deutschland*.[4] This varied

[2] *Samizdat* is a neologism coined by the Russian poet Nikolai Glazkov from a combination of the words *сам* and *здать* and literally meaning "self-published" or "self-publishing." Oushakine Sergei Alex. "The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat." *Public Culture* 13.2 (2001): 191–214. 194. The term designates a grassroots method of reproducing and disseminating otherwise unavailable texts (Oushakine 191).

[3] In *Postfascist Fantasies* (1997), Julia Hell identifies the GDR's foundational discourse of antifascism as the "most powerful ideological discourse in the GDR." Hell, Julia. *Postfascist Fantasies: Psychoanalysis, History, and the Literature of East Germany*. Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 1997. 17. The "hineingeborene" generation is defined by Karen Leeder as one whose dominant experience is having been born "into" an already existing GDR state. Leeder, Karen. *Breaking Boundaries: A New Generation of Poets in the GDR*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. 23 – 28.

[4] Mensching, Steffen. "Wetter-Bericht." *Bizarre Städte* 1 (1987): n. pag.

palette of authors is forced to coexist within the binding of the journal, "zusammengehalten, ja aneinandergepreßt," as Kutulas puts it, thus forming a material platform for political and aesthetic exchange.

Included as the penultimate text of the journal's first volume is "Der Eisenwagen," a short story by the East German author Volker Braun (b. 1935), which Braun wrote as a postscript to his earlier drama *Lenins Tod* (1970). "Der Eisenwagen" has been discussed by GDR studies scholar Wolfgang Emmerich as a literary watershed distinguishing authors such as Braun from the final generation of GDR authors, the so-called Prenzlauer Berg poets, whose work is the subject of this dissertation. Emmerich contends that Braun's story presents an attitude that is "diametrically opposed" to the attitude of this younger generation.[5] Braun's titular *Eisenwagen*, a "flaches, unbequemes mit Tarnfarbe gestrichenes Wägelchen, das wir jetzt aus dem Gerümpel zogen […] Jedenfalls unbefahren," sets up a metaphor of communism, manifesting in the October revolution and later adopted by the GDR ("die Lokomotive der Geschichte, meine Herren Arbeiter und Bauern").[6] Nevertheless, rather than serving as a harbinger of a utopian future, Braun's *Eisenwagen* has come to resemble a tank, at once restraining and protecting its occupants, which, moreover, moves in an uncertain direction ("ob vorwärts oder rückwärts"). In moments of "despair," the narrator has tried to get out of it, only to realize that he cannot and does not want to leave the machine, reaching the only "honest" and possible solution to accept the *Eisenwagen* as his final resting place ("mein Grab, mein Mausoleum"). Thus, even though the socialist project in Central and Eastern Europe has been compromised, the protagonist refuses to abandon it. However, the story concludes, this is only the protagonists' solution:

[5] Emmerich, Wolfgang. *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*. Leipzig: Kiepenheuer, 1996. 405-06.
[6] I am citing from Braun's text as it was first printed by *Bizarre Städte* 1 (1987). The volume is unpaginated.

others will have to find solutions of their own: "Eine ehrliche, eine eindeutige Lösung, was mich betraf; die andern mußten die ihre finden."

If Braun ultimately opts to accept East German socialism, Emmerich claims, the generation of GDR authors that followed – for whom this version of socialism also was a constraining and damaged "Eisenwagen" – advocated "den Absprung vom desavouierten Gefährt" (403). However, in the volume of *Bizarre Städte* where "Der Eisenwagen" was first published, Braun's text is succeeded by an experimental piece written by the then twenty-one-year-old Prenzlauer Berg poet Johannes Jansen (b. 1966). This experimental text defies Emmerich's general assessment of the GDR's youngest literary generation as uncommitted to and disassociated from the state socialist project. Jansen's text appears to have been written in response to Braun's call for others to "find solutions of their own." It appropriates official GDR language and imagery (including Party slogans and official East German state insignia) and reassembles them in heterogeneous form comprised of poems, narrative fragments, and photographs. In a programmatic statement, Jansen's text presents its own experimentation as an attempt to reanimate a stagnant "given" situation that has been passed on to Jansen's generation of authors born "into" the GDR. Jansen's text is, I suggest, exemplary of two trends in the last generation of East German writers at the time: first, that of the multimedial and playful manipulation of found poetic language; and second, the trend of envisioning a meaningful socialist future in East Germany by the country's cultural underground more than thirty-five years after the state's formation.

This set of twinned preoccupations runs contrary to the scholarly reception of the larger body of work to which Jansen's collage belongs. I use the shorthand "Prenzlauer Berg poets" to designate this loosely associated collective of over a hundred artists and writers who produced

their work in the last decade of the East German state (1979 – 89). The collective was named after the East Berlin neighborhood in which it concentrated its cultural activities, although many of the associated artists resided in other East German cities (especially Dresden, Erfurt, Karl-Marx-Stadt, Leipzig, and Halle). One defining characteristic of the Prenzlauer Berg (PB) collective is the common generation to which the majority belonged. As Karen Leeder writes, the "dominant experience" of these writers "was having been 'born into' the established socialist state," largely from early to the late 1950s.[7] To these writers, Leeder continues, "the Second World War, the anti-fascist democratic struggle of the founding years, the Cold War, the building of the Berlin Wall, even the events of 1968, were all textbook history" (24). While this generation of writers experienced renewed hope associated with the relaxation of official cultural policies instituted in 1971 by the General Secretary of the Socialist Unity of Party of Germany Erich Honecker, such hope was considerably diminished following the state's controversial expatriation of the critical communist songwriter and poet Wolf Biermann in 1976.

Following the collective's formation in 1979, the state's troubled reception of early PB projects culminated in the ban of this emergent literature from official publication by a Party decree from 1981.[8] Before 1989, the poets had circulated the majority of their work through both a network of so-called "unofficial" journals published in *samizdat* and through their punk-

[7] Leeder 24. That the majority of these writers stemmed from the same generation ought not to obscure the fact that several prominent members of this collective hailed from a variety of countries, from Czechoslovakia to Chile. They were thus no "unvermischte DDR-Produkte," as Leeder claims with reference to a comment that the poet and songwriter Wolf Biermann uttered in a context of a different East German author (24).

[8] Prenzlauer Berg literature was banned at a meeting of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in November 1981, which ruled the emergent literary scene at Prenzlauer Berg to be "außerhalb der durch die Kulturpolitik unserer Partei formulierten Erwartungen und Anforderungen an Literatur." Böthig, Peter. *Grammatik einer Landschaft: Literatur aus der DDR in den 80er Jahren*. Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 1997. 63. As Peter Geist further details, the occasion that banned this collective from official publication was a planned publication of the collective's poetry by the *Akademie der Künste*. Geist, Peter. "Die Lyrik der nichtoffiziellen Literaturszene." Warnke, Uwe and Ingeborg Quaas. *Die Addition der Differenzen: die Literaten- und Künstlerszene Ostberlins 1979 bis 1989*. Berlin: Verbrecher Verlag, 2009. 21.

influenced performances, as Seth Howes has recently argued.[9] The post-Wall PB anthology titled *Vogel oder Käfig sein* (1991) lists over thirty unofficial periodicals and more than 140 smaller projects (such as self-published poetry collections and book objects) produced by the collective.[10] Referencing the sheer volume and variety of the PB *oeuvre*, Birgit Dahlke has recently warned against mistaking this body of work for a "homogeneous expression of a single generation's culture," suggesting instead that the generation consisted of artists who deployed different aesthetic concepts, from hermetic experimentation to politically "explosive" cabaret.[11] In a 2015 interview, the Erfurt-based artist and erstwhile PB poet Gabriele Stötzer similarly emphasized the heterogeneity of the group.[12] Stötzer divides the PB Scene into three subsections: first, there were the explicit politically engaged writers (*die Politischen*) such as Lutz Rathenow (b. 1952); second, the "freien Künstler" with no immediate political or institutional ties; and third, authors such as Jan Faktor (b. 1951) and Uwe Kolbe (b. 1957), who were members of the State Writers' Union (*Deutscher Schriftstellerverband*, renamed *Schriftstellerverband der DDR* in 1973), the GDR's most important Party-sanctioned literary institution. Without wishing to privilege Dahlke or Stötzer's model of the PB collective, their

[9] Howes, Seth. "'Killersatellit' and *Randerscheinung*: Punk and the Prenzlauer Berg." *German Studies Review* 36.3 (October 2013): 579-601. In GDR scholarship, "unofficial" journals are journals produced in *samizdat* in print-runs under just one hundred copies (examples include *Anschlag*, *ariadnefabrik*, *Bizarre Städte*, *Entwerter-Oder*, *Liane*, *Mikado*, *Schaden*, *und*, *Uni/vers*, and *Verwendung*). The magazines were tolerated allegedly as a result of a loophole created by the "Bildende Kunst" bill from August 31, 1971, which postulated that graphic artworks over 100 copies had to be officially approved; the bill unwittingly absolved small-scale interdisciplinary projects from the censor. Eckart, Frank. *Eigenart und Eigensinn: Alternative Kulturszenen in der DDR (1980 – 1990)*. Bremen: Edition Temen, 1993. 37. Finally, the divide between officially sanctioned and "unofficial" literary production in the GDR was not absolute. Throughout the 1980s, the officially sanctioned East German writers Christa and Gerhard Wolf and Franz Fühmann, who mentored several of the PB poets, supervised the publications of PB authors (e.g., Stefan Döring, Uwe Kolbe, Bert Papenfuß-Gorek, Rainer Schedlinski, and Gabriele Stötzer-Kachold) through official channels.

[10] Michael, Klaus and Thomas Wohlfahrt. *Vogel oder Käfig sein: Kunst und Literatur aus unabhängingen Zeitschriften in der DDR 1979 – 1989*. Berlin: Galrev, 1991. 407 – 43.

[11] Dahlke, Birgit. "Underground Literature? The unofficial culture of the GDR and its development after the *Wende*." *Rereading East Germany: The Literature and Film of the GDR.* Ed. Karen Leeder. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 160 – 79. 168.

[12] This information was given to me in my interview with Gabriele Stötzer from June 13, 2015, in Erfurt, Germany.

sketches are useful insofar as they reveal a diverse and heterogeneous cultural formation and, moreover, caution against ascribing to this group a monolithic attitude toward dissent.

Yet despite the heterogeneity recently noted by Dahlke and Stötzer, according to a dominant tripartite generational model of writers in the GDR championed by Emmerich's seminal study *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* (1996), the entire Prenzlauer Berg collective is generally regarded as a collective of drop-outs (*Aussteiger*) who refused to partake in either the building or the critical amelioration of socialism as it had been attempted by previous generations of East German writers. This consensus has resulted primarily because some of the PB poets issued public statements in which they dismissed these confrontational efforts as naïve attempts at reform within the system.[13] The classification deployed by Emmerich thus defines the first generation of GDR authors as both the most adherent to the prevailing socialist-realist doctrine of historical optimism and the most dedicated to the struggle against Germany's fascist past in its explicit renunciation of "formalism" (119). Emmerich defines the second generation (born between 1915 and late 1930s and consisting of authors such as Volker Braun, Heiner Müller, and Christa Wolf) as willing to participate in the building of socialism while also making critical demands on the socialist state (404). According to Emmerich, the third generation – the PB poets – no longer identify themselves as socialists, ascribe a moral or activist valence to literature, or foreground the realization of social utopia as a central literary category, as the two preceding generations had done (404). Emmerich's conclusion, that all three tenets shared by the first two generations are wholly rejected by the youngest one, has gained the status of consensus in much of the existing scholarship on Prenzlauer Berg.

[13] Examples of such statements include the PB poet Gert Neumann's interview with Egmont Hesse, during which Neumann isolates the PB poets from the dominant discourse. Neumann, Gert. "Geheimsprache: Klandestinität." *Sprache & Antwort: Stimmen und Texte einer anderen Literatur aus der DDR*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1988. 129 – 44. Similarly, in his 1986 interview with *Der Spiegel*, the poet – and as it was later revealed – police informant Sascha Anderson proclaims his generation to be "indifferent" to the East German state and its attendant language of power (as cited in Emmerich 402).

Thus far, those who have disputed this consensus about the PB collective have done so by concluding that this literature assumed no critical distance at all from the East German state. This conclusion was reached when it was revealed in 1991 that two of the collective's members, Sascha Anderson and Rainer Schedlinski, had long been informants for the East German secret police (*Staatssicherheit*), informally known as the Stasi.[14] These revelations led some prominent figures either to dismiss the entire scene as a "Stasizüchtung" (Wolf Biermann) or to refer to PB literature as the Stasi's "perfide Simulation" (Frank Schirrmacher).[15] In so doing, however, they exaggerated Anderson and Schedlinski's influence over the PB collective, which in reality was too decentralized and extensive to be fully controlled. Furthermore, the link between Anderson's poetry and the GDR cannot be fully explained by the poet's betrayal. Anderson's cycle of poems entitled "eNDe" (1982), for instance, also relates to official GDR discourse through its parodic allusion to the country's official newspaper, *Neues Deutschland* (*ND*), in its Dadaist form. One of the poems included in this cycle, furthermore, mirrors the language of high-ranking military officers, subtly

[14] The decision to open the Stasi files was made by East Germany's de Mazière government in August 1990. After German reunification in October 1990 the implementation of this decision was passed on to the Bonn government and the so-called "Gauck" agency. As Paul Cooke comments, although it was the aim of the Gauck agency to facilitate the process of reconciliation, it at times "undermined" this effort by feeding the politically motivated notion of the GDR as a primarily oppressive and unjust state. Cooke, Paul. *Representing East Germany since Unification: From Colonization to Nostalgia.* Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005. 65.

[15] Biermann's delegitimization of the poets took place in a televised speech given on November 13, 1991 (Emmerich 416-17) and in several articles printed by *Der Spiegel*. In one such article, Biermann subsumes the PB scene wholly under the control of the state's secret police: "Jetzt erfahren wir, daß die bunte Kulturszene am Prenzlauer Berg ein blühender Schrebergarten der Stasi war. Jedes Radieschen numeriert an seinem Platz. Spätdadaistische Gartenzwerge mit Bleistift und Pinsel. Die angestrengt unpolitische Pose am Prenzelberg war eine Flucht vor der Wirklichkeit, sie war eine Stasizüchtung, aus den Gewächshäusern der Hauptabteilungen HA-XX/9 und HA-XX/7" (as cited in Leeder 206). In an article for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* from October 25 1991, journalist, critic and erstwhile supporter of PB literature Frank Schirrmacher writes: "Wenn Anderson für die Stasi gearbeitet hat, dann wäre nicht nur […] der Lyriker und Liedermacher sondern auch der Mythos Prenzlauer Berg erledigt. All die subversiven Mappen, Texte und Aktionen, die von dort ausgehend, die ganze DDR erfaßten, waren dann kaum etwas anderes als eine perfide Simulation der Stasi" (as cited in Leeder 206). Schirrmacher had been a vocal proponent of the Scene, stepping up his support of the collective after Christa Wolf and Heiner Müller's respective involvements with the Stasi had come to light a year before, in 1990. He later dismissed all East German literature as corrupt (Leeder 6).

mimicking their shrill voice by omitting punctuation, letters ("diskutiern"), and subverting the contents by means of enjambment:

> ich will mal sagen
> natürlich gibt es menschen di
> e anders denken mit diesen menschen
> muss man geduldi
> g arbeiten mit denen muss man
> diskutiern und das wissen di
> e vielleicht auch die stärksten argumente
> sind auf unserer seite i
> ch zum beispiel bin chef
> der mili
> täraka
> demie
> friedrich
> engels der ddr[16]

The present study aims to demonstrate that many more works by PB poets than have been recognized to date contradict rather than confirm their stated claim to *Aussteigertum*, or utter disassociation from the East German state. My analytical point of departure is a startling disjunction between Prenzlauer Berg's literary and artistic works and the group's widely cited proclamations about its cultural and political relationship to the GDR. On the one hand, PB artists collectively ascribe to themselves the position of *Aussteigertum*; on the other hand, their poetic and visual practices evince an actively engaged attitude towards it by formally mimicking the political and cultural context from which they emerge. Mimicry as a form of opposition has been most widely discussed in postcolonial studies, where the term largely pertains to ambivalent structures of subjective formation in colonial circumstances of political and cultural hegemony. For instance, Homi K. Bhabha's notion of mimicry, according to which ambivalent colonial demands for assimilation and the maintenance of a visible difference produce slippages and

[16] As cited in Leeder 159. The connection between Anderson's poem and mimicry was first made by Leeder (159). The Friedrich Engels military academy ("MAK Friedrich Engels") in Dresden was the GDR's most prominent military school.

excesses that prove menacing to both colonial epistemes and disciplinary powers, might apply in very limited fashion to GDR cultural dissent in terms of structure.[17] This structure, which both repeats the existent and generates excesses that in turn prove menacing to the powers that had commanded their own reproduction in the first place (Bhabha 123), can be discerned not only in works by the PB group, but also in official East German writers' interpretations of state aesthetic policies. However, insights gleaned from postcolonial studies are not fully applicable to GDR culture before 1989 – first, because of an absence of a colonizing power in what, for the most part, was a sovereign communist state, and second, because of the country's general presumption of class-based homogeneity.

Devin Fore's exposition of formal mimicry and repetition in interwar art and literature – especially Fore's discussion of three distinct aesthetic and political practices of mimicry by the photomonteur John Heartfield (1898 – 1968) – is more applicable to my argument about the PB poets.[18] Fore initially argues that Heartfield's montages imperfectly repeat both the language of politics and the press (such as clichés, puns, and propaganda slogans) and realist pictorial conventions in their holistic yet disharmonious visual fields (259). These imperfections are attained by iterating appropriated linguistic and pictorial fragments in such a way that increases the works' polyvalence through aesthetic devices such as repetition, pastiche, and irony, the goal of which is to establish critical distance from the mimicked. Fore next suggests that for his photomontages, Heartfield appropriates select art historical movements and events of the previous history of world art, e.g. by revisiting the work of the nineteenth-century French caricaturist Honoré Daumier (248). And finally, Fore argues that Heartfield's mimicry derives

[17] Bhabha, Homi K. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." *The Location of Culture*. London; New York: Routledge, 2004. 121 - 32.
[18] Fore, Devin. *Realism after Modernism: The Rehumanization of Art and Literature*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2012.

part of its political force from appropriating and modifying materials and strategies associated with affirmative culture by drawing on the classical canon as well as a wide range of "low-brow" culture, including newspapers and illustrated magazines, often leaving the incorporated sources almost intact and locatable (245). With this imperfect repetition of appropriated, precirculated material, Heartfield is able to engage with, and intervene in the deficiencies of his milieu on its own political and aesthetic terms.

Few texts to have emerged from the Prenzlauer Berg Scene are more emblematic of these strategies than the PB author Stefan Döring's poem "mitmachen – mitmacht," produced and distributed unofficially in 1986.[19] Scholars who have discussed this poem consider it a confirmation of Prenzlauer Berg's radical distance from the East German state, citing what I too take to be the poem's central passage:

> denn wer mitmacht hat mitmacht
> sei er auch inwendig ein außenseiter
> hält er doch hoch was ihm die luft nimmt
> was ihn mächtig schwach macht (10-13)

The crux of this poem is syntactically ambiguous: "denn wer mitmacht hat mitmacht." As critic Peter Böthig sees it, the line articulates a generational break with the East German tradition of dissident writers who were critical of the communist state yet still committed to the communist cause.[20] Böthig argues this point because Döring and the youngest generation of East German writers to which he belonged felt that ultimately a symbiotic relationship had prevailed between the East German state and officially sanctioned writers (such as Christa Wolf and Volker Braun). Moreover, Böthig contends, this relationship of mutual dependence on the GDR state had

[19] The poem first appeared in Gerhard Wolf's article for the unofficial Prenzlauer Berg journal *ariadnefabrik*. Wolf, Gerhard. "Zu einem Aspekt junger Lyrik der DDR: 2. Aufsatz." *ariadnefabrik* 3 (1986): 2 – 7. 6. Here I am citing a section of the poem as it was reprinted in Döring, Stefan. *heutmorgenstern.* Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau, 1989. 13.
[20] Böthig, Peter. *Grammatik einer Landschaft. Literatur aus der DDR in den 80er Jahren*. Lukas Verlag, Berlin 1997. 10 – 11.

inhibited these official writers from actively calling for modes of reform that were too much at variance with the discourse of socialist institutions. Rather than attempting reform from within as their forbears had done, the youngest generation, according to this argument, adopted an attitude of "Entkoppelung" (Böthig 15) – or utter disassociation – from the GDR.

Döring's poem is allegedly emblematic of this disassociation because in the neologism "mitmacht" ("withpower") the text reassembles the grammatically correct third person singular of the verb *mitmachen*. Böthig describes such features as avantgarde gestures of an "absoluten Bruchs und des Neuanfangs" (15). What his reading overlooks, however, is the extent to which Döring's linguistic violation and similar ones by others frequently remain bound to the GDR context whence they emerge. In this case, the word "mitmacht," to which Döring assigns two syntactical functions, repurposes the popular East German slogan "Mach mit," which was broadcast on sports programs, children's television, and also printed on postage stamps.[21] In recycling official cliché as poetic content, the poem's ostensible attack on complicity is thus mitigated by the recognition of its own implication in official discourse. Moreover, Döring's reassemblage of state language in the poem exceeds mere repetition of this material, given that the poet uses state language as a means for poetic innovation.

Döring's practice of formal mimicry is comprised of conflicting gestures of imitation, rejection, and critique that are likewise adopted by other PB poets, and this demands a scholarly reevaluation of the PB poets in three key ways. First, I situate the group's poetics in relation to official GDR discourses and the literary traditions of two previous generations in the communist state. Second, I assess the poets' seemingly anachronistic recourse to transnational avantgarde practices (including the montage of the Weimar period, Russian Futurist poetry, and the Swiss and South American concrete and visual poetry movements of the 1950s and 1960s) in relation

[21] The usage of "mitmachen" in the GDR and in relation to Döring's poem has been noted by Gerhard Wolf (6).

to the late twentieth-century context of the GDR. Third, I will examine the GDR revival of the historical avantgarde in Prenzlauer Berg as a hitherto undocumented legacy of John Heartfield, whose work informs the group's visual practices as a feature of East German culture. Heartfield's career began with montages based on "relentless semantic reduction" executed during the artist's association with the Berlin Dada movement (Fore 18), the revolutionary content of which survives in Heartfield's later photomontages, which Heartfield perfected during his exile years in Prague and London (1933 – 1950) and continued to produce following his emigration to the GDR in 1950. Heartfield's montages adopt strategies of formal mimicry that emulate and critique existing political structures with the aim of advancing an international communist cause.[22] Similar strategies of mimicry deployed toward related though modified utopian goals may be discerned in the revival of certain practices cultivated by, for example, the PB artist Reinhard Zabka two decades after Heartfield's death, in Zabka's mimicry of preceding modes of representation adopted from the avantgardes from before and after the Second World War, and of affirmative official culture in the GDR, such as the illustrated press. My dissertation thus seeks to account, first, for the group's transnational orientation vis-à-vis the practices of the historical avantgarde, and second, to reevaluate the significance of the PB poets by analyzing its formal relationship in poetry and visual arts to the culture and politics of the GDR.

Chapter 1, "No Future? The Anti-Teleological Experimentation of the Prenzlauer Berg Poets," maps out a critical dialogue that took place among three successive generations of GDR avantgardists and the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED). With David Bathrick's *The Powers of Speech* (1996) and Loren Kruger's *Post-Imperial Brecht* (2004) as my points of departure, I place the SED's correlation of progressive temporality and production at the center

[22] Nancy Roth describes Heartfield's works as "tool[s] with which he advanced his anti-fascist, anti-capitalist message, as well as the Communist cause to which he openly dedicated his entire *oeuvre*." Roth, Nancy. "Heartfield and Modern Art." Heartfield, John, et al. *John Heartfield*. New York, 1992. 18-29. 24.

of this dialogue. This chapter argues that although the SED's 1951 adoption of a reflective model of reality in art had put the Party at the vanguard of the state, Brecht's GDR theater, notably his 1953 staging of Erwin Strittmatter's *Katzgraben* (1951), sought to situate art as an active, critical reorganization of experience. It next shows how the second-generation avantgarde playwright Heiner Müller, in turn, criticizes the official temporality of socialism's construction in the Brecht-inspired production plays *Der Lohndrücker* (1956) and *Der Bau* (1965). By recombining appropriated GDR language in the 1980s – in retrospect, the final decade of the East German state –, the PB poets and artists Uwe Warnke, Burkhard Wunder, and Bert Papenfuß-Gorek all further contribute to this discourse by at once shunning and affirming the possibility of a socialist future with innovative aesthetic gestures.

Chapter 2, "Reassembling the GDR: The Re-Presentation of Official GDR Discourse in the PB Poets' Multimedial Works" disputes the thesis that the avantgarde poetic practices of PB confirm the collective's public professions of their radical severance from the East German state. It argues instead that the collective's linguistic and formal experimentation frequently remains bound to the GDR context whence it emerges. This chapter shows that in their essays, poetry and visual art, the Prenzlauer Berg engages critically with what these poets and artists perceived as the deterioration of GDR language into a travesty of a genuine socialist discourse. They do so by indicting a flawed system of referentiality undergirding official East German language – a language that they perceive as having been emptied of its content by means of repetition, and which they simultaneously appropriate and assail in their works. This chapter argues that the poets aim to revitalize and reanimate the compromised referentiality of this language material by experimenting with both a fragmentary aesthetic and the index. My analysis concentrates on

artistic works by Jan Faktor, Uwe Warnke, and Karla Sachse, as well as essays by Kito Lorenc and Michael Thulin.

The third chapter, titled "A Communism Off the Frame: John Heartfield and His Legacy in the GDR," examines the GDR's contentious reception of the interwar photomonteur John Heartfield (1898 - 1968), who immigrated to the communist state in 1950. Here I examine an array of political and cultural documents published on Heartfield by the East German state, which collectively suggest that the artist did not receive full official support. Such reception, I argue, is incongruous with the fact that upon its foundation, the East German state adopted an official cultural doctrine of socialist realism, which had been founded on the legacy of Heartfield's "appropriationist," "synthetic," and "deeply political" practices of mimicry in photomontage (Fore 10). This chapter identifies as a point of overlap between Heartfield's photomontage and socialist realism their shared ambivalent attitude toward photography as a medium. It argues that this affinity diminishes, however, when, after its foundational phase, socialist realism begins to emphasize a positive depiction of reality – as outlined by Katarina Clark's seminal work on socialist realism[23] – a shift that later negatively affected Heartfield's reception in the GDR. By contrast, Heartfield's photomontage invites what I view as an active formulation of a communist ideal by the viewer: a mechanism likewise detectable in the photomontages by the East German PB artist Reinhard Zabka in the 1980s.

Highlighting the Prenzlauer Berg's active critical engagement with the socialist state both in the authors' articulation of their essays and in their works' formal mimicry will first help differentiate and further contextualize this understudied body of texts. Contrary to the prevalent consensus about the PB group in GDR scholarship, my reappraisal shows that possibilities of a socialist future continued to be debated within the collective and, at times, were even proposed

[23] Clark, Katarina. *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981.

by its artworks. This debate thus concerned a broader strata of the East German population than previously considered, exceeding members of the SED government and a handful of officially sanctioned, critical intelligentsia, who in 1989, before the impending accession of the GDR to the Federal Republic, called for the building of a truly democratic socialist order: an order that would not "turn this word [socialism] into a caricature" (Christoph Hein) and from which "nobody runs away" (Christa Wolf).[24] The following three chapters analyze how both East German language, its attendant visual culture, and the possibilities of a communist future are at once being undermined and reaffirmed by Prenzlauer Berg's multimedial and innovative works. An examination of such strategies of aesthetic and political critique and innovation – strategies that the collective had frequently borrowed from the transnational avantgardes –, moreover, helps us reconceptualize our understanding of dissent under state-sponsored Central European communism as both more ambivalent in political orientation and more transnational in aesthetic scope than in previous generations. It also shows that even though an oft-noted sense of economic crisis and cultural stagnation may have defined many Central and Eastern European communist cultures in the years prior to their demise, innovative literature and art were being produced from within late state-sponsored socialism, rather than resulting from that socialism's defeat. Such literature and art deserve to be examined anew.

[24] As cited in Bathrick, David. *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996. 1.

CHAPTER 1

No Future? The Anti-Teleological Experimentation of the Prenzlauer Berg Poets

I. I. Introduction

Among the few public voices to discuss the Prenzlauer Berg (PB) collective in East Germany was the officially sanctioned novelist and playwright Volker Braun (b. 1939), who in an article published in a state periodical in 1985 read the literature of the PB poets in ambivalent terms. In a crucial passage, Braun calls the poets "unsere vermeintlichen Neutöner."[25] In so doing he casts a skeptical eye not only on Prenzlauer Berg's recourse to transnational avantgarde practices – evinced in the montages, readymades, and experimental poetry by Thomas Florschütz, Bert Papenfuß-Gorek, Karla Sachse, Ulrich Tarlatt, Uwe Warnke, and others – but also on those critics who at the time of this literature's circulation came to herald the PB collective as an avantgarde phenomenon in its own right.[26] According to Braun, these "alleged avantgardists" like to "paint the town red" – "auf den Putz hauen" – with the parties and punk-inspired performances they put on, for which the collective was known, and they are, as Braun continues, "Hucker, nicht Maurer" (as cited in Michael, Wohlfahrt 288). According to the logic of Braun's metaphor, in which "Hucker" designates a by now extinct type of construction worker who would deliver bricks – especially those recovered from Germany's postwar ruins – without participating in the construction itself, the PB poets likewise shift found poetic material around,

[25] Braun, Volker. "Rimbaud. Ein Psalm der Aktualität (1983)." *Vogel oder Käfig sein: Kunst und Literatur aus unabhängigen Zeitschriften in der DDR 1979-1989.* Ed. Michael, Klaus and Thomas Wohlfahrt. Berlin: Galrev, 1991. 287-88. In the GDR Braun's article was published in 1985 by the official literary periodical *Sinn und Form.*

[26] The literary criticism that in the1980s heralded the PB poets as a new GDR avant-garde includes, for instance, articles by Frank Eckart, and Anita Kenner (the alias used by the PB associate Christoph Tannert). Eckart, Frank. *Eigenart und Eigensinn: Alternative Kulturszenen in der DDR (1980 – 1990).* Bremen: Edition Temen, 1993. Kenner, Anita. "Avantgarde in der DDR heute? Ein Panorama der Kunst-, Literatur-, und Musikszene." *Niemandsland: Zeitschrift zwischen den Kulturen*. 5.2 (1988): 96 – 110.

but fall short of creating works that would be coherent and free-standing.[27] In Braun's view, however, this process is not entirely unproductive:

> Aber auch in dem Schüttgut werden Reize, Assoziationen, Anstöße geliefert; in dem bedeutenden Wortmüll sind verschwiegene Gefühle und Gedanken deponiert, die uns, selbstredend, mehr zu sagen haben als die gestanzte Festtagskunst. Technisch die Wiederholung des geistlosen Handbetriebs der Avantgarde, niedrige Verarbeitungsstufe. (288)

On the one hand, Braun reprimands the collective for rehearsing "vacuous" avantgarde practices that had once been meaningful; on the other hand, he praises this work for its revelatory potential. In this regard, the PB poets challenge affirmative culture by "puncturing" its "facade" ("gestanzte Festtagskunst," "auf den Putz hauen") and in so doing reveal thoughts and affects that would have otherwise remained concealed. Even though Braun does not elaborate on what "puncturing" means in aesthetic terms, the forceful vocabulary he uses to describe these practices (*stanzen*, *hauen*) denotes physical labor that is productive precisely because it is destructive. By availing themselves of violent aesthetic techniques appropriated from the avantgardes – the fragmentation and montage that the PB poets were inclined to use come to mind – the poets, in Braun's estimation, produce works that are, on the one hand, contemporary and incisive, but on the other hand, repetitive on account of their mere borrowings from previous avantgarde styles.

While I agree with Braun's assessment of the basic parameters of PB literature as prone to combining GDR language material with methods borrowed from the avantgardes, I take issue with Braun's partial dismissal of this literature as an empty rehearsal of obsolete aesthetic practices. Braun himself looked from the late 1950s onward to prewar avantgarde movements as a source of aesthetic and political renewal and was thus no general detractor of the avantgarde's postwar revival in East Germany. However, his fundamental criticism – echoed in a wider

[27] Verlag VEB Bibliographisches Institute Leipzig. *Sprachpflege: Zeitschrift für gutes Deutsch*. Bd. 28-29 (1979): 18.

reception of PB literature from before and after 1989[28] – parallels Peter Bürger's negative assessment of all postwar "neo-avantgarde" movements in the West. According to Bürger, because the prewar, "historical" avantgarde had once sought – and by the mid-1920s, failed – to disable institutions held responsible for the separation of art from the praxis of life (such as the museum), any post-1945 elaboration on the aesthetic program or revolutionary intentions of the erstwhile avantgarde can be only a meaningless repetition.[29] This conclusion has been challenged, among others by Hal Foster, who in *The Return of the Real* (1996) argues that rather than repeating a failed project of its predecessors, the postwar avantgarde completes a project that in the predecessors' activities is not yet fully articulated.[30] In works by the historical avantgarde, Foster argues, the rhetoric of putting an end to art ought not to be confused with what is a challenge to art's conventions in a particular context. Although these disruptions of convention often contain the seeds of critique against the institutions that frame them, according to Foster, the neo-avantgarde has in fact extended the historical avantgarde's incipient

[28] Citing press reviews of PB literature from the time of its circulation – particularly critical reviews of the PB anthology *Berührung ist nur eine Randerscheinung* published in 1985 in the FRG – Anneli Hartmann surmises that critics reacted unfavorably to what they perceived as Prenzlauer Berg's "verspäteten Anschluß" to movements of the international avantgarde. Hartmann, Anneli. "Schreiben in der Tradition der Avantgarde: Neue Lyrik der DDR." *DDR-Lyrik im Kontext.* Ed. Cosentino, Christine, Ertl, Wolfgang, and Gerd Labroisse. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988. 1-37. 6. A similar criticism of the PB poets was articulated by the poet and songwriter Wolf Biermann in a televised speech from 1991. Biermann, Wolf. "Laß, o Welt, o laß mich sein!: Rede zum Eduard-Mörike-Preis." *Die Zeit.* 15 November 1991. Biermann famously denounced the movement as complicit with oppressive state surveillance, a primary charge of political corruption that, to Biermann's mind, was accompanied by a second flaw as well. According to Biermann, in their emulation of the avantgardes, the PB poets do little more than plagiarize key moments from the history of the avantgardes.

[29] While to Bürger's mind the repetition of the historical avantgarde by the neo-avantgarde is bad enough, worse still is the neoavantgarde's revival of the historical avantgarde's critique of art's autonomy from within the artistic context, which in Bürger's view inverts this erstwhile critique into an affirmation of autonomous art. Bürger, Peter. *Theorie der Avantgarde*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974. 97.

[30] Building on arguments made by Benjamin Buchloh in 1984, Hal Foster's *The Return of the Real* (1996) expands on Buchloh's critique of Bürger in three key ways: first by arguing against Bürger's generalizing premise that the avantgarde's disparate activities can be seen as attempting to destroy bourgeois art's false autonomy; second, by pointing to Bürger's historicism according to which an artwork "happens all at once, entirely significant in its first moment of appearance"; and third, by pointing out that Bürger's dismissal of the postwar avantgarde as "neo" reaffirms the categories of authenticity, originality, and singularity. Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century.* London, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996. 10-11. See also Buchloh, Benjamin. "Theorizing the Avant-Garde." *Art in America* 72.10 (November 1984): 19 – 21.

institutional critique. In Foster's view, it has done so by producing "new aesthetic experiences, cognitive connections, and political interventions, […] that may make up another criterion by which art can claim to be advanced today" (14). The targets of this extended critique – which include the museum, capitalist industry, and the culture industry – constitute Foster's object of study, which is the postwar avantgarde in North America and Western Europe.

Drawing on Foster's approach to the postwar avantgarde and at the same time challenging Braun's dismissal of Prenzlauer Berg as a merely repetitive neo-avantgarde, this chapter argues that the collective's significance as a postwar, GDR avantgarde lies in its critique of political and cultural institutions that came into being with the state's foundation in 1949 and continued to shape the state's culture over the course of its forty-year existence. More precisely, I contend that in their writing the PB poets resume what I would call a dialogue between the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) and the state's most prominent avantgarde artists: Bertolt Brecht and Heiner Müller. This dialogue critically engages with the SED's official correlation between progress and production, echoed in the state's foundational definition of progressive literature as one which would encourage East German citizens to be producers of a socialist society.[31] While the SED's adoption of a reflective model of reality in art in 1951 had cast the Party as the vanguard of the state, Brecht's theater as it had developed in the GDR sought to challenge this model by imbuing art with an active role in the critical reorganization of experience even in the German Democratic Republic. In texts such as *Der Lohndrücker* (1956) and *Der Bau* (1965), Heiner Müller in turn criticizes the optimism underlying the official temporality of socialism's construction within Brechtian aesthetics. By playfully combining GDR language material from a perspective of nearly forty years after the state's foundation, the

[31] For an overview of this correlation, see for example Kaufmann, Eva and Hans Kaufmann. "Literatur in einer dynamischen Gesellschaft." *Erwartung und Angebot: Studien zum gegenwärtigen Verhältnis von Literatur und Gesellschaft in der DDR.* Berlin: Akademie, 1976. 9 – 44.

PB poets expand on both Brecht and Müller's critique of the correlation of progress and production, taking their respective contributions to this discourse in new directions, by both shunning and affirming a socialist future ahead with aesthetically innovative gestures.

II. Avantgarde in the GDR: Bertolt Brecht, Heiner Müller, and the SED

With the foundation of the GDR in 1949, the SED's "genuine forms of de-Nazification" (David Bathrick) represented a more legitimate break with the then recent National Socialist history, as compared to the Bonn republic's less thoroughgoing claims to democratic reforms.[32] Starting with the installment of a new economy with communist goals presumed to be in sight, official East German temporality followed the teleology of Marxist dialectics, which – broadly stated for the purposes of my argument – entailed the overcoming of human alienation as the logical and necessary outcome of laws of historical development.[33] While such progress-oriented temporality in this Marxist vein suggests some parallels with Renato Poggioli's notion of the avantgarde – as a harbinger of an imminent revolution that anticipates utopia – the similarity had led historically to conflicts between the avantgarde movement and the Communist Party.[34] In the Soviet Union, for example, the aspirations of the Futurist avantgarde (1917-29) eventually clashed with "that other vanguard of Soviet life, the Party," owing to what Margaret Rose describes as a rivalry between the artistic and political vanguard about who would ultimately

[32] East German de-Nazification entailed the implementation of a socialist economy as well as radical personnel and administrative changes. However, as Bathrick further comments, the official narrative was also too quick to place the GDR on the right side of history. The national story about fascism consisted of stories about communists returning from exile or concentration camps, a hagiography of their struggle, and effaced specific victims of the Holocaust. Bathrick, David. *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995. 32.

[33] See for example a document titled "Vorwärts zu neuen Kämpfen und neuen Siegen!: Neujahrsaufruf des Parteivorstandes der SED, 1. Januar 1950" as an example of an early legislation of a new, progressive model of temporality for East German culture. *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED*. Ed. Elimar Schubbe. Stuttgart: Seewald, 1972. 131-33.

[34] Poggioli, Renato. *The Theory of the Avant-garde.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1971. 86.

lead the organization of the new society.[35] This would result in the disbandment of avantgarde movements by 1932 and the gradual implementation of socialist realism, officially inaugurated as an aesthetic program in the Soviet Union in 1934.[36] The theory that the Soviet avantgarde was entirely decimated by socialist realism under Stalin has however been challenged by Boris Groys, who argues that socialist realism's ambition to organize life in monolithic artistic forms – which were not those favored by the avantgarde – nonetheless derived from an internal logic of avantgarde method.[37] Groys is right in suggesting that the Soviet shift to socialist realism would have appealed to the avantgarde's political ambition of social revolution. Yet socialist realism and the avantgardes of the Eastern Bloc diverge on the role their respective representatives allocated to the cultural production of temporal consciousness within the social and material development of socialist society. Established in the Soviet Union of the early 1930s and reinforced during the so-called Expressionism debate (1937-38) in Germany, this basic split between socialist realism and the avantgarde in the transnational realm continued to influence the dialogue between the East German communist party on the one hand, and the state's artistic avantgardists on the other.

Soon after the state's foundation in 1949, a document titled "Kulturelle Aufgaben im Rahmen des Zweijahrplanes" assigned GDR writers the socialist realist task of creating a progressive literature that would foster a spirit of historical optimism and societal "Arbeitsfreude."[38] This encouragement of a positively coded affective work ethic reflects the

[35] Rose, Margaret. *Marx's Lost Aesthetic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984. 135.
[36] Socialist realism was adopted as the official Soviet aesthetic at the 1934 First Writers' Congress. Regine, Robin. *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992. 11. What Robin terms a "syncretic" definition of socialist realism first appeared in the USSR in 1932, coinciding with the disbandment of previously distinct literary and artistic schools and associations.
[37] Groys, Boris. *The Total Art of Stalinism: Avant-garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992.
[38] "Kulturelle Aufgaben im Rahmen des Zweijahrplanes." *Kritik in der Zeit: Literaturkritik der DDR 1945-1975*. Ed. Klaus Jarmatz. Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1978. 147.

document's origins in a society still struggling against the destruction of the Second World War and thus concerned with overcoming postwar material shortages. Even in 1949, however, the hope that a better society could be achieved through communism was placed at the forefront of the GDR's fledgling cultural politics too.

A later (1951) cultural document cites Soviet-style socialist realist literary models as exemplary, entrusting the new German literature with the task of portraying life under the "neuen gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse[n]" of the GDR as "richtig, das heißt in seiner Vorwärtsentwicklung" (Jarmatz 252). This emphasis on "progressive development" becomes accelerated further following the proclamation of the "Aufbau der sozialistischen Gesellschaft" in 1952, which entailed a stepping up of industrialization and ongoing agricultural reforms.[39] The notion of progressive temporality to which the SED lays claim in the so-called *Aufbau* period is both "vorantreibend" and "unwiderstehlich" (Jarmatz 167-73). Crucially for my argument about the cultural-political dialogue between the SED and the avantgarde in the GDR of the early 1950s, the cultural documents in question deem literature progressive in its capacity to reflect the activities of productive ("werktätiger") citizens, seen working collectively toward a goal that is already known or "aufgezeichnet" in terms of a communist ideal (Jarmatz 168). Thus, even though in stipulating that the writer ought to portray reality in the GDR both as it is and in its progressive development, the documents also invite the writer to help articulate what that future will be. They specify that the writer is to depict every stage of socialism's *Aufbau* in a way that already contains "die ganze Zukunft des sozialistischen Sieges" (Jarmatz 168). The documents thus call for a literature that is prefabricated by virtue of reflecting a set of laws, the outcome of which (such as the inevitability of communism's approach) is already known by the

[39] Fulbrook, Mary. *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker.* New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2005. 34.

ostensibly irrefutable science of communism. The Party rather than the writer is clearly cast as the political vanguard of the state. Literature and the arts play a necessary but subordinate role in this political enterprise. In other words, these cultural documents of the 1950s demand a literature that would reflect a preformulated temporal trajectory, rather than one that would challenge the hegemony of linked communist prognoses of social progress and labor production.

This reflective model of socialist reality in art was in turn challenged by Bertolt Brecht, who via Switzerland returned to the GDR in 1950 from his long-term exile in the United States, and died in the GDR six years later. As Stephen Parker pertinently puts it, in the GDR Brecht represented both a "major coup" and a "headache" for the SED.[40] On the one hand, the GDR gained considerable prestige from the presence of Brecht, who by 1950 was a world-renowned author of over twenty plays and the creator of epic theater. For this the state supplied Brecht with prizes and a theater for his Berliner Ensemble, and Brecht was a fundamental supporter of the state's wide-ranging economic and educational reforms. On the other hand, until Brecht's posthumous canonization, the GDR viewed the playwright with suspicion for a multitude of reasons, the most significant of which for my purposes being Brecht's critique of official cultural policy. Heeding the official directive for a literature in which the citizen is an active producer, Brecht – and his successors in the GDR, including Heiner Müller and, I argue, the Prenzlauer Berg – engaged with production as both a theme and an aesthetic mode in ways that diverged from official *Kulturpolitik*.

In the GDR, the conflict between Brecht and the SED derived in part from the pre-war Expressionism debate, during which exiled German-speaking Marxists had heatedly discussed possible links between Expressionist form and fascist politics. Until 1956, theories of realism

[40] Parker, Stephen. "A Life's Work Curtailed? The Ailing Brecht's Struggle with the SED Leadership on GDR Culture Policy." *Edinburgh German Yearbook 5: Brecht and the GDR: Politics, Culture, Posterity*. Ed. Bradley, Laura, and Karen Leeder. Vol. 5. Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2011. 65-82. 65.

that Georg Lukács expounded, partially in the context of this debate, occupied a "Monopolstellung" in East Germany.[41] In the debate, Brecht's epic theater – which in accordance with Brecht's capacious notion of realist art authorized the use of formal interruption and aesthetic estrangement – was tacitly deemed by Lukács to be antagonistic to both realist principles and artistic production within the socialist tradition. In response, Brecht took issue with Lukács's criticism of what Lukács had called the "sogenannte Avantgarde."[42] The avant-garde had failed, in Lukács's estimation, to divulge the causal complexes at work underneath the disintegrated surface of life under capitalism by instead superficially reproducing that disintegration with aesthetic methods such as montage. Aiming to represent a complex social reality which, in Brecht's view, was no longer accessible through simple experience, his epic theater embraced reality's apparent distortion, yet sought to interrupt the distortion with cognitive devices borrowed from technology and Russian Futurism (such as the montage and segmentation mimicked from industrial production). The difference according to Brecht lay between "widerspiegeln" and "den Spiegel vorhalten": while the former creates the illusion of an unmediated access to the world, the latter – like a mirrored image contained within the mirror's edges – emphasizes the mediation of the content by a cultural artifact.[43] Steve Giles has argued that the qualification of realist writing by Brecht and Lukács as one that must uncover causal

[41] Lukács's dominant position in the GDR before 1956 is here noted by the SED journalist, politician and minister of culture Alexander Abusch. Emmerich, Wolfgang. *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR.* Leipzig: Kiepenheuer, 1996. 120. The 4th Congress of GDR writers and the onset of de-Stalinization in spring 1956 made it possible for East German writers to reappropriate the heritage of modernism and certain elements of the Soviet avantgarde. Klatt, Gudrun. "Proletarisch-revolutionäres Erbe als Angebot." In *Literarisches Leben in der DDR 1945 bis 1960*. Ed. Münz-Koenen, Ingeborg et al. Berlin: Akademie, 1979. 244-92.

[42] Lukács, Georg. "Es geht um den Realismus." *Werke. Probleme Des Realismus I. Essays über Realismus*. Vol. 4. München: Luchterhand, 1971. 313-43. 314. Brecht's contributions to the debate remained unpublished until 1967 (eleven years after Brecht's death) and they were most closely represented in the Expressionism debate by Ernst Bloch and Hanns Eisler. Brecht's tension with the SED cannot thus be attributed to Brecht's public disagreement with Lukács at the time of the Expressionism debate, but rather to Lukács's implicit critique of Brecht's epic theater (e.g. in the concluding section of "Es geht um den Realismus"), and the SED authorities' familiarity with the general principles of Brecht's epic theater.

[43] Hecht, Werner. *Bertolt Brechts Arbeitsjournal. Band 1. 1938 - 1942.* Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1973. 158.

complexes hidden from the surfaces of social life, in fact, creates an affinity between Brecht and Lukács's positions.[44] Nevertheless, for Lukács such insight can mainly be achieved through "narration" – a narratological structure (exemplified by works of classical bourgeois novelists) that projects life in all its breadth and wholeness, and uncovers the driving forces of social development in an integrated work of art.[45] Lukács's recommendation that contemporary writers ought to emulate classical bourgeois realism in this sense is, according to Brecht, not only restrictive in its range of authors (e.g. Balzac, Mann, Gorki) and genres (especially the novel), but also inimical to the formal artistic experimentation that Brecht considered indispensable for the literature of the socialist movement.

Brecht articulates his disagreement with Lukács and the latter's acolytes in Moscow in a conversation with Walter Benjamin, recorded in Benjamin's journal entry from 1938:

> Wir kamen auf die russische Literaturpolitik. "Mit diesen Leuten," sagte ich [Benjamin], mit Beziehung auf Lukács, [Andor] Gabor, Kurella, "ist eben kein Staat zu machen." Brecht: "Oder *nur* ein Staat, aber kein Gemeinwesen. Es sind eben Feinde der Produktion. Die Produktion ist ihnen nicht geheuer. Man kann ihr nicht trauen. Sie ist das Unvorsehbare. Man weiß nie, was bei ihr herauskommt. Und sie selber wollen nicht produzieren. Sie wollen den Apparatschik spielen und die Kontrolle der andern haben. Jede ihrer Kritiken enthält eine Drohung."[46]

Here Brecht opposes the subjection of artistic production to what he perceives to be a bureaucratic enforcement of cultural norms and forms alike. In so doing he expounds an understanding of art as a critical reorganization of experience, presented on stage as a trial arrangement rather than a finished product, and additionally co-produced by a critically reasoning audience. The latter emphasis on a more democratic, shared production of meaning

[44] Giles, Steve. "Realism after Modernism: Representation and Modernity in Brecht, Lukács and Adorno." Carroll, Jerome, Maike Oergel. *Aesthetics and Modernity from Schiller to the Frankfurt School*. Oxford; New York: Peter Lang, 2012. 275-96.
[45] Lukács, Georg. "Erzählen oder beschreiben?" *Werke, Bd. 4. Probleme Des Realismus I. Essays über Realismus*. München: Luchterhand, 1971. 197-242.
[46] Benjamin, Walter. Ed. Tiedemann, Rolf, Sweppenhäuser, Hermann. *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. 6. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972. 537.

implicitly challenges the hegemonic position of the Party in cultural matters. Yet the challenge posed by Brecht's theater in the GDR is additionally complicated and, as I ultimately argue, mitigated on account of Brecht's deviations from his own model in his later writings.

Following his immigration to the GDR, Brecht notes how he as a playwright grapples with the task of creating a new theater for the nascent GDR state.[47] In Brecht's view, such theater cannot be derived from received formulae – including his own epic theater, which had been developed in opposition to capitalism and fascism – but ought to be fundamentally affirmative in a communist state while also genuinely political, advocating change in the GDR from a position of support. Brecht does this mainly by enlisting his spectators in the task of producing a socialist future that, however, necessarily diverges from the one propagated by the SED at the time. The SED's "oberflächlicher Optimismus," writes Brecht in 1953, runs the danger of undoing the social revolution achieved thus far, by simplifying the progressive temporal trajectory on which the state has embarked. It is thus necessary in Brecht's view to decide collectively which aspects of social life are promising ("zukunftsträchtig"), rather than to distort reality à la the SED from above by means of a temporal narrative sanctioned by the Party (*BFA* 23:258). For Brecht, the road to building socialism in the GDR is paved with conflicts and threats that need to be put on display: "Wir müssen überall, wo wir Lösungen zeigen, das Problem, wo wir Siege zeigen, die Drohung der Niederlage zeigen, sonst entsteht der Irrtum, es handle sich um leichte Siege" (*BFA* 25: 422-23). By representing socialism's victories as well as the problems and failures that could signal its demise, Brecht invites his audience to learn from and participate in the creation of the new society. Yet while such theater is intended to produce a

[47] The production of a new GDR theater for Brecht entails "eine tiefe Neuerung des Theaters [...], mit einem neuen Inhalt und einer neuen gesellschaftlichen Funktion und neuen Formen, welche die Formen dieses Inhalts und dieser Funktion sind." Brecht, Bertolt. *Werke. Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*. Vol. 23. Frankfurt a. M., Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1988-98. 135. All subsequent in-text references to Brecht's work abbreviated to "*BFA*" and followed by relevant volume and page numbers.

more democratic and undogmatic progression toward a socialist future than the uncontested, simple progression simultaneously posited by the SED, Brecht's productions and writing on theater in the GDR show that this balance between affirmation and critique was quite difficult to maintain.

Brecht's amendments to *Aufbau* temporality are further exemplified in his annotations to the production of *Katzgraben*, a 1951 "agrodrama" by Erwin Strittmatter and the only play with GDR content that Brecht staged.[48] To give a brief synopsis of the Strittmatter play: set between 1947 and 1949 in the fictitious village of Katzgraben in Brandenburg, the drama deals with village politics amidst the reorganization and modernization of agriculture, during which the East German state had in fact redistributed land to small farmers (*Bodenreform*). The play follows a string of victories of the ongoing social transformation, accompanied by what turn out to be surmountable problems. Despite being given new land, for example, Katzgraben's small farmers are still forced to rely on wealthy farmers' (*Junker*) horses for tending it and thus continue to be under the *Junker*'s control – an unresolved contradiction in the state's otherwise successful agricultural reform. As time in the play progresses, with each of its four acts set a few months apart, so does the situation of the smaller farmers. Aided by the local SED representative, the small farmers manage to extricate themselves from their dependence on the *Junker*, an independence that becomes especially evident in the final act, when eight tractors supplied by the state arrive in the village. The play ends with a dance, a tractor parade, and several long apostrophes full of plans for further developments delivered to the villagers.[49]

[48] Besides *Katzgraben* Brecht additionally worked on one other play with GDR content. This project was based on the East German model worker Hans Garbe, but remained unfinished in Brecht's lifetime. Brecht, Bertolt and John Willett. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1978. 251. "Agrodrama" is a term coined in the context of early GDR theater by David Bathrick.
[49] Strittmatter, Erwin. *Katzgraben: Szenen aus dem Bauernleben.* Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau, 1966.

Brecht's modifications of Strittmatter's play concern me here because they are exemplary of the ways in which Brecht intervenes in the SED's organization of the relationship between temporality and literature. Although certain aspects of Strittmatter's *Katzgraben* may fall into the category of "affirmative plays and tractor poetry" that Wolfgang Emmerich uses to characterize all literature of socialism's *Aufbau*, Brecht's heavily revised version of the play resists this classification.[50] This has been demonstrated by Loren Kruger, who points out ways in which Brecht mutes the socialist kitsch in which Strittmatter's original occasionally indulges.[51] Brecht achieves this in several ways: for instance, by paring down some of Strittmatter's apostrophes about the improvements envisioned for the village or placing those apostrophes in the mouths of exhausted Party officials rather than steely leaders, thus subjecting them to partial *Verfremdung*; by creatively appropriating the caricature and physical comedy of the *Volksstück* genre, yet transforming it into a *gestus* of critique (74-75);[52] and perhaps most significantly, by ending the production with the characters' sober discussion of challenges lying ahead rather than Strittmatter's more jubilant celebration of successful reforms. Brecht's *Katzgraben* thus abstains from using "Happy-End-Schablonen" (*BFA* 25:433), endings that presuppose a socialist victory and thus at no point leave the spectator in any doubt of the play's temporal trajectory or positive outcome. The revised version thus moderates the unbridled

[50] Emmerich, Wolfgang. "Gleichzeitigkeit: Vormoderne, Moderne und Postmoderne in der Literatur der DDR." In Arnold, Heinz Ludwig. *Bestandaufnahme Gegenwartsliteratur*. München: Text + Kritik, 1988. 193-211.
[51] Kruger, Loren. *Post-Imperial Brecht: Politics and Performance, East and South.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 75.
[52] When for instance at the end of Brecht's production, one of the *Junker* is tossed into a wheelbarrow, Kruger argues that instead of relying on the crude physical comedy typically attributed to the *Volksstück*, Brecht mobilizes the concrete plasticity of performance to show the "threat of defeat" in the contingencies of the body (Kruger 75). John Willett defines *gestus* as a term which in Brecht's epic theater denotes the condensation of both "gesture" and "gist," and that can be understood as an "attitude or a single aspect of an attitude expressible in words or actions" (Brecht, Willett 42). Devin Fore additionally highlights Brecht's understanding of *gestus* as both "deeply social" and "conventionalized": while the movement of swatting a fly is not a *gestus*, a laboring gesture would be an instance of *gestus*. Fore, Devin. *Realism after Modernism: The Rehumanization of Art and Literature.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012. 140-41.

optimism that permeates Strittmatter's play by undercutting its unhindered temporal trajectory with strategies drawn from Brecht's epic theater (*gestus*, *Verfremdung*).

At the same time, however, Brecht's notes on his production of *Katzgraben* show a tendency to downplay a genuinely contradictory presentation of social conflicts on stage, leaving the spectator in only minor doubt of socialism's victory**.** In other words, Brecht's notes on Strittmatter's play stop short of representing "threats" in the form of existing social "Mißstände," as Brecht himself notes (*BFA* 25:423). He claims that the play is not a *Tendenzstück* (a political play motivated by mending the status quo) he claims, but it is rather meant to inject in its audience a new feeling for life to engage it in the active, critical overcoming of surmountable difficulties and corrigible mistakes (*BFA* 25:423-24). Such a fundamentally affirmative presentation of crises and conflicts amounts, however, to what is only a slight tempering of the SED-administered optimism that Brecht had otherwise critiqued.[53] Thus, while Brecht's pre-GDR, epic theater may have striven to involve the audience in a more democratic theatrical production – in which "man nie weiß [...], was bei ihr herauskommt" – Brecht's GDR theater at times collapses into dramatic production restricted to predetermined outcomes. And although Brecht's notion of progress toward a presumed socialist victory is more differentiated than the one outlined in the SED documents of the 1950s, the fact that the outcome of this history is never in fundamental doubt links Brecht's GDR theater to an apologetics of the existing order.

Brecht's dictum that GDR theater ought to refrain from offering illusionary solutions to actual problems – which Brecht himself partially struggled to follow – is a principle that likewise undergirds the production plays by Heiner Müller (1928 – 1995), to whom I turn next. Müller's production plays, beginning with *Der Lohndrücker* (1956), and followed by *Die Korrektur*

[53] Here I recapitulate Kruger's conclusion about socialist temporality in Brecht's adaptation of *Katzgraben*, in which Kruger seeks to complicate scholarly consensus about early GDR theater as solely affirmative and underdeveloped, pointing out Brecht's temporal amendments to what would have otherwise been a "happy end routine" (82).

(1959), die *Umsiedlerin* (1961), and finally, *Der Bau* (1965), offer a rather unembellished portrayal of the political upheavals of socialism's construction. Schooled in the Brechtian tradition, Müller, however, surpassed Brecht in his critique, becoming the first GDR playwright to "confront directly and brutally the historical realities through which he had lived," as David Bathrick comments (93). This ruthless confrontation with GDR history, facilitated by a relaxation of cultural policy in 1956 triggered by Khrushchev's de-Stalinization speech but complicated by the subsequent Soviet-led crushing of the Hungarian uprising, is perhaps what enabled Müller to complete a project that Brecht himself had started but abandoned: the problematic story of the East German model worker Hans Garbe. Drawing on scholarship by David Bathrick, Joachim Fiebach, and Loren Kruger, I will delineate how production and progress unfold in Müller's *Der Lohndrücker*, and how they also depart from Party directives. I will subsequently turn to *Der Bau*, where the time of socialism's construction is postponed to an elusive socialist future, thus completing a narrative of production skepticism started by *Der Lohndrücker*.

In 1949, an East German worker Hans Garbe almost single-handedly repaired a factory furnace while one of its ovens was in still in use. He thus averted a costly production shutdown and simultaneously supplied the GDR with a "much needed contemporary socialist myth" (Bathrick 112). Three hagiographies of Garbe were published between 1950 – 51, giving Garbe a legendary status that Brecht was trying to demystify in his unfinished project on the worker. The historical figure of Garbe troubled Brecht on several counts. For example, Garbe's excessive contribution to production was perceived by his comrades as going against their interests by driving down their wages through increased production quota. Though his fellow workers would benefit from Garbe's feat in the long range, Garbe's extraordinary productivity

further catered to the exploitative labor policies of the employer-state, which eventually imploded in the workers' uprising on June 17 1953.[54] The forcefully suppressed uprising was seen by some (especially Western) critics as a delegitimation of the GDR's aspiration to become an *Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat*.[55] The Party vehemently denied this charge by questioning the authentic agency of the strikers – a conundrum on which Brecht himself was undecided.[56] To Brecht, the agency of the workers would have been complicated precisely by people like Garbe, who visibly participated in the June 17 uprising, and who, before he became the socialist model worker in the GDR, had been an efficient producer for a Nazi factory, even reporting an act of sabotage. If the implications of these contradictions plagued Brecht to the point of abandoning

[54] The period of socialism's *Aufbau* saw an almost complete reorganization of the class structure and the installation of a socialist economy. Under the assumption that productivity, efficacy and technological progress would lead to a genuinely better society, the state pursued a rapid expansion of its heavy industry at the expense of manufacturing consumer products, while also greatly increasing the demands for worker productivity. Soon this policy, however, backfired in the uprising of June 1953, which was fueled by the workers' dissatisfaction over the production quotas and a dearth of adequate consumer goods. The demonstration was eventually quelled by Soviet tanks (Fulbrook 34).

[55] Harkin, Patrick. "Brecht and June 17: A Reassessment." *Edinburgh German Yearbook 5: Brecht and the GDR: Politics, Culture, Posterity*. Ed. Laura Bradley and Karen Leeder. Vol. 5. Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2011. 83 – 100. 86.

[56] Harkin shows that Brecht reacted to the uprising with a series of contradictory statements. On the day of the uprising, Brecht urged the Berlin Ensemble to show support for the government and endorsed the Party's action in a note to the SED's General Secretary Walter Ulbricht. However, only one aspect of the note – a sentence that assured the SED of Brecht's "allegiance" – was circulated by the newspaper, leaving out Brecht's advice to the SED that it ought to enter into a debate with the workers (Harkin 86). The minutes from an emergency board meeting held on the day of the uprising by the *Akademie der Künste* (of which Brecht was a member) show that Brecht voted down the motion of sending a statement of support to the government on the academy's behalf – a decision that is at odds with the earlier note. Harkin interprets Brecht's note to Ulbricht as a rash decision Brecht made while fearing that the GDR was in danger, but that he refrained from supporting the government further after witnessing the events on the streets and discussing the matter with his colleagues. To Ulbricht's chagrin, the editor of *Neues Deutschland* and Ulbricht's rival Rudolf Herrnstadt later published a much more disparaging letter by Brecht, in which Brecht deems the workers' unhappiness "understandable" and stresses the need for a public dialogue (Harkin 89). Harkin additionally examines Brecht's private notes on the uprising. In the notes, Brecht discusses the presence of fascist forces on the streets on June 17 – a line to which the Party resorted in order to explain the conflict. However, Brecht's notes further admit that the Party made a mistake, exacerbating the workers' conditions and thus obscuring the achievements of socialism. Harkin analyzes Brecht's cryptic note "Der 17. Juni hat die ganze Existenz verfremdet" through the lens of the Brechtian *V-Effekt* – that is, as an opportunity to gain new insights by distancing oneself from a habitual viewpoint, concluding that Brecht ultimately saw the uprising in positive terms (94). To Brecht's mind, the uprising has shown the working class as slightly misguided but capable of revolutionary fervor, and the Party as fallible but capable of leadership. In Harkin's view, Brecht's apparent critique of the government in his famous poem about the uprising, "Die Lösung" (1953), ought to be read as a satire of cultural officials (94). The poem's final lines, "Wäre es da / Nicht doch einfacher, die Regierung / Löste das Volk auf und / Wählte ein anderes?" mock the Secretary of GDR's Writers Union Kurt Barthel (also known as Kuba), who in an article titled "Wie ich mich schäme" castigates the workers' disloyalty to the government, whose trust they will have to work hard to renew (Harkin 94).

the Garbe project that, in his eyes, threatened East Germany's socialist project as such, Müller incorporates these contradictions into the narrative of *Der Lohndrücker* as hurdles that slow and stop socialism's production before those hurdles are overcome with the workers' own decision-making and resolve.

The linear unfolding of *Der Lohndrücker* – an insight for which I rely on Joachim Fiebach – corresponds to a linear unfolding of the historical process, with its clearly defined ordering into the past (haunting the play in the form of a bombed-out stage set and workers' stories from fighting in the war), the present time of socialism's construction, and the socialist future.[57] No matter how much or how fiercely the play's characters clash with their environment, this fundamental chronology remains unquestioned and the realization of socialism remains fixed as an achievable future goal. As Fiebach suggests, the characters' actions generate a "lineare Zeitkette" (29), which continues to unfold irrespective of setbacks. To illustrate: in scene seven the Party officer Schorn reproaches Balke (the name given to the Garbe figure in the play) for denouncing him to the Nazi authorities for sabotaging production, which had sent Schorn to prison, prompting a response from Balke that he was doing his job as a production inspector (sending back flawed hand-grenades) and acting in self-protection. After a "pause," Schorn appears to overcome his resentment and offers Balke his protection from the coworkers' attacks Balke has been experiencing (19). However, Schorn is not the play's only character to swallow his resentment so that time and production can move forward. When in scene nine the resentful coworkers throw stones at the laboring Balke, Balke puts the stones into the wall that he is building and the production continues (24). In scene ten, two coworkers beat Balke up, but he reemerges "Am Ofen […] im Gesicht Schlagspuren" two scenes later (Müller 27). Then a

[57] Fiebach, Joachim. *Inseln der Unordnung: Fünf Versuche zu Heiner Müllers Theatertexten*. Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1990. 28.

strike threatens production, but is averted by the worker-leaders, who convince their comrades to support Balke's project. Now it is the sulking Balke, however, who pauses both production and the play's temporal development, by not wanting to cooperate with his coworkers. However, a reconciliation takes place in the play's final scene, when Balke asks Karras (who earlier had beaten Balke up) to assist him in his project:

> BALKE. Ich brauche dich, Karras. Ich frag dich nicht aus Freundschaft. Du mußt mir helfen.
> KARRAS. Ich dachte, du willst den Sozialismus allein machen? Wann fangen wir an?
> BALKE. Am besten gleich. Wir haben nicht viel Zeit. (Müller, "Der Lohndrücker" 32)

In this final scene, the progress of socialism thus emerges not as an order from above, but as a result of a chain of altercations among the workers themselves. Both halted production and time can now resume their joint linear movement, as fast as ever.

While the play generally sustains, and eventually reaffirms, a temporality akin to the one proclaimed by the state, it usurps the socialist future from the state's mandate and places it into the purview of the workers. The challenge is staged not only with the sequence of narrative nodes during which workers and supervisors reanimate production by negotiating social conflict, but also with an aesthetic revolt. This incipient aesthetic is, in the main, destructive, in that it deflates, parodies and at times literally shreds official Party edicts, which the play includes in the form of slogans, banners and newspaper panegyrics. For example, in the opening scene, a poster that says "SED – Partei des Aufbaus" is ripped off the wall, while exhausted workers leaving the factory trample the poster underfoot (Müller, "Der Lohndrücker" 8). In the second scene, a worker complaining about the government's demands for higher productivity derides those demands by reciting the motto: "Wenn wir besser leben wollen, müssen wir mehr produzieren" – as if by heart – or "auswendig," as the stage directions tell us (10). Finally, when in scene five a

journalist arrives at the factory, he is not intending to report on what state the factory production really is in, but is unabashedly fishing for affirmative stories or "Produktionserfolge, für die Sonntagsbeilage" (14). The published article, which praises Balke's brigade, is later read out and derided by a worker, who deflates the article's flowery rhetoric:

> KOLBE. " […] Wir suchten die Brigade des kühnen Neuerers [Balke] an ihrem Arbeitsplatz auf, wo ein reges Treiben herrscht, und konnten einen Blick in den Ofen werfen. Wie diese Männer mit den Steinen umgehn, das ist sozialistisches Tempo…" Spinner! Ohne Tempo verbrennst du dir die Pfoten. (23)

From this series of aesthetic negations, however, there emerges a new aesthetic, cruder and more aggressive – an aesthetic of "Spinner!," "Pfoten," ripped-up banners, and beaten up bodies. This new aesthetic, I argue, is more representative of those experiencing the stark realities of building socialism firsthand. Quite in the Brechtian vein, by refusing to portray the triumph of the new society on stage in a heroic affirmation of Balke, this emergent aesthetic as sketched by Müller allows for a more democratic and a more critical reorganization of meaning. Müller seems to be saying that as long as this process is held together by a firm resolve, that the contradictions lying in the way of the future goal can and will be overcome, a new society can and will be built, not despite but because of disruption in industrial production and critical challenges to official East German discourse.

After being lauded by the SED for its exemplary portrayal of "the transformation of working-class consciousness," *Der Lohndrücker* was denied an award and had too brief a run to reach the broader worker audience for which it was intended (Kruger 94). By the time Müller started his work on *Der Bau* in 1963, he had already been expelled from the Writers' Union for his *Die Umsiedlerin* (1961), and he was to be marginalized by GDR theater over the course of the following decade. First published in the prominent literary periodical *Sinn und Form* in

1965, *Der Bau* attracted criticism from the SED, was subsequently dropped from rehearsal, and remained unperformed until 1980.[58] The play's title evokes both the recent construction of the Berlin Wall (1961) as well as Franz Kafka's eponymous story of 1931, in which the narrator repeatedly aborts and resumes the construction of a burrow intended to protect him from his enemies.[59] *Der Bau*'s ostensible object of construction, however, is a chemical factory under the SED's official economic policy designated "Neues Ökonomisches System der Planung und Leitung" (1963-70) and renamed "Ökonomisches System des Sozialismus" in 1967. The intended purpose of this policy was to maximize productivity through economic efficiency, technology, and expert leadership of economic planners. Changing the name from NÖS to ÖSS was supposed to signal that new emphases on productivity and efficiency, which also included decentralization and competitive remuneration, were not being pursued without socialist concerns and did not attempt to approximate a capitalist economy, as some critics were quick to charge. The name change had, moreover, been preceded by the SED's proclamation in the mid-60s of the alleged arrival of an imperfect, but nevertheless stable and harmonious form of socialism, "eines realen Sozialismus," which would later – but not as fast as previously thought – allegedly transform itself into communism proper (Emmerich, "Kleine Literaturgeschichte" 185). The corresponding SED demand that literature under the NÖS ought to register and shape the impact of these ongoing, technology-aided developments toward communism is taken up by *Der Bau*, though without sharing the Party's confidence that contemporary science and technology will necessary lead to an improvement of life under socialism.[60] What follows is an

[58] Hörnigk, Frank. "Bau-Stellen. Aspekte der Produktions- und Rezeptionsgeschichte eines dramaturgischen Entwurfs." *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* 6.1 (January 1985): 35-52.
[59] Müller references the influence on *Der Bau* himself in Müller, Heiner. *Krieg ohne Schlacht: Leben in zwei Diktaturen.* Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1992. 196. In *Der Bau*, the Berlin Wall is referred to both by its official moniker "antifaschistischer Schutzwall" and as a "Gefängnis." Müller, Heiner. *Stücke*. Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1975. 130. Finally, Müller's play is loosely based on Erik Neutsch's 1964 novel *Spur der Steine.*
[60] The Party directives for literature under the NÖS were formulated at the ninth Plenum des ZK der SED in April

abbreviated reading of the play with regard to two specific points: first, that *Der Bau* subverts the temporal narrative of GDR socialism under NÖS moving forward under the expert leadership of its planners; and second, that in its temporal dislocation of construction from progress, the play reaffirms a communist future that is not only unpredictable, but also unachievable within the existing means.

Though Müller's play shows its characters engaged in the construction of an economical, brown coal-fired plant of the future, the "Chemie von morgen" (Müller, "Der Bau" 119), this construction is literally endless, stagnant, and regressive, as the play's workers engage in the building, demolishing, and rebuilding of the same structure over and over again. Meanwhile, competing worker brigades are stealing scarce materials from one another to fulfill the production quota. In the opening scene a worker emerges from a ditch where he had been smashing up the foundations of the factory under construction. Responding to the question "Warum zertrümmert ihr das Fundament?" posed by a bewildered inspector, the worker takes issue with the "ihr" of the question, indicting the bureaucratic wielders of paper with the construction's failure to materialize: "Papier sprengt den Beton, Papier wellt den Boden" (117). Dismayed at what he sees and hears, the inspector surmises the roots of this failure as follows: "[...] du kannst mit deiner VVB über eine Plankorrektur nicht reden, die uns ich weiß nicht wieviel Zeit, Geld und Agitation spart. Wenn ein Maler einen Baum kopfstellt, geben wir ihm seine Leinwand zu fressen, und in unsern Büros ist der Abstraktionismus fakt" (119).[61] Recalling the punishment that would befall a painter for contradicting reality (as an SED document against abstraction in the arts would have it) – by "turning a tree upside down," Kruger writes, Müller's inspector highlights the discrepancy between this condemnation of

1965 by the SED's then general secretary Walter Ulbricht (Emmerich 186).

[61] "VVB" is an acronym for "Vereinigung Volkseigener Betriebe," one of the main legal form of industrial enterprise in the GDR.

abstraction in the arts and the impunity of bureaucrats who pass decisions without paying attention to their own abstraction from real problems.[62] In *Der Bau*, the planners, whose role in the NÖS's was considered key, are in fact held accountable for the stagnation of the economy.

As several clues indicate, construction in *Der Bau* is not only about the building of a factory, but also revives the metaphor of socialism as a construction site (common in the GDR), in particular by placing the play's present construction regarding building materials on a temporal trajectory between the capitalism of the past ("vor uns hat der Kapitalismus gebaut" – 120) and the communism of the future.[63] This end goal is, however, called into doubt, for instance in a character's ironic remark directed at thieving worker brigades, which blames the stagnant pace of construction for the delay in communism's arrival: "der Kommunismus wird aufgehen um so viel später, wenn Sie jetzt Beton klaun zum wievielten Mal in einem Monat" (121). Moreover, the system metaphorically represented by the construction site bears little resemblance to the stable and harmonious "realer Sozialismus" propagated by the SED: "jeder Platzregen macht einen Sumpf aus ihm [dem Chemiekombinat]" (120) and the planners' mismanagement keeps breaking the foundations of not only the factory but the system as a whole. Independent of the dismal present, however, which, just as the factory's construction, is stagnant and even moves back in time ("Jetzt kannst du sagen: das ist Kapitalismus" – 118; "die Zeit läuft Krebsgang" – 131), the play upholds a communist future that is unpredictable with any socialist science. Communism is either something that will arrive but that the characters will not live to see (165); alternatively, in a utopian vision, a worker describes "die Städte, die wir morgen baun" that emerge from a sea of clouds in a distant future (162), undermining the SED's

[62] Kruger 108. For an exemplary SED document against abstraction, see Jarmatz 152-57.
[63] The figuration of the GDR as a construction site has been addressed by Eva Kaufmann (Kaufmann 39-40).

claims to an alleged practicability of such a future with existing economic and scientific means, and also underscoring the temporal distance of such a future from the GDR of the present.

When staged for the first time in East Berlin in 1980 – following Müller's newly acquired status of a public intellectual after he had published his plays in West Berlin in 1974 and coinciding with a more general cultural thaw in the 1970s in East Germany – *Der Bau* was not received as a historical play about an earlier phase of socialism's construction. Rather, the stage production spoke to the perception of stagnation and cultural malaise that had engulfed the East German state in what was to be its final decade.[64] After the relatively relaxed cultural policies of the 1970s, which began with Erich Honecker's announcement that there would be "no taboos" in East German culture and a subsequent enrichment of the relatively ossified cultural heritage, with traditions ranging from romanticism to proletarian avantgardes,[65] the 1976 expatriation of the critical socialist poet and songwriter Wolf Biermann caused what Karen Leeder terms a "fundamental caesura in GDR cultural history" (11). As Leeder writes, the aftermath of the expatriation involved repressive measures against open supporters of Biermann, forced exclusions from the Writer's Union and a disillusionment of GDR intellectuals, which also "profoundly" affected the literary beginnings of the PB poets (25). Punning on the official conception of the GDR as an *Übergangsgesellschaft* – a society that is in a state of transition from socialism to communism – Leeder writes that "it was at this point for many writers that the illusion of the much-touted 'Übergangsgesellschaft' gave way to the anticipation of an 'Untergangsgesellschaft'" (25). The 1980s were characterized by a worsening economic and

[64] The first production of *Der Bau* was directed by Fritz Marquardt at the Volksbühne in 1980. Though the play was well received, the audience apparently related to the play's thematization of stagnation and decrease in economic production, which by the 1980s engulfed the entire country, and reacted with "intense" silence to *Der Bau*'s allusion to the building of the Berlin Wall (Kruger 115-16).

[65] Hohendahl, Peter U. "Theorie und Praxis des Erbens: Untersuchungen zum Problem der literarischen Tradition in der DDR." *Literatur der DDR in den siebziger Jahren.* Ed. P. U. Hohendahl and P. Herminghouse. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1983. 32 – 35.

environmental situation and the crushing of hopes for more democratic cultural policies. Having espoused the conception of a progressive development that had shaped the state's foundation, official East German discourse continued right into the 1980s to bear the marks of those early aspirations, albeit with a growing sense of what Mary Fulbrook has called "empty ritual and decreasing meaning" (32). What I will finally argue is that this shopworn notion of an unwavering forward march toward a communist future is playfully disassembled by the PB poets, who, in so doing, continue to engage in an ongoing dialogue about temporality and production in what would retroactively become the final chapter of the East German avantgarde.

III. No Future? The Prenzlauer Berg Poets and the GDR

In *Requiem for Communism* (2003), Charity Scribner discusses industrial ruins and material remainders from second-world communist cultures and transnational socialist movements after 1989. What Scribner terms the "wreckage of socialism" that 1989 leaves in its wake – which, moreover, coincided with the breakdown of heavy industry across Europe and the exhaustion of the welfare state – has, according to Scribner, been generating a process of collective mourning that, nevertheless, keeps this part of Europe's cultural memory alive.[66] Scribner examines several such projects in the former GDR, including a museum established in the former GDR's erstwhile industrial hub Eisenhüttenstadt, arguing that this memorial of East German everyday material culture and industrial production evinces a shift away from a "collective" to a "collecting" society: where a place of production of a communist future has now been converted into a place of conservation and of conversion of that future into the past (Scribner 10). Taking the premise that the utopian potential of socialism in East Germany had been exhausted alongside efforts to build a workers' state even before the state formally

[66] Scribner, Charity. *Requiem for Communism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003. 3 – 14, 23 – 36.

collapsed as her starting point, Scribner argues that this collapse is nevertheless being mourned in postcommunist art projects set in the industrial ruins of Europe's Second World. The following discussion of PB art and poetry seeks to illuminate a different way of considering the fate of industrial history in Europe and the GDR's communist project itself in the state's final decade.

In a piece by Burkhard Wunder, a little known associate of the PB collective, fragments of industrial histories and *Aufbau* futurity are juxtaposed with one another. This piece was made in collaboration with the PB poet and publisher Uwe Warnke in 1986. It is affixed to the reverse of a dust jacket of the underground journal *Entwerter-Oder* that Warnke has edited from 1982 till the present. Wunder's artwork consists of a red portfolio embossed with official state insignia:

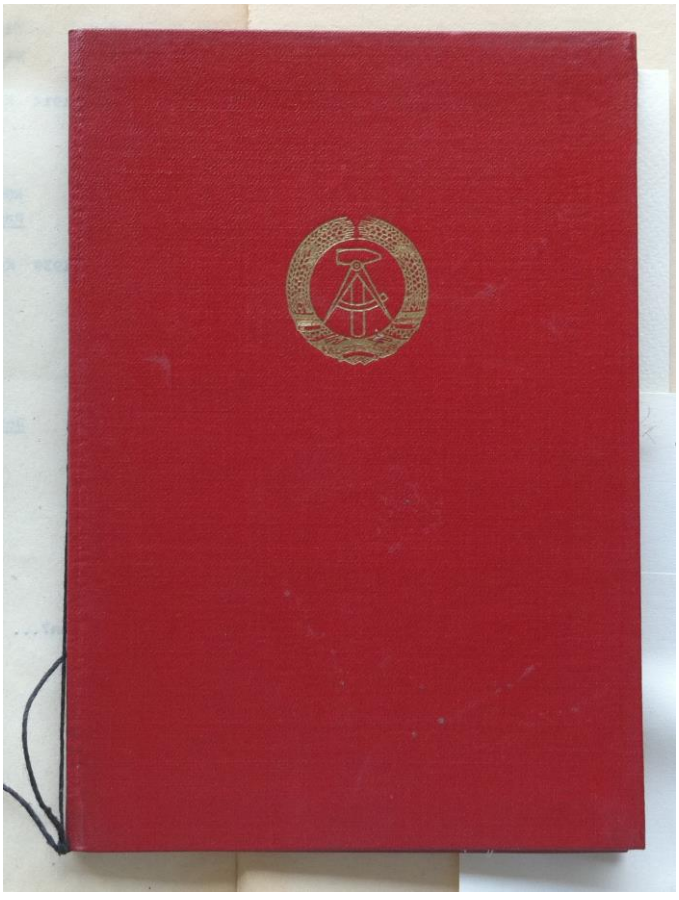
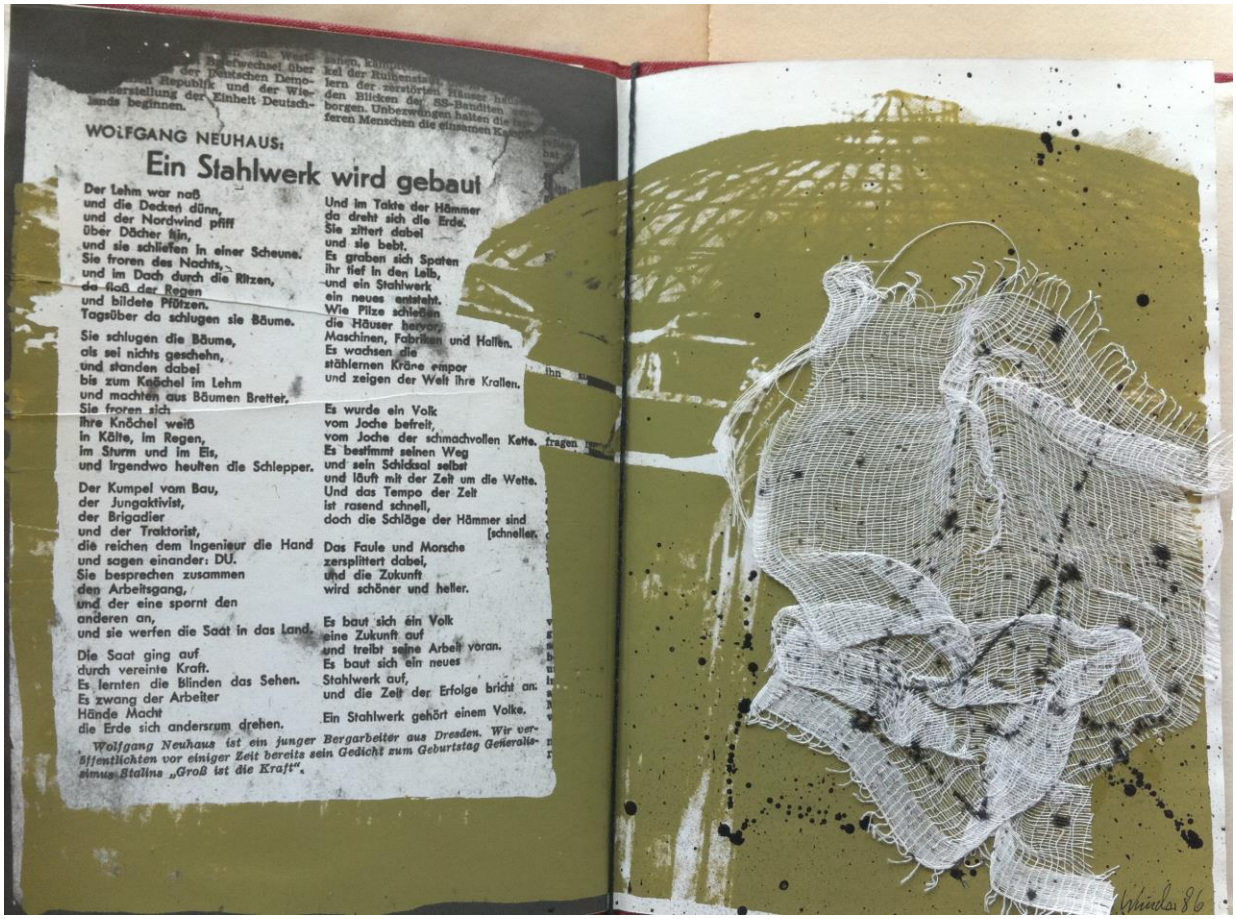


Fig. 1. Wunder, Burkhard. *Beilage*. 1986. *Entwerter-Oder* XXIV (1986).

Inside the portfolio is a collage made from two overlapping screenprints: stenciled to the right is an outline of an industrial structure (a gasometer); to the left is a screenprint of a poem that appears to have been taken from an official newspaper:



WOLFGANG NEUHAUS:

Ein Stahlwerk wird gebaut

Der Lehm war naß
und die Decken dünn,
und der Nordwind pfiff
über Dächer hin,
und sie schliefen in einer Scheune.
Sie froren des Nachts,
und im Dach durch die Ritzen,
da floß der Regen
und bildete Pfützen.
Tagsüber da schlugen sie Bäume.

Sie schlugen die Bäume,
als sei nichts geschehn,
und standen dabei
bis zum Knöchel im Lehm
und machten aus Bäumen Bretter.
Sie froren sich
ihre Knöchel weiß
in Kälte, im Regen,
im Sturm und im Eis,
und irgendwo heulten die Schlepper.

Der Kumpel vom Bau,
der Jungaktivist,
der Brigadier
und der Traktorist,
die reichen dem Ingenieur die Hand
und sagen einander: DU.
Sie besprechen zusammen
den Arbeitsgang,
und der eine spornt den
anderen an,
und sie werfen die Saat in das Land.

Die Saat ging auf
durch vereinte Kraft.
Es lernten die Blinden das Sehen.
Es zwang der Arbeiter
Hände Macht
die Erde sich andersrum drehen.

Und im Takte der Hämmer
da dreht sich die Erde.
Sie zittert dabei
und sie bebt.
Es graben sich Spaten
ihr tief in den Leib,
und ein Stahlwerk
ein neues entsteht.
Wie Pilze schießen
die Häuser hervor,
Maschinen, Fabriken und Hallen.
Es wachsen die
stählernen Kräne empor
und zeigen der Welt ihre Krallen.

Es wurde ein Volk
vom Joche befreit,
vom Joche der schmachvollen Kette.
Es bestimmt seinen Weg
und sein Schicksal selbst
und läuft mit der Zeit um die Wette.
Und das Tempo der Zeit
ist rasend schnell,
doch die Schläge der Hämmer sind
[schneller.
Das Faule und Morsche
zersplittert dabei,
und die Zukunft
wird schöner und heller.

Es baut sich ein Volk
seine Zukunft auf
und treibt seine Arbeit voran.
Es baut sich ein neues
Stahlwerk auf,
und die Zeit der Erfolge bricht an.

Ein Stahlwerk gehört einem Volke.

Wolfgang Neuhaus ist ein junger Bergarbeiter aus Dresden. Wir veröffentlichten vor einiger Zeit bereits sein Gedicht zum Geburtstag Generalissimus Stalins „Groß ist die Kraft".

Fig. 2. Wunder, Burkhard. *Beilage*. 1986. Detail of text on the left-hand side reprinted on the following page.

The poem, "Ein Stahlwerk wird gebaut," had been written by a young worker-poet, Wolfgang Neuhaus, from Dresden, during the *Aufbau* period before Stalin's death in 1953.[67] Its opening section tells the story of workers who, despite ice, wind and rain, nevertheless continue

[67] An editor's note that Wunder reprinted along with the poem says that the newspaper had recently published another poem by Neuhaus, written on the occasion of Stalin's birthday (see the first close-up of Wunder's piece on p. 43).

...Briefwechsel über ... der Deutschen Demo... Republik und der Wie...herstellung der Einheit Deutschlands beginnen.

...sanen, Kämpfen ... kel der Ruhenstadt, ... lern der zerstörten Häuser ... den Blicken der SS-Banditen ... borgen. Unbezwungen halten die tapferen Menschen die einsamen Kämpfe...

WOLFGANG NEUHAUS:

Ein Stahlwerk wird gebaut

Der Lehm war naß
und die Decken dünn,
und der Nordwind pfiff
über Dächer hin,
und sie schliefen in einer Scheune.
Sie froren des Nachts,
und im Dach durch die Ritzen,
da floß der Regen
und bildete Pfützen.
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und standen dabei
bis zum Knöchel im Lehm
und machten aus Bäumen Bretter.
Sie froren sich
ihre Knöchel weiß
in Kälte, im Regen,
im Sturm und im Eis,
und irgendwo heulten die Schlepper.

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der Brigadier
und der Traktorist,
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und sagen einander: DU.
Sie besprechen zusammen
den Arbeitsgang,
und der eine spornt den
anderen an,
und sie werfen die Saat in das Land.

Die Saat ging auf
durch vereinte Kraft.
Es lernten die Blinden das Sehen.
Es zwang der Arbeiter
Hände Macht
die Erde sich andersrum drehen.

Und im Takte der Hämmer
da dreht sich die Erde.
Sie zittert dabei
und sie bebt.
Es graben sich Spaten
ihr tief in den Leib,
und ein Stahlwerk
ein neues entsteht.
Wie Pilze schießen
die Häuser hervor,
Maschinen, Fabriken und Hallen.
Es wachsen die
stählernen Kräne empor
und zeigen der Welt ihre Krallen.

Es wurde ein Volk
vom Joche befreit,
vom Joche der schmachvollen Kette.
Es bestimmt seinen Weg
und sein Schicksal selbst
und läuft mit der Zeit um die Wette.
Und das Tempo der Zeit
ist rasend schnell,
doch die Schläge der Hämmer sind schneller.

Das Faule und Morsche
zersplittert dabei,
und die Zukunft
wird schöner und heller.

Es baut sich ein Volk
eine Zukunft auf
und treibt seine Arbeit voran.
Es baut sich ein neues
Stahlwerk auf,
und die Zeit der Erfolge bricht an.

Ein Stahlwerk gehört einem Volke.

Wolfgang Neuhaus ist ein junger Bergarbeiter aus Dresden. Wir veröffentlichten vor einiger Zeit bereits sein Gedicht zum Geburtstag Generalissimus Stalins „Groß ist die Kraft".

Fig. 3. Wunder, Burkhard. *Beilage.* 1986. Detail.

to fell trees "als sei nichts geschehn" (12).[68] As the next stanza tells us, the reason why the workers do not mind their physical hardship is because the backbreaking labor they are doing happens under the socialist conditions of the GDR, where "Kumpel vom Bau," youth activists, and engineers all address one another per "DU" (21 – 26). At several junctures, Neuhaus's poem gives an ecstatic vision of workers, who with great speed produce harvests, factories, houses, and heavy machinery (32-48).[69] But material production is not the only type of production that this labor effects. In the second half of the poem (38-71) we are told that the liberation of the workers from the chains of capitalism and fascism, together with the installment of the new social order, has unleashed a productive power that is already building a better – "schöner und heller" (64) – future, the movement of which is almost as fast as the strikes of the workers' hammers (52-64).

On the one hand, Wunder preserves the poem in one piece so as to maintain Neuhaus's interlocking progressions – from felling trees to building factories, from capitalist past to a socialist future. On the other hand, the collage questions and undercuts the claim to a continual development posited by Neuhaus's poem. Wunder does this in several ways. For one, he juxtaposes Neuhaus's poem with an image of an anachronistic gasometer – a nineteenth-century industrial structure that by then still existed around the Prenzlauer Berg neighborhood as a ruin from Berlin's capitalist past.[70] Through a visual doubling of the gasometer's cylindrical shape in

[68] Numbers in parentheses throughout my discussion of B. Wunder's piece refer to the lines of Neuhaus's poem as reprinted by Wunder.

[69] The poem's heroic portrayal of the physical hardship of labor under communism bears striking resemblance to the literary panegyrics to Taylorism from the early USSR. As Susan Buck-Morss comments, proletarian poetry by Aleksei Gaston, a poet and former factory worker in capitalist France who became the director of the Soviet Central Institute of Labor, emphasized the mitigation of physical sacrifice entailed by the labor process that would now, however, produce a "world of universal harmony and peace." Buck-Morss, Susan. *Dreamworld and Catastrophe the Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000. 105.

[70] The gasometer in Wunder's piece additionally indexes a then recent controversial demolition of three gasometers in the Prenzlauer Berg neighborhood. Although these gasometers had been listed among East Berlin's protected buildings and generally perceived as architectural symbols of the neighborhood, they were slated for demolition because of the high costs of their upkeep and alleged aesthetic incompatibility with the Ernst Thälmann memorial, in

the negative white space that surrounds the poem, and the partial fragmentation of both inserts, Wunder suggests a formal affinity between the two objects (poem and gasometer) as ruins from the prewar industrial and *Aufbau* periods respectively. Just as by the 1980s only the outside skeleton (*Gasometerhülle*) remained from the original industrial structure, Neuhaus's poem, too, has lost its erstwhile meaning, given that thirty-five years after the state's foundation the future that the poem projects still has not arrived. The failure of this future to come about is further underscored by Wunder's use of the red decorative binding typically used to hold awards.[71] The disjunction of a celebratory form and hollowed-out content unmasks as premature the optimism of the *Aufbau* period, which in Wunder's piece is both discontinued and enshrined in the decorative bindings. The collage refrains from producing a new sense of direction from its asyntactical conglomeration of materials and fragments, its play on formal repetition, and an indeterminate movement between fragments. The piece of gauze placed partially over the collage is particularly illustrative in this regard. Given that the symbolic function of the gauze is to dress wounds, the gauze covers the collage as though the absence of the socialist future and the legacy of industrialization – both capitalist and socialist – were wounds that needed to heal. In formal terms, however, the gauze in the collage also functions as a grid – a structure that likewise organizes the typeset of the poem in the newspaper. Yet unlike the rigid and regular grid of the newspaper, the grid of the gauze is misshapen, and the ink splattered over it does not adhere to its broken form. This blurring of boundaries between structure and collapse, held separate in the poem's opposition of structure ("Häuser [...] / Maschinen, Fabriken und Hallen" – 47 – 48) and formlessness ("Lehm" – 1, 14; "das Morsche" – 61), contests the poem's explicit

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the backdrop of which one of the gasometers had been visible. Zajonz, Michael. "Die konnten nicht mal richtig sprengen." *Der Tagesspiegel.* 12 August 2015. 21. The demolition of Prenzlauer Berg's gasometers took place in Juli 1984 amidst protests that gathered support from an especially wide spectrum of East German citizens (*Der Tagesspiegel*).

[71] This information was given to me by Uwe Warnke in a phone interview from January 20, 2016.

confidence in construction as a vehicle of progress toward socialism – a confidence that is additionally undermined by the spectral and disintegrating grid of the gasometer itself.

Wunder's *Aufbau* relic was circulated in the PB underground journal *Entwerter-Oder*, where it was affixed to the magazine's dust jacket. For the dust jacket of this particular issue, the journal's publisher Warnke created a design that appears to be in dialogue with Wunder's piece:

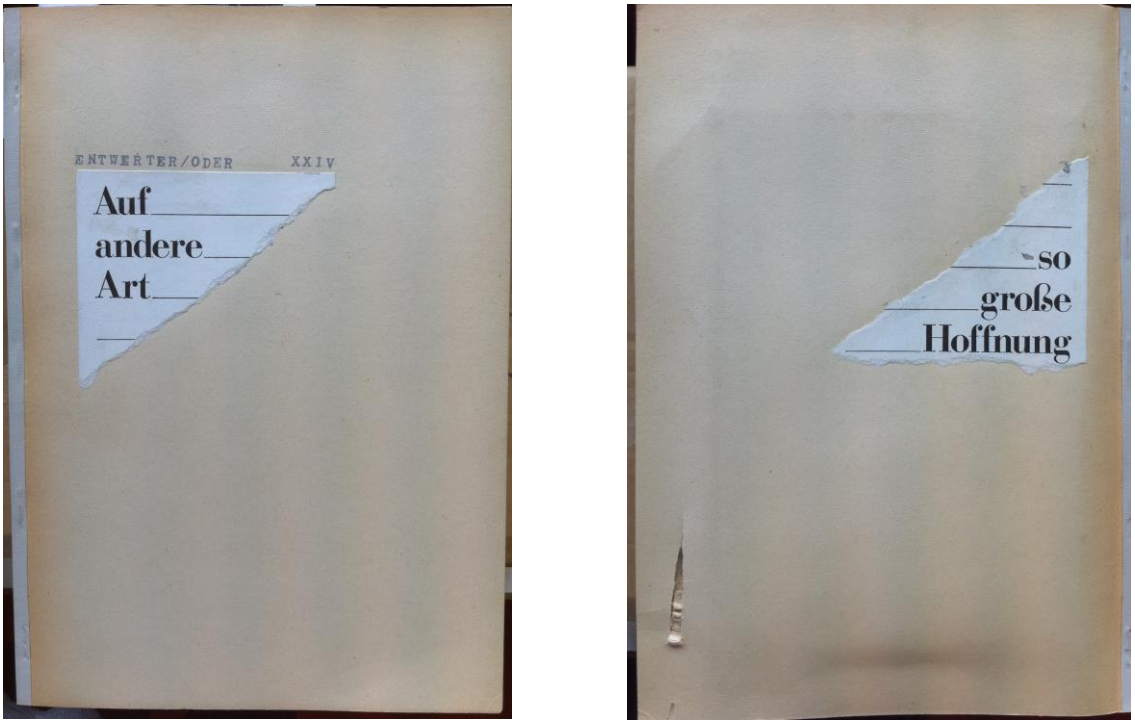

Fig. 4. Warnke, Uwe. *Entwerter-Oder* XXIV (1986). Front and back cover.

To make the dust jacket, Warnke reused a book cover from a published diary by Johannes R. Becher (1891-1958) – one of GDR's most prominent officially sanctioned authors, who in the state's foundational period also served as the minister of culture. The title of Becher's diary, *Auf andere Art so große Hoffnung* (1951, published in 1967), comes from a German translation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest.* In Shakespeare, the verse is an expression of consolation to the shipwrecked Sebastian, who despairs over the death of a fellow traveler whom he presumes to

have drowned, and is in turn cheered by a friend that the abandonment of hope is, in fact, the beginning of another great hope.[72] Becher's diary, which spans the GDR's first two full years (1950-51), positions the state's nascent socialism, the building of which (*Aufbau*) he would help oversee, as a source of hope and an alternative to the then still-recent catastrophe of the war. While it cannot be definitively determined if Warnke's irreverent manipulation of Becher's title, which Warnke tears up and affixes to the cover of his underground journal, negates or affirms the hope indexed by Becher's title thirty-five years after the state's formation, with this playful manipulation of Becher's title as found poetic language, Warnke claims some notion of hope (as operative in ruins, or both) within East Germany's socialism for the country's cultural underground. In so doing, Warnke also shifts the emphasis away from progress as a social certainty to hope as a temporal affect.

The future of socialism is addressed in rather different terms in the poetry of Bert Papenfuß-Gorek (b. 1956). Critic and author Gerhard Wolf argues that Papenfuß shapes his poetic language in ways so radical that all contextual dependence seems at first to be severed.[73] A closer look at Papenfuß's works, however, reveals what in fact is a deep-rootedness of this poetry in its cultural and linguistic context, against which it simultaneously launches its attacks. As Papenfuß himself surmises, "[d]er Aspekt der Attacke [...] gegen Konventionen ist mir

[72] The following section of a Shakespeare translation appears in the preface of Becher's published diaries: "Aus diesem 'ohne Hoffnung', oh, was geht Euch / Für große Hoffnung auf! Hier ohne Hoffnung, ist / Auf andere Art so große Hoffnung... " Becher, Johannes R. *Auf andere Art so große Hoffnung: Tagebuch 1950 – Eintragungen 1951*. Berlin: Aufbau, 1969. 7.

[73] Wolf, Gerhard. "Zu einem Aspekt junger Lyrik der DDR: 1. Aufsatz." *ariadnefabrik* 2 (1986): 2 – 10. Throughout the 1980s the officially sanctioned author, critic and publisher Gerhard Wolf (b. 1928) acted as a mentor and promoter of a number of the PB poets and published his analyses of poetry by Papenfuß, Stefan Döring, Jan Faktor, and Rüdiger Rosenthal in four essays written for the unofficial journal *ariadnefabrik*. Wolf's three additional essays on PB poetry were published by *ariadnefabrik* 3 (1986): 2-7, and *ariadnefabrik* 4 (1986): 2-14. Between 1987-89 Wolf oversaw the publication of an edition of PB poetry "Außer der Reihe" under the auspices of the official Aufbau Press, which was intended as a debut into the GDR's general public by authors from the literary underground. Köhler, Tilo. "Außer der Reihe – eine Edition außerhalb des offiziellen Programms." *Die Addition der Differenzen: die Literaten- und Künstlerszene Ostberlins 1979 bis 1989*. Ed. Warnke, Uwe and Ingeborg Quaas. Berlin: Verbrecher Verlag, 2009. 139-43.

ebenso wichtig wie der Aspekt der Tiefe, des Verwurzeltseins" (as cited in Warnke, Quaas 28). In "schriftbruch," a programmatic poem first published in 1990 but written in the 1980s, Papenfuß's idiosyncratic poetic language is laid out alongside some potential reason as to why it is conducting its linguistic violations:

schriftbruch

nach ueberstandener
seh-krankheit
erkennen
erweiterte augen die
riffgelaufnen
stabenschiffe
"ix" als "ka-es" &
"zet" als "te-es"

aus innigen
zwingenden
dringenden
gruenden werden sie
flott gemacht zu
"ch" & "sch"

denen wohl ist
auf zwingenden
zriftgruenden
war diese
klippzrift
ohnehin kein
k n
i e
el – hol
wert [74]

This poem makes explicit shifts in spelling that are maintained quite consistently throughout Papenfuß's work. Instead of x's, Papenfuß writes "ks," instead of z's, he writes "ts." A whole other set of linguistic transgressions can be extrapolated from this small but representative

[74] Papenfuß-Gorek, Bert. *SoJa*. Berlin: Druckhaus Galrev, 1990. 70. This post-*Wende* collection is an anthology of the poetry Papenfuß had written throughout the 1980s; however, the exact publication date of "Schriftbuch" is unspecified.

showcasing in the poem at hand. The language refrains from using the *Umlaut* ("ueberstandener"), splits words to create new compounds ("seh-krankheit," "ka-es"), uses *kleinschreibung*, the ampersand instead of "und," and additionally operates with neologisms, loanwords (i.e. the English-language "cliff" and "rift"), part-words, malapropism, near-homophones, and word associations. The poem's titular "schriftbruch" exemplifies some of these methods. Roughly translating as "script-breaking," the compound bears a close visual and acoustic resemblance to "Schriftbuch" ("script book" as a catalog of Papenfuß's writing), as well as "Schiffbruch," meaning "shipwreck." Through a chain of associations, the violation of writing (*Schriftbruch*) conducted by the poem is linked to an implicit failure or breakdown (*Schiffbruch*).

In "schriftbruch," Papenfuß seeks to animate and playfully transform the basic components of a defunct language – its phonemes, signs, syllables, and words. In line two the failure or the *Schiffbruch* migrates into the malaprop "seh-krankheit" (of which *Seekrankheit* is a homophone). Overcoming "see-sickness" has led to a perceptual widening ("erweiterte[n] augen") of the poetic self, and the components of language now look differently to its "expanded eyes." After being shipwrecked, some "Stabenschiffe" (another nautical-themed nonsense compound, which however evokes the combination of "Buchstabe" and "Chiffre") appear to have found refuge on the "reef" ("riffgelaufnen"). The neologism *riffgelaufen* implies the existing word "schiefgelaufen," pointing to a language that had indeed gone wrong, or literally – to the "slanting" (*schiefen*) diagonally drawn letters "x" and "z." In lines 7-8 the poem attempts to generate new possibilities with the basic elements of this language. The letters "x" and "z" are stretched out in their phonetic spelling as "ix" and "zet," which in turn morph into the linguistic novelties "ka-es" and "te-es." One could, however, also speak of a linguistic transsubtantiation –

of "x" into "cheese" and "z" into "tea," given that "ka-es" resembles the already existing "Käse" and "te-es" the already existing "Tee." Thus, "schriftbruch" relates its experimentation to a preceding crisis of language, which it attempts to counter by foregrounding the visual and phonetic aspects of this language as well as its changeability through Papenfuß's own protean writing.

"schriftbruch's" remaining two sections keep shifting between linguistic renewal and failure by pitting against one another the vocabulary of floating and sinking. Line 13 "briskly" (*flott*) switches the phonetic pronunciation of the letters "x" and "z" to "ch & sch" respectively, which in so doing it also seeks to preserve or make "afloat" (of which "flott" is synonymous). This new phonetic rule changes how the rest of the poem is read. For instance, "zwingenden" in line 16 can now also be read as *schwingenden*, and in line 19 the neologism "klippzrift" that evokes the combination of "Klippe" (or the English language "clip") and the English-language "rift" further regenerates into *klippschrift* or "clear (or "clipped") script," depending on in which language the reader chooses to read. Yet despite these innovations, the restored elements sink to the bottom of the "rift" – an English-language loanword contained in Papenfuß's neologism "zriftgruenden" or, indeed, *schriftgruenden* as a return to a basic way of writing. The poem ends with a syntactical and visual inversion – "war diese/ klippzrift/ ohnehin kein/ k/i/el -- hol/e/n/ wert," bending and breaking into half the verb "kielholen" with its shape (21-23). The fissure generates at least two ways of reading the verb: either as *kielholen*, the "careening" of a boat ashore for repairs, or as *Kiel holen*, the fetching of a quill as an instrument of writing. The poem thus ends with a question, implied in the inverted syntax of its ending, expressing misgivings about the extent to which it will help overcome the crisis that has occasioned its linguistic innovations.

An important elaboration on the open-ended reanimation of a failed language that can be found in "schriftbruch" is the 1981 poem "wortflug," in which Papenfuß appropriates, dismembers and recombines the GDR's official narrative of progress. "Wortflug" is a variation on "wortschritt," which appears in l. 13 of the poem, and which Papenfuß adapts from "Fortschritt," replacing the movement of history with the movement of language that the poem pursues. This "pace" of words (*Wort-schritt*) is anything but the original "forth-pace" (*Fort-schritt*). It is whimsical instead, ranging from the left-to-right and top-to-bottom of Latin script, to a multidirectional, back-and-forth movement among the semantic, visual and phonetic patterns created by Papenfuß's unorthodox spelling (e.g. in replacing "f" for "v" and "w") and the diagonal placement of the poem's words across the page. The poem's opening relates these violations against a deficiency of its own milieu, which is reportedly lacking in "geschlechtlichkeit":

wortflug – meiner umwelt gebrichts
an geschlechtlichkeit
& noch solchen wortschaetzen
so ich schaetz aller leute
noch solche wortschaetzen
gegen ferfestigungen
ferfestigter zungen
& bekwehmlichkeiten (1-8)[75]

Sexuality and especially the breaking of taboos are often broached by Papenfuß's texts.[76] Yet for my reading of Papenfuß's elaboration on the discourse of temporality in the GDR, *Geschlechlichtkeit* is less significant in its literal meaning than in its pun on *Geschichtlichkeit* or the milieu's lack of historicity. In "wortflug" this lack (or potentially the breaking of the environment, contained by the verb "gebrichts") is predominantly registered in a general

[75] Papenfuß-Gorek, Bert. *dreizehntanz*. Berlin: Aufbau, 1988. 123-24. 123.
[76] This point is made by Karen Leeder in her discussion of Papenfuß's post-1989 collection *LED SAUDAUS*. Leeder, Karen. *Breaking Boundaries: A New Generation of Poets in the GDR.* Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1996. 167-68.

linguistic stagnation, "solidifications of ossified tongues" and "complacencies" against which the poem positions itself in lines 6-8. Papenfuß's potential play with the morpheme "schlecht" that "Ge-schlecht-lichkeit" contains suggests further that this stagnation, ossification and complacency might stem from a lack of "badness," perhaps denoting the milieu's reluctance to acknowledge what is bad in it. The text's attack on linguistic conventions is conducted in opposition to this standstill and with an eye toward linguistic reanimation. In its culmination "wortflug" makes its play on movement explicit, telling its words to move as they please. At the same time, however, this freedom of language appears linked with utopian anticipation:

liegen worte
wenn ihr ruhe wollt
brach
sitzen worte
wenn ihr daran wollt
bereit
stehen worte
wenn ihr gedicht wollt
dikk da
gehen worte
wenn ihr weiter wollt
noch weiter
laufen worte
wenn ihr dorthin wollt
wort –
flugs um bestimmten
forkommnissen zuforzukommen
for ort beim wort
dass kommunismus
kommen muss (23-42)

The poem gives its words the freedom to do anything they want. Words can "lie" still and unproductive, they can "stand" on the page in their "thick" visual presence and form a poem. Alternatively, they are free to move, slowly or quickly ("flugs"), to anticipate the ostensibly definite event or prediction of communism's arrival. In the last three lines of the poem, the predicted event is conveyed as a citation – "beim wort" (40) – that can be read in two different

ways. "[D]ass kommunismus / kommen muss" is either someone else's "word" of which the poetic self is unsure and which it ironically undermines. Alternatively, in the last two lines, "Kommunismus" is stretched out and broken into its two partial homophones, "kommen" and "muss." In this case, the poem appears certain of communism's arrival because that future is confirmed through the word's condensation of "must" and "arrive." The poem cites language itself as the authority on the possibility of this outcome. Under this optic, the poem offers an alternative to the official language of the GDR as a merely repetitive vehicle of a communist narrative of progress, by making a creative and liberated language the means by which contact with the utopian dimension of communism can be renewed. Papenfuß's poetry innovates, breaks, de-instrumentalizes, and moves language, leaving open the option of progress as a temporal possibility without predetermining the temporal form of its movement.

IV. Conclusion

Situating the PB poets in relation to the East German avantgarde tradition as represented by Brecht and Müller, the cultural politics of the SED, and the context of the cultural malaise of the 1980s ought to achieve two things for this, still understudied, group of writers. For one, it should establish the group as an East German avantgarde that until the country's demise in 1989 perpetuated a dialogue about progressive temporality and production – and thus continued the Brechtian critique of the role that official institutions in the GDR had allocated to literature and culture forty years before. Moreover, the PB poets' critique extends to the legacy of Brecht's aesthetics in the GDR as well – by shunning the values of optimism and progress to which Brecht's GDR theater lays claim – yet at times affirms a distant communist future, akin to the utopian visions that punctuate *Der Bau*. While this future can no longer be discerned in the

asyntactical and repetition-based work by Wunder, it is at times left open as a possibility in the protean pursuit of a failed but not dead language in Papenfuß's poetry. This additionally suggests that some degree of commitment to the future of unalienated life in East Germany continued to play at least some role within this group of writers.

Second, this contextualization prevents the Prenzlauer Berg group from being included in another kind of teleology for East German literature, proposed by Emmerich in an influential article from 1988 (Emmerich, "Gleichzeitigkeit" 193-211). Emmerich's model attributes an allegedly uncritical dedication to the SED's socialist project to the first generation of GDR writers – represented in this paper by Bertolt Brecht –, a critical one to the second generation (Heiner Müller), and a complete abandonment of this project by the PB poets. Emmerich simultaneously values, as Julia Hell rightly points out, East German literature more the greater the distance it takes from the GDR's official discourse.[77] As I have shown, PB poetry has considerable aesthetic and political value precisely because of its formal mimicry of GDR discourse. To Hell's criticism of Emmerich, I would add that even though Emmerich wrote his article before the collapse of the GDR, continuing to uphold a model that interprets this literature as having entirely abandoned a notion of utopia coincides perhaps too neatly with the sudden end of the East German state and its integration into the FRG in 1990. Contradictory yet present signs of utopian hope are discernible in this multifaceted body of work, prompting us to reconsider its political purchase.

[77] Hell, Julia. *Post-Fascist Fantasies: Psychoanalysis, History, and the Literature of East Germany.* Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 1997. 13.

CHAPTER 2

Reassembling the GDR: The Re-Presentation of Official GDR Discourse in Multimedial Works by the Prenzlauer Berg Poets

I. Introduction: The Prenzlauer Berg Poets as *Aussteiger*

A widely held scholarly view – a view that this dissertation seeks to contest – regards the Prenzlauer Berg (PB) poets as radical dissidents who refused to partake in either the long-term building or the critical amelioration of socialism as it had been attempted by previous generations of East German writers. As noted, this consensus about the PB has arisen mainly because several PB authors, including Sascha Anderson, Gert Neumann, Uwe Kolbe, Fritz-Hendrik Melle, and Rainer Schedlinski, issued explicit statements in which they dismissed confrontational efforts as naïve attempts at reform from within the system. The authors' position was often articulated in explicit contrast with the poets' generational predecessors in the GDR. One flagrant point of such contrast was the East German Marxist writer Volker Braun, whose texts, though increasingly critical towards "really existing socialism" (Rudolf Bahro), nevertheless consistently refused to abandon the socialist project.[78] In an interview from 1979, for example, PB poet Uwe Kolbe juxtaposes his generation's overtly disengaged attitude with Braun's earlier commitment; Kolbe's contemporary Melle similarly distances himself from the political conflict that Braun's work embodies (Emmerich 405-06).

Other PB poets went even further, expressing an attitude of utter disavowal and indifference toward the GDR. An interview with the poet, musician and media artist Sascha Anderson from 1986, conducted after Anderson's emigration to the Federal Republic earlier in 1986, is particularly illustrative in this regard:

[78] Bahro, Rudolf. *Die Alternative: zur Kritik des real existierenden Sozialismus*. Köln: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1977.

> Die DDR als Gebilde interessiert mich nicht. Das ist doch der Unterschied. Meine Jugendzeit fiel nicht in die Aufbruchphase der DDR. Ich mußte mich nicht identifizieren mit diesem Staatsgebilde. Ich habe mich identifiziert mit einem Freundeskreis, mit einer Landschaft, in der ich aufgewachsen bin. […] Vielleicht besteht meine Generation der Anfang bis Mitte 30jährigen noch <sic.> aus Aussteigern. Nach uns kommt eine Generation, und die halte ich für viel wichtiger, die ist gar nicht erst eingestiegen. Das ist der wirkliche Unterschied zur Situation Mitte der siebziger Jahre. Wir wissen noch Bescheid. Wir kennen sogar noch die Sprache der Macht. Wir haben unsere Aversion gegen die Macht aus der Kenntnis ihrer Sprache, ihres Denkens. Die Generation nach uns versteht die Sprache der Macht nicht mehr, versteht ihr Denken nicht mehr und ist noch freier als wir. Wir mußten uns erst befreien.[79]

Here Anderson begins by positing a historical discontinuity between his and previous East German literary generations. By referencing his predecessors' identification with the state, the poet alludes to the country's foundational discourse of antifascism – a discourse through which the Communist Party legitimized its power in the country, as heir of the resistance movement in the aftermath of the Second World War.[80] Speaking nearly four decades later, Anderson suggests that this account of history no longer suffices to legitimize the status quo as it has been experienced by the youngest generation, born almost exclusively "into" the already existing state in the 1950s and early 1960s.

In his interview with *Der Spiegel*, Anderson further distinguishes his generation from "the situation in the mid-1970s," by which he means the infamous expatriation in 1976 of the dissident poet and songwriter Wolf Biermann from the GDR.[81] Anderson later explicitly contrasts Biermann's ousting with his own emigration a decade later in order to differentiate the cultural activities at Prenzlauer Berg from those of Biermann's generation. "Ich habe gelesen,"

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[79] Anderson, Sascha. "Die Generation nach uns ist freier" *Der Spiegel.* 1 September 1986. Web. May 3 2015.
[80] Fulbrook, Mary. *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker.* New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2005. 29.
[81] The former East German poet and songwriter Wolf Biermann is a son of a communist resistance fighter executed by the Nazis. A committed communist himself, Biermann emigrated to the GDR at sixteen where he became a well-known cultural figure. In 1976, Biermann's passport was revoked after what was perceived to be a provocative concert by the East German authorities during a trip to Cologne, West Germany. Jay Rosellini: *Wolf Biermann.* München: C.H. Beck, 1992.

says Anderson in the interview, "Anderson begreife sich als Zentrum einer neuen Antibewegung in der DDR. Genau das ist es ja eben nicht. Während zu Zeiten Biermanns eine Gegenbewegung etabliert wurde, ist jetzt eine ganz breite Struktur von kultureller Eigenaktivität vorhanden." (*Der Spiegel*). In other words, the committed communist Biermann and his East German contemporaries had often engaged with GDR discourse through poetic calls for reform and a critique of "really existing socialism." However, Anderson evacuates the PB group from this shared cultural and linguistic space, foregrounding his own radical critique of language as an ostensible precondition for a critique of social and ideological structures in the GDR. Anderson's position is echoed by several other PB figures, who, in their public statements at various points perceive East German language to have deteriorated to the point of emptiness (Michael Thulin), moral bankruptcy (Uwe Kolbe), and of having become a mere vehicle for the regime (Gert Neumann).[82] To delimit their own discourse further from the dominant one, the poets often draw on the conceptual vocabulary of French poststructuralist theory, which was censored in the GDR, but which they were able to obtain from West Berlin.[83]

This proclaimed attitude of utter disavowal was publicly discredited in 1991 when it was revealed – after legislation to open files of the East German secret police (*Staatssicherheit,* Stasi) had been passed by East Germany's de Mazière government in August 1990 – that Anderson, along with another poet and editor of the leading underground journal *ariadnefabrik* Rainer

[82] See Egmont Hesse's interviews with Uwe Kolbe ("Etwas anderes als ein Gespräch mit Uwe Kolbe: Auf halber strecke...") and Gert Neumann ("Geheimsprache 'Klandestinität'"). Hesse, Egmont. *Sprache & Antwort: Stimmen und Texte einer anderen Literatur aus der DDR*. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1988. 116 – 22, 129 – 44. For Thulin, see Thulin, Michael. "Sprache und Sprachkritik: Die Literatur des Prenzlauer Bergs in Berlin/DDR." Arnold, Heinz Ludwig, and Gerhard Wolf, eds. *Die andere Sprache: Neue DDR-Literatur der 80er Jahre*. München: Text + Kritik, 1990. 234 – 242.

[83] According to Dominic Boyer, texts by Francophone theorists Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, and others were denied state-sanctioned publication in the GDR. Their translations were, however, published by the West Berlin Merve Press, which were smuggled across the Wall by friends. These texts were read widely across the PB Scene. Boyer, Dominic C. "Foucault in the Bush: The Social Life of Post-Structuralist Theory in East Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg." *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 66:2 (2001): 207-36.

Schedlinski, had long been Stasi informants. As previously noted, these revelations led some prominent figures, including Biermann and the journalist Frank Schirrmacher to dismiss the entire PB Scene. Documentary evidence indeed shows that the two poets regularly convened with the Stasi, obtained funds from the Stasi for their artistic projects, and gave information to the Stasi that was potentially harmful to other PB figures.84 The Stasi documents further suggest that the poets' deployment of French theory, which also underpinned some of their linguistic experimentation, was endorsed by the secret police. One interview transcript, for instance, shows the Stasi encouraging Schedlinski to concentrate on his theoretical texts and to bring them to the attention of others.[85]

In a study of the reception of poststructuralism by members of the PB Scene, Dominic Boyer has argued that poststructuralism offered these poets a set of critical tools with which to impugn what they perceived as ossified official GDR language. According to Boyer, the Stasi considered such attacks harmless though because to them, French theory provided a "connoisseurial language of dissent" (Boyer 227), that could not be popularized outside the small artistic community of Prenzlauer Berg. Referring to an essay by Jan Faktor, a poet who, both before and after the *Wende*, openly opposed the attitude of disengagement that others within the PB Scene had espoused, Boyer suggests that the group's interest in poststructuralism prevented the Scene from radicalizing itself in exchange for being left in peace by government forces:

> The Scene's creativity and productivity was <sic.> accepted, even subtly promoted [by the Stasi], so long as it honored a de facto arrangement to speak above and beyond the remainder of GDR society. […] The Stasi, for their part, monitored the Scene and read its samizdat journals but, as Faktor insightfully argues, they eventually determined that letting the artists pursue their esoteric

[84] Böthig, Peter, and Klaus Michael. *MachtSpiele: Literatur und Staatssicherheit im Fokus Prenzlauer Berg*. Leipzig: Reclam, 1993.
[85] The transcript, dated from September 27 1985, reads: "'Gerhard' [Schedlinski's code name] wurde angeraten, seine Stärken in der theoretischen Arbeit mehr zur Geltung zu bringen und seine Zurückhaltung etwas abzulegen. Gleichzeitig wurden Möglichkeiten ins Gespräch gebracht, wie er durch zeitweise Arbeitsverhältnisse sich sozial und operativ besser absichern sollte" (as cited in Böthig, Michael 244).

> interpretive and representational practices would give them a sufficient creative space so as not to seek a more intense or intelligible public conflict with the state. In retrospect, it seems somewhat absurd to argue that the GDR state had the least interest in the messages or 'content' of post-structuralist theory; like the Scene itself, the state found post-structuralism an opportune vehicle through which to achieve its cultural agenda. (Boyer 227)

By disentangling the Stasi's "cultural agenda" from that of the PB poets, Boyer rightfully grants this literature a degree of autonomy from the state. Yet there are two problems with Boyer's analysis. First, it inflates the extent to which Anderson and Schedlinski controlled the PB collective (Emmerich, "Kleine Literaturgeschichte" 408). Second, by characterizing the poets' dissident discourse as speaking "above and beyond the remainder of GDR society" – while also remaining largely unintelligible to the Stasi – Boyer reaffirms the group's alleged linguistic isolation from the GDR. This isolation is, however, belied by what I argue to be PB literature's very accessibility to East German audiences. Even texts by Anderson and Schedlinski, whose disengagement would have been most directly encouraged, are not always congruent with the deliberate hermeticism they are supposed to emblematize. As noted earlier, Anderson's cycle of poems entitled "eNDe" (1982), for instance, parodies the pre-circulated language of official East German media through its titular allusion to the country's official newspaper, *Neues Deutschland* (*ND*). A poem by Schedlinski from 1984 quotes readily recognizable propaganda slogans and clichés ("mach mit," "freie deutsche / jugend," "brüder zur sonne")[86] and assails their meaning through enjambment:

> mach mit unter dem
> ehrenbanner schrittmaß
> achtzig nationale
> front freie deutsche
> jugend mit der waffe in
> der hand zum wohle des volkes schöner
> unsere brüder zur sonne

[86] "Brüder zur Sonne" was an East German propagandistic song from the *Aufbau* period. "Freie Deutsche Jugend" is the name given to the state youth organization.

die staatsoper macht ergreifende stücke.[87]

Though Boyer helps us reconsider this literature in the history and context in which it is embedded, the link between Prenzlauer Berg's texts and the GDR cannot be fully explained by the two poets' collaboration with the Stasi that Boyer underscores.

In his epilogue to *The Powers of Speech* (1996), David Bathrick rightly rejects claims that the PB Scene was Stasi-run as inaccurate. He likewise rightly insists on situating this collective within the East German socialist public sphere, though he does so in a particular way from which I will also deviate. According to Bathrick, the poets' assertion of an absolute linguistic outside fails to acknowledge their own criticism of a critical dialogue with power that had been conducted by the poets' generational predecessors (Bathrick 240). Bathrick's criticism of the PB poets concerns the poets' insight, gleaned from their study of Foucault, into how issues of complicity and resistance manifest at the level of speech acts: any effort at potential opposition would be subverted by the dominant power. In launching their own opposition, however, the poets fail to act on their own insight that any discourse, regardless of its intention or political gesture, is necessarily situated within the boundaries of power, Bathrick concludes (239).

While I agree with Bathrick's assessment of the poets' sometimes naïve proclamations of *Aussteigertum*, his critique elides the contradictory structure of both critical distance from and repetition of the discursive representation of official power in the GDR, a contradiction that, I argue, is integral to many of PB texts. To achieve such contradiction, the texts simultaneously appropriate and assail official East German language – a discourse comprised of official media, Party slogans and related paraphernalia (such as bureaucratic forms). A collage made in 1988 by the East German-Chilean artist Guillermo Deisler for the unofficial monthly *Uni/vers* is particularly illustrative of such strategies, insofar as it is comprised almost entirely of the

[87] Schedlinski, Rainer. "mach mit." *Schaden* 4 (1984): n. pag.

material and textual detritus of East German bureaucracy and print media. Deisler's piece disrupts the meaning of individual elements through its overlaying of fragments and the word "ungültig" stamped across them. It incorporates its critical commentary solely through its structure, which simultaneously subverts the found texts that are otherwise constitutive of the piece. This and other similar PB texts raise the question of why these poets would launch their critiques of East German discourse exclusively through its partial repetition.

Broadly conceived, this chapter reevaluates both the artistic production and the general scholarly reception of the third-generation PB poets, by situating their multimedial production in aesthetic and political relationship vis-à-vis the GDR. This relationship is one of active engagement, not the principled disassociation that previous scholars have stressed. I argue that the PB poets draw on representational paradigms appropriated from the historical avantgardes in order to repeat official East German language playfully, and in so doing, to expose it as having deteriorated into a travesty of a genuinely socialist discourse. While such playful repetition often pivots on destructive mimicry toward the emulated text, the pieces subject to analysis here for the most part also attempt to create possibilities for renewed signification of decaying language material. My analysis in this chapter concentrates on works by the PB poets and artists Jan Faktor, Uwe Warnke, and Karla Sachse, all of which originally appeared in unofficial GDR journals such as *und* (1982 – 84), *ariadnefabrik* (1986 – 89), and *Entwerter-Oder* (1982 – present). First though, the following section will examine two essays written by PB poets Kito Lorenc and Michael Thulin in 1985 and 1989-90 respectively. These essays register a sense of impoverished signification of official East German language in the 1980s, and will thus help us

situate Prenzlauer Berg's strategies of aesthetic appropriation in relation to a widespread

Fig. 5. Deisler, Guillermo. "Collage." *Uni/vers* 1 (1988).

linguistic deterioration of late GDR discourse. My enquiry into strategies that Prenzlauer Berg used in its programmatic and poetic texts and related interdisciplinary projects positions the poets' practices as what I want to call a critical assimilation of, not an evacuation from the linguistic and cultural malaise of the GDR in what proved to be its last decade.

II. The Difficulty of Dialogue

In the afterword to his 1984 poetry collection *Wortland*, Kito Lorenc, a second-generation East German-Sorbian writer associated with the Prenzlauer Berg group, remarks on a "'Gefühl-nicht-mehr-so-schreiben-zu-können'" that has infiltrated his authorial sensibility.[88] Lorenc attributes this feeling to a general linguistic malaise that engulfed the GDR in the 1980s, and that was caused by the pressure of the language of mass media and what he terms the "vorherrschenden öffentlichen 'Sprachregelungen'" (165). Lorenc then continues to catalog some of these linguistic aberrations within existing public discourse. The features he indicts range from "Grandiosität" – as in "Feierlichkeit," "Ausführlichkeit bei Amtsaufzählungen," "Pleonasmen," "aufgeblähte Formulierungen," and "Dingwortkrankheit" – to an excessive tendency toward sweeping generalizations and the overuse of rhetorical cliché (166). Lorenc's critical vocabulary registers the common denominator of the linguistic corruption he means as a kind of surplus – semantic, syntactical, and stylistic – which, like a disease ("Dingwortkrankheit"), infects a language iterating itself in prefabricated constructions. This linguistic surplus verges on semantic emptiness, as Lorenc makes apparent in the examples he provides of generalization and cliché.

An essay published immediately after the *Wende* by PB poet Michael Thulin with striking parallels to Lorenc further elaborates on this paradoxical excess and emptiness of official

[88] Lorenc, Kito. *Wortland*. Leipzig: Reclam, 1984. 155-67. 165.

East German language. Here Thulin attributes linguistic degradation to excessive repetition and schemic formulae circulated by GDR media; explaining their impact as follows:

> Daß den allseits herrschenden Sprachregelungen kein wirklicher Sinn mehr innewohnte, war nicht nur eine Erfahrung der frühen achtziger Jahre; es war ein generelles Dilemma. Die Worte waren besetzt und ihren Bedeutungen zugleich ent-setzt. Und durch die Einbindung auf eine Handvoll überschaubarer und abrufbarer Bedeutungsmuster schien Sprache schließlich den wichtigsten Teil ihrer kreativen und benennenden Kraft eingebüßt zu haben. Wer beispielsweise eine Zeitung zur Hand nahm, wußte Bescheid. Im Grunde wußte er es schon vorher: Mit dem Blick in die Zeitung verschwanden die Tatsachen. Zurück blieb nur das unbestimmte Gefühl, alles bereits gekannt und schon einmal genau so ähnlich gelesen zu haben – und die paradoxe Ohnmacht beim Zusammenknüllen der Seiten. (Arnold 234)

The dilemma to which Thulin refers is both, he suggests, particular to the late GDR as well as one that is more general to any prefabricated use of language (e.g. under Western bureaucracies). Dominated by Party politicians and state-sanctioned journalists, official East German language derives its meaning solely from its predetermined usage. Repeatedly deployed in readily available semantic patterns ("Bedeutungsmuster"), this language, according to Thulin, deteriorated into a skeleton of convention. "Occupied" – or "besetzt[e]" – language gradually becomes emptied of its content, becoming "ent-setzt" – or "de-occupied." For Thulin, official structures of repetition additionally inhibit the creative potential of this language. They make it a vehicle of stagnation despite the officially upheld doctrine of historical progress that in the 1980s still informed the socialist enterprise.[89] Later in his essay, Thulin describes a lingering feeling of familiarity he has when perusing an official newspaper as a "synästhetisch[e] Déjà-vu-Erfahrung" (Arnold 234), extending his perception of repetitive logic to all official cultural signs.

Yet perhaps most telling is Thulin's concluding violent description of scrunching up pages of a newspaper, a violent act which the author at the same time identifies as powerless.

[89] Fulbrook, Mary. *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker.* New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2005. 32.

Although the newspaper is destroyed, its language survives and will continue to reproduce itself. Thulin's image connotes the inviolability of official East German discourse, which by the 1980s foreclosed the possibility of dialogue. This is because by then such a discourse, as Thulin and Lorenc's testimonies suggest, continues to reproduce itself through signs without referents, as Thulin later explicitly contends where he calls the language of official East German media "eine Sprache ohne Botschaft, [...] Signifikant ohne Signifikat" (Arnold 235). What these accounts by Lorenz and Thulin suggest is that by the 1980s, the language of East German officialdom had deteriorated into a representational mode that Jean Baudrillard might term "simulation."[90] Instead of duplicating or even parodying reality – and thus still retaining a point of reference to it – simulation, according to Baudrillard, "bears no relation to reality whatsoever" because it substitutes signs of the real for the real itself (Baudrillard 4). This characteristic makes simulation impervious to intervention. In the context of Western avantgarde art and with reference to Baudrillard, Hal Foster also calls simulation a form of "social deterrence [...] – for how can one intervene in events when they are simulated or replaced by pseudoevents?"[91]

In search of critical strategies with which to penetrate a discourse impervious to dialogue, many PB poets appropriate and simultaneously assault such a discourse. Often they do so through ludic procedures, mimicking many of the same practices characteristic of the avantgardes – a label that here encompasses Dada, the montage of the Weimar period as well as the Swiss and South American concrete poetry movements of the 1950s and 1960s. Everything – from the pre-circulated, GDR-specific state-produced content of these works to the way they are assembled – is secondhand. The PB poets thus partially surrender their authorship as a

[90] Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulations*. Trans. Paul Foss and Philip Beitchman. New York: Semiotexte, 1983.
[91] Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century.* London, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996. 77.

polemical gesture in response to the state power's treatment of language, and explore avenues of literary production that refrain from perpetuating the ongoing linguistic domination by the state. However, the adaptation, which involves the repetition and formal and semantic reconfiguration of state-produced clichés and imagery, generates discrepancies that differentiate these texts from the thing reproduced. Even in the case of readymades (found objects selected to be artworks, which are thus the most extreme manifestation of reproduction, where all difference appears to have vanished) included in the unofficial PB journal *Entwerter-Oder* to be discussed in the penultimate section of this chapter, this graphic art still, contra Foster, highlights differences between the mimic and the mimicked. Otherwise highly distinct texts and multimedial pieces by PB poets and artists Jan Faktor, Uwe Warnke, and Karla Sachse reveal this shared form of mimicry to be actively engaged in the generation of new possibilities for ailing socialist discourse in the GDR, as my textual analyses will now show.

III. The Re-Grounding of Empty Language: Jan Faktor's "Manifeste der Trivialpoesie"

"Das erste Manifest der Trivialpoesie" (1982) is part of a series of texts with which Jan Faktor made his literary debut in the Prenzlauer Berg Scene between 1982 and 1983, approximately four years after the author's immigration to the GDR from his native Czechoslovakia. Though not politically motivated, Faktor's emigration was partially influenced by his disillusionment with the period of the so-called "normalization" that engulfed Czechoslovakia following the intervention of the troops of the Warsaw Pact to end the Prague Spring in 1968.[92] Altogether Faktor wrote four manifestos of "trivial poetry," which he initially

[92] The termination of the Prague Spring by the troops of the Warsaw Pact was followed by a period of "normalization" (*normalizace*), a term that, according to Jonathan Bolton, "captures the mixture of ironic resignation, boredom, and often despair that characterized the 1970s for many people, in particular for the writers, artists, and other intellectuals who had taken advantage of the newly creative public life of the 1960s." Bolton,

distributed in unofficial journals and as pamphlets, and later re-published in an officially sponsored collection of his texts.[93] In a recent interview, Faktor dismissed the manifestos as a "Dadaist joke" with which he had intended to make light of poetry as such, but he also asserted that in relation to their GDR context of emergence, the texts were originally meant to communicate "more serious thoughts."[94]

Das erste Manifest der Trivialpoesie

Trivialpoesie ist die Poesie des alleinstehenden Satzes
Trivialpoesie ist die Poesie des Satzes ohne Kontext
Trivialpoesie ist die Poesie der Reduktion
Trivialpoesie ist die Poesie des vom Verstand nicht getrübten Gefühls

Trivialpoesie muß man als eine Reaktion verstehen
als die einzige tatsächlich konsequente Reaktion
Trivialpoesie ist die einzige tatsächlich konsequente Reaktion auf _
Poesie die mit Inhalten vollgestopft ist
Trivialpoesie ist die einzige tatsächlich konsequente Reaktion auf_
die Poesie der Zusammenhänge
einzige tatsächliche Reaktion auf die Poesie die den_
Ausweg hinter den uneinnehmbaren Barrikaden komplizierter_
Betrachtungen sucht
einzige tatsächliche Reaktion auf alle Abarten literarischen_
Bemühens die den voll ausreichenden Rahmen eines Satzes überschreiten
Beispiel Nr. 1: ! **Ich habe Hunger**

Der Sinn der Trivialpoesie liegt in ihrer subversiv oppositionellen_
Wirkung (1 – 18)

The manifesto begins by opposing "trivial poetry" to lyric that looks for a "solution [*Ausweg*] behind impenetrable barricades of complicated_ / observations" (9 – 11), thus signaling a crisis of language and culture to which "trivial poetry" offers a solution of its own. The two forms of poetry continue to be contrasted throughout the manifesto, whereby the

Jonathan. *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, The Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012. 14.

[93] Faktor, Jan. *Georgs Versuche an einem Gedicht und andere positive Texte aus dem Dichtergarten des Grauens*. Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau, 1989. 87 – 91.

[94] This information was given to me in an unpublished interview I conducted with Faktor, on June 2, 2015 in Berlin-Pankow.

principles of trivial poetry are outlined in mostly negative terms (i.e. through absence). The text first rejects poetry that is "stuffed full of contents" (8), proclaiming trivial poetry to manifest itself only in isolated, decontextualized sentences, and to be devoid of loquaciousness (14 – 15), indexicality and rhetorical aspiration (19 – 22):

> Trivialpoesie erklärt niemandem etwas
> Trivialpoesie demonstriert nichts
> Trivialpoesie zeigt auf nichts
> Trivialpoesie will und wird keinen von etwas überzeugen wollen (19 – 22)

Classical poetic tools, ranging from poetic imagery to assonance and rhyme, are likewise rejected:

> Trivialpoesie ist Antwort auf die Aufdringlichkeit der Sprache_
> des untrivialen Dichtens
> Trivialpoesie weiß nicht was bildliches Denken und was Übertragen_
> von Bedeutung ist
> weiß nicht was stilistische Figuren sind
> sie kennt kein Epitheton kein Symbol keinen Neologismus
> es ist ihr nichts fremder als Allegorie
> sie ekelt sich vor Lautmalerei und vor der Arbeit mit dem Rhythmus
> meidet Alliteration
> und Assonanz und Reim haben im eindimensionalen Raum der_
> Trivialpoesie keinen Platz (70 – 80)

The text discloses more about its objects of attack than it does about new poetic principles it overtly purports to outline. In other words, it describes the nature of the crisis alluded to in lines 1 – 3 by blacklisting a slew of properties and devices through which crisis has allegedly been fueled. For instance, in the opening four sections (1 – 22), the manifesto attacks contextualization, "complicated observations" and rhetoric. In so doing, it targets politically committed literature or any literature that evinces tendentiousness or an advocacy of a partisan position. At stake for Faktor is neither the support nor the dismissal of any particular political disposition. This point is spelled out in the opening of the third manifesto, which declares trivial

poetry to have "einen Abscheu vor sogennanter engagierter Kunst_ / und zwar unabhängig davon wie und wofür sich diese engagiert."[95] Rather, Faktor's first manifesto assails usage that instrumentalizes, manipulates and otherwise imposes itself on language that has already been strained to its breaking point.

The manifesto also explicitly shuns traditional aesthetic devices such as the use of stylistic figures, symbols, allegories, and rhythm (70 – 80). These features are ascribed to "untriviale[n] Dichten," which puts a strain on language because it solidifies language through combining, prearranging and encoding it in poetic imagery, neologisms, and phonetic patterns. The text's insistence on abandoning classical poetic tools is so vehement it utilizes the underscore instead of the line break. As Faktor explains in a related essay, the underscore denotes the graphic overflowing of a sentence to the following line and thus avoids creating an enjambement.[96]

Underlying the first manifesto's disparate objects of rejection is a common denominator. In light of the context in which Faktor wrote the piece, Antonia Grünenberg, who has written the most extensive analysis of this text to date, traces this commonality to socialist realism, East Germany's prevalent cultural doctrine at the time.[97] Grünenberg is right insofar as the manifesto's irreverent evocation of another, "untriviale" or "übrige dichterische Produktion" (69, 54-5), which is semantically overdetermined ("mit Inhalten vollgestopft"), persuasive ("überzeugen"), and incorporates tradition, brings to mind several key socialist realist tenets.[98]

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[95] Faktor, Jan. "Das dritte Manifest der Trivialpoesie" (Faktor, "Georgs Versuche" 95 – 98. 95). Lines 1 – 3.
[96] Faktor's idiosyncratic system of punctuation is explained in a separate short piece titled "Anmerkungen zur Interpunktion." Faktor, Jan. *Georgs Versuche an einem Gedicht*. 34-5.
[97] Grünenberg, Antonia. "Vogel oder Käfig sein: Zur 'zweiten' Kultur und zu den inoffiziellen Zeitschriften in der DDR." Eckart, Frank. *Eigenart und Eigensinn: Alternative Kulturszenen in der DDR (1980 – 1990)*. Bremen: Edition Temen, 1993. 75-92. 87.
[98] Socialist realism emerged in the USSR between 1932 and 1934 and by 1934 became a nation-wide cultural policy. A modified version of the doctrine was accepted as the official policy of the newly established East German state in the early 1950s. Related documents published in 1951 by the Central Committee of the Sozialistische Einheitspartei

Grünenberg's assessment is nevertheless reductive for two reasons. For one, several of the manifesto's objects of attack – including wordiness and complexity (12-5) are too general to refer to a particular set of programmatic principles, even if socialist realism's notorious "conceptual poverty" is taken into account.[99] Second, if some of these principles do indeed allude to cultural norms of Party policies in the GDR, they are merely portrayed as endemic to what I argue to be a more pervasive crisis within East German language. This becomes apparent when in 53 – 55 the text summarily labels its many objects of rejection as burdensome "Ballast," yet draws a permeable boundary between "Ballast" and "[der] übrige[n] dichterische[n] Produktion":

> Trivialpoesie kämpft gegen den Ballast der die Sache der Poesie bedroht
> Trivialpoesie setzt mit neuen Mitteln den Kampf fort den die übrige_
> dichterische Produktion früher oder später verlieren müßte (53-5)

According to the passage above, although the remaining literary production has failed to save the poetic cause from invasion by "Ballast," the threat that "Ballast" poses to poetry does not emanate from this literature. "Ballast" represents something akin to a linguistic crisis that encroaches on this literature from without, and in which this literature is merely implicated.

Given that the manifesto rejects, among other things, "content," "observations," and "pointing" (21), the term "Ballast" could be taken to denote the burdening of the signifier by the signified. Yet Faktor's manifesto does not reject merely content but excessive content; not observations in general, but impenetrable ones (8 – 13). Moreover, the few examples of trivial poetry that the manifesto includes retain a form of signification, rather than trying to do away

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Deutschlands (SED), reject "formalism," and list the portrayal of "typical characters under typical circumstances of our time" (Engels), pedagogy, and a commitment to classical heritage as key socialist realist principles. Jarmatz, Klaus. *Kritik in der Zeit.* Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1978. 248-53. The principles continued to be negotiated and expanded throughout the existence of the East German state.

[99] Devin Fore argues that the lack of firm aesthetic principles rendered socialist realism a "voracious" doctrine and an heir to potentially all previous artistic schools. Fore, Devin. *Realism after Modernism: The Rehumanization of Art and Literature*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2012. 244.

with it by, for instance, producing an inarticulate or nonsensical text. The new poetry Faktor calls for and demonstrates with his "examples" (*Beispiele*) of trivial poetry is reduced in form, vocabulary, syntax, and devoid of traditional poetic devices. It manifests in simple declarations such as "Ich habe Hunger," "Ich bin so allein" and "Ich bin glücklich" (16, 49, 90), which are interspersed throughout the text and highlighted in bold as trivial poetry *par excellence*. While such facile, indeed, trivial affective expressions and vitalist gestures according to Faktor's own admission make light of poetry as such, the embrace of the first-person singular pronoun *ich* – capable of referring to different speakers in different contexts – evinces a shift from a flawed referential system to a different type of sign known as the index.

In a postscript included with his manifesto, Faktor calls his own text inconsequential and mystifying (91). Here, an aporia arises when, contrary to the manifesto's initial rejection of poetic language that points and demonstrates, the text – far from disavowing referentiality – evinces a recourse to the indexical. The two opposing positions cannot ultimately be reconciled: in this regard, the paradox is exemplary of Faktor's indebtedness to Dada.[100] To give a brief definition as surmised by Bianca Theisen in her work on the exploration of the indexical by contemporary Austrian literature: the index, according to Umberto Eco's definition of the term on which Theisen draws, is a sign that "indicates closeness as signified content."[101] "/ This / does not acquire meaning because something is close to it," writes Theisen, "on the contrary it signifies that there must be something close to it. Because of their context-sensitivity, indexical

[100] As Richard Sheppard has argued, Dada resists binary thinking in favor of a form of thinking for which Sheppard uses the shorthand "yes and no." This contradiction embraces creative, destructive, incomprehensible or not easily assimilable experiences. It simultaneously rejects that which is rigid and constricting in order to live to the full amid the flux of modernity. Sheppard, Richard. *Modernism - Dada - Postmodernism*. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern, 1999. 189 – 96.

[101] Theisen, Bianca. *Silenced Facts: Media Montages in Contemporary Austrian Literature.* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2003. 6 – 7. Before adopting Umberto Eco's definition of the index, Theisen departs from Charles Sander Peirce's definition of the index as a sign "physically linked to its object," such as, for instance, "tracks in snow, traces of circumstantial evidence, or imprints of reality transcribed in the photograph," a definition which in Theisen's view, however, tends to exclude non-verbal pointers, deictic pointers and shifters (6).

propositions are incomplete and demand supplementation" (Theisen 6 – 7). Examples of the indexes include non-verbal and deictic pointers and shifters, which are linguistic signs "filled with signification because they are empty."[102] Personal pronouns such as "I" or "you" belong to this category because their referent keeps changing places, e.g., across the space of a conversation (Krauss 69).

Returning to Faktor, the few examples of trivial poetry given by the manifesto are limited to affects and bodily perceptions uttered in the first person singular. This way, the new poetry Faktor invokes ultimately points to a referent behind the signifier "ich," of the poetic voice, thus re-grounding the manifesto's language in a physical presence that such language entails. In so doing, Faktor disposes of empty language because it has been overburdened and its referents eroded, and instead deploys an indexical language "'filled with signification' only because it is 'empty'" (Krauss 70). To re-ground his poetic language further, Faktor also mobilizes visual possibilities afforded by his texts. In this, Faktor's texts owe much of their effect to concrete poetry, additionally expanding on the principles of this avantgarde.[103] Of particular relevance here is the author's use of the surrounding white space of the page, which he explains in an essay on his idiosyncratic punctuation as follows: "Sätze, die 'überfließen,' werden mit Gedankenstrich gekennzeichnet; Sätze, Satzteile dagegen, die erst nach einer Zäsur ausgesprochen werden sollen (also kein Gedankenstrich), fangen am Anfang neuer Zeilen an" (Faktor 34). In other words, Faktor's manifesto uses the negative white space for its mute presence. For instance, the blank space that follows after lines 1 and 2 visually enacts the demarcation and decontextualizion, for which the poem advocates:

[102] Theisen 6 – 7. Shifters are also discussed in Krauss, Rosalind. "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America." *October* 3 (1977): 68-81. 69 – 70.

[103] Broadly speaking, a concrete poem's visual presentation is key to the meaning of the work. In concrete poetry, the "structural relations of the words, rather than any particular image suggested by them, [...] gives their visual presentation value." Jackson, Kenneth David, Eric Vos, and Johanna Drucker. *Experimental - Visual - Concrete: Avant-Garde Poetry Since the 1960s*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996. 40.

Trivialpoesie ist die Poesie des alleinstehenden Satzes
Trivialpoesie ist die Poesie des Satzes ohne Kontext (1-2)

Similarly, the blank space that succeeds the line "das Schweigen des trivialen Dichters gehört auch zu seinem Werk" (114) evokes silence with the signifier "Schweigen" while at the same time producing it with the mute fact of the empty page. To conclude, even though Faktor's "Das erste Manifest der Trivialpoesie," for the most part, recapitulates aspects of a widespread crisis, the fundamental undertaking of this text – to generate a poetry immune to the crisis – is not an entirely empty promise. While the text attacks an ongoing "burdening" of language that has become overdetermined and impenetrable, Faktor's recourse to indexicality seeks to mobilize body and page as referential sites, in function if not in content, as a missing presence that asks to be read.

IV. The Visual Poetry of *Entwerter-Oder*

If Faktor's visual innovations help resuscitate the overburdened East German language, in the PB magazine *Entwerter-Oder*, by contrast the visual and physical substance of language alone no longer offers ways in which this discourse is to be revitalized. Here the visual is already thoroughly integrated into what Michael Thulin with reference to official East German newspapers describes as a synesthetic déjà-vu (Arnold 234). One of the oldest magazines of the PB Scene, *Entwerter-Oder* was founded in 1982 by the poet and publisher Uwe Warnke, who coined the journal's titular pun as a tribute to the irreverent Austrian language poet Ernst Jandl.[104] The journal's physical appearance is remarkably heterogeneous, partially deriving from the publication's limited production in *samizdat*, partially also parodying the notion of the

[104] This information was given to me in my interview with Uwe Warnke in June 2011 in Berlin-Friedrichshain.

literary journal. Cardboard, newspapers and other everyday materials often serve as the magazine's dust jackets:

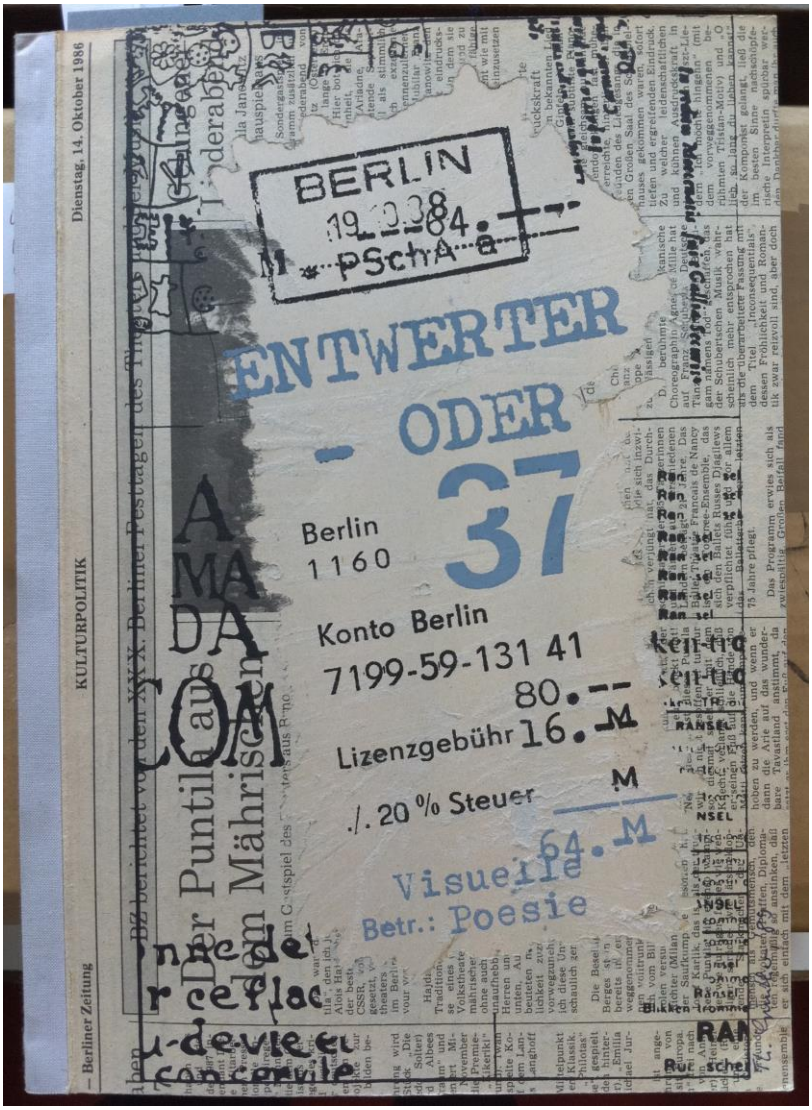


Fig. 6. Dust jacket of *Entwerter* - *Oder* 37 (1988).

The majority of the readymades included in the magazine are of recognizably East German provenance:

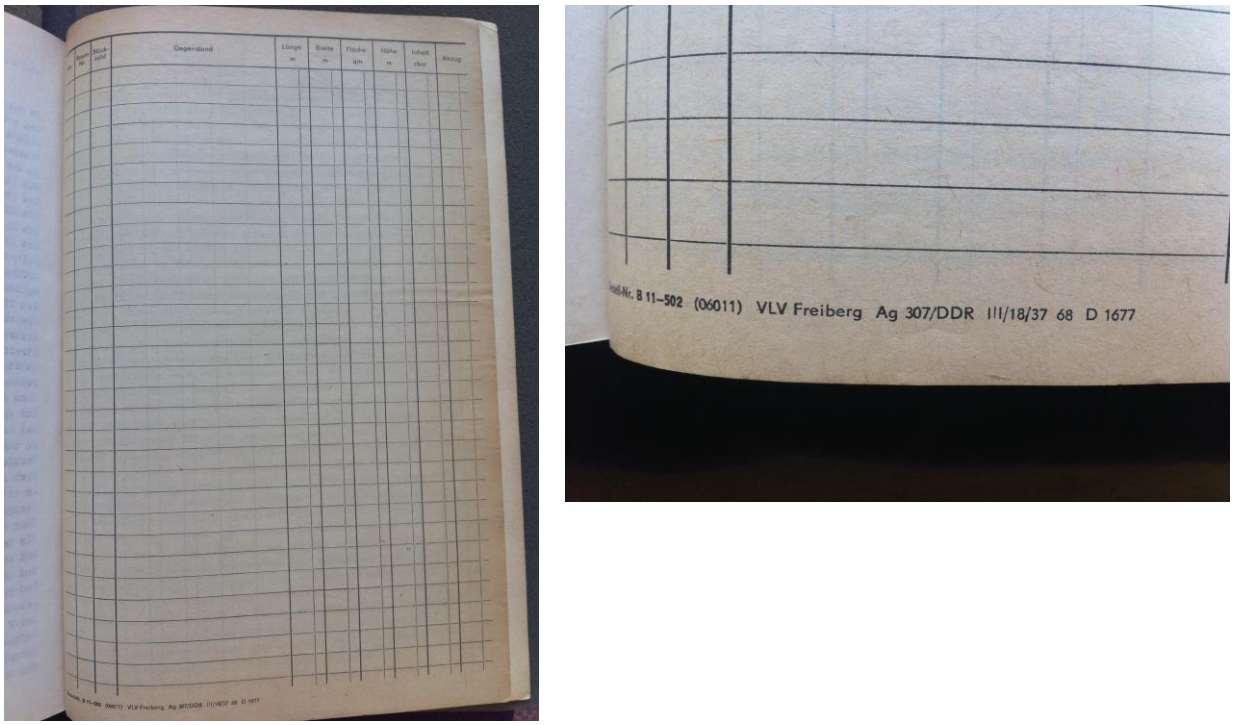
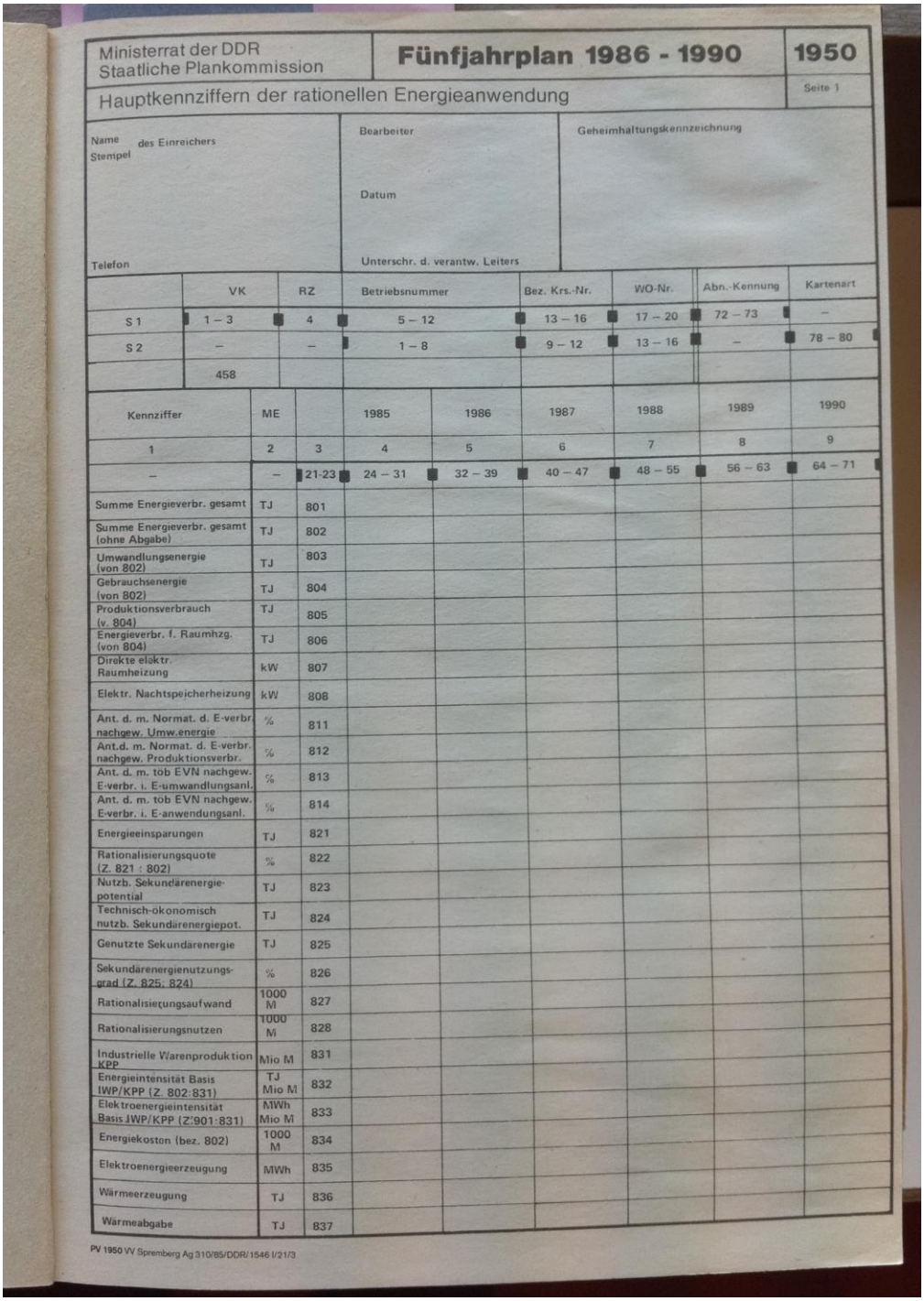


Fig. 7. A readymades included in *Entwerter – Oder* (detail on the right-hand side).

Such pieces are, on the one hand, material and linguistic extensions of late East German bureaucracy. On the other hand, the re-presentation of these forms in the journal as readymades additionally exposes the ossification of official language into itemizations, number series, and impenetrable acronyms, as well as the compartmentalization of this language into grids and templates. Warnke subjects these reproduced official signifiers to referential undercuttings, exacerbating the ongoing mimetic deterioration of GDR language, and its underlying replicative logic – a repetition of repetition, in other words. One such piece from early 1989 apparently stipulates the country's increasingly rationalized energy policy from 1986 to 1990 – so in retrospect, beyond the existence of the GDR Ministry that had issued document:



Ministerrat der DDR
Staatliche Plankommission

Fünfjahrplan 1986 - 1990

1950

Seite 1

Hauptkennziffern der rationellen Energieanwendung

Name des Einreichers
Stempel

Telefon

Bearbeiter

Datum

Unterschr. d. verantw. Leiters

Geheimhaltungskennzeichnung

	VK	RZ	Betriebsnummer	Bez. Krs.-Nr.	WO-Nr.	Abn.-Kennung	Kartenart
S 1	1 – 3	4	5 – 12	13 – 16	17 – 20	72 – 73	–
S 2	–	–	1 – 8	9 – 12	13 – 16	–	78 – 80
	458						

Kennziffer	ME		1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
–	–	21-23	24 – 31	32 – 39	40 – 47	48 – 55	56 – 63	64 – 71
Summe Energieverbr. gesamt	TJ	801						
Summe Energieverbr. gesamt (ohne Abgabe)	TJ	802						
Umwandlungsenergie (von 802)	TJ	803						
Gebrauchsenergie (von 802)	TJ	804						
Produktionsverbrauch (v. 804)	TJ	805						
Energieverbr. f. Raumhzg. (von 804)	TJ	806						
Direkte elektr. Raumheizung	kW	807						
Elektr. Nachtspeicherheizung	kW	808						
Ant. d. m. Normat. d. E-verbr. nachgew. Umw.energie	%	811						
Ant.d. m. Normat. d. E-verbr. nachgew. Produktionsverbr.	%	812						
Ant. d. m. töb EVN nachgew. E-verbr. i. E-umwandlungsanl.	%	813						
Ant. d. m. töb EVN nachgew. E-verbr. i. E-anwendungsanl.	%	814						
Energieeinsparungen	TJ	821						
Rationalisierungsquote (Z. 821 : 802)	%	822						
Nutzb. Sekundärenergie-potential	TJ	823						
Technisch-ökonomisch nutzb. Sekundärenergiepot.	TJ	824						
Genutzte Sekundärenergie	TJ	825						
Sekundärenergienutzungs-grad (Z. 825: 824)	%	826						
Rationalisierungsaufwand	1000 M	827						
Rationalisierungsnutzen	1000 M	828						
Industrielle Warenproduktion KPP	Mio M	831						
Energieintensität Basis IWP/KPP (Z. 802:831)	TJ Mio M	832						
Elektroenergieintensität Basis IWP/KPP (Z:901:831)	MWh Mio M	833						
Energiekoston (bez. 802)	1000 M	834						
Elektroenergieerzeugung	MWh	835						
Wärmeerzeugung	TJ	836						
Wärmeabgabe	TJ	837						

PV 1950 VV Spremberg Ag 310/85/DDR/1546 I/21/3

Fig. 8. A readymade. *eNDwerter-Oder* 12 (1989).

The seriality that the document reproduces evokes forces of mechanization, standardization, and mass production. In this sense, the work could be understood as akin to the readymades

fashioned in pop art and the consumption-critical commodity sculpture in a Western, capitalist context.[105] Here however, institutional context and seriality work together to reveal the presupposition of a future as belied by repetitive practices.

By contrast, visual poems by Warnke and Sachse move away from re-presenting ossified language material, instead enabling – to varying degrees – its novel re-assemblage. In Warnke's "Sprachkomplex II" (1985), language has been reduced to basic building blocks:

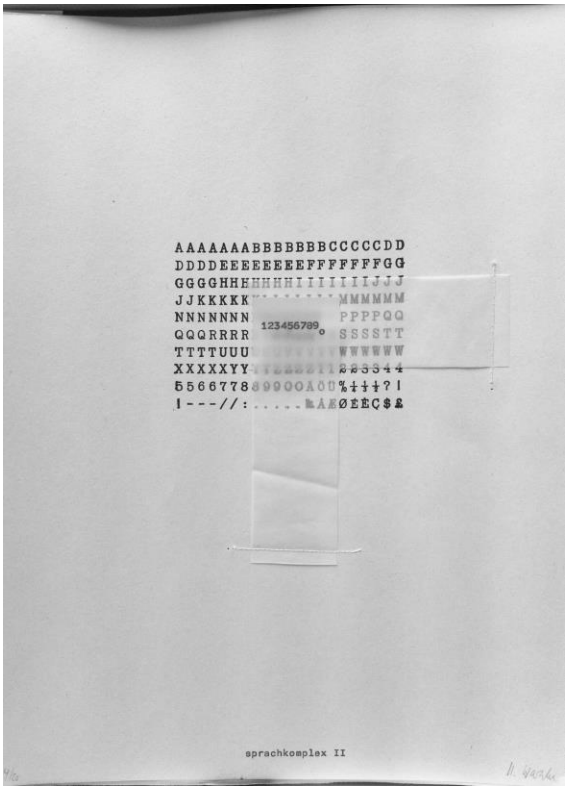


Fig. 9. Warnke, Uwe. *Sprachkomplex II*. 1985.

This piece consists of letters, numbers and symbols Warnke that had stamped on a blank piece of card stock in the shape of a neat quadrangle. Covering the quadrangle are two overlapping

[105] "Commodity sculpture" is a trend in art from the United States of the Reagan years. Commodity sculptors such as Jeff Koons and Haim Steinbach elaborated on the readymades of pop art, which merely mimicked the serial, industrial production of commodities, by commissioning works at once elaborate and kitchy, through which they additionally portrayed commodities and their consumption as "vehicles of distinction" (Foster 112).

pieces of tracing paper that have been sewn to the main sheet of paper. The transparent elements feature four additional sequences of numbers and letters, as they are typically arranged on a typewriter keyboard. The poem's language appears to have been liberated from representational function and semantic usage and rendered both abstract and minimalist. Through both its uneven repetition of individual signs, whereby vowels form especially long sequences, as well as its visible presentation of letters in their positive and mirror image form, the piece foregrounds sonorous and visual aspects of its own linguistic composition:

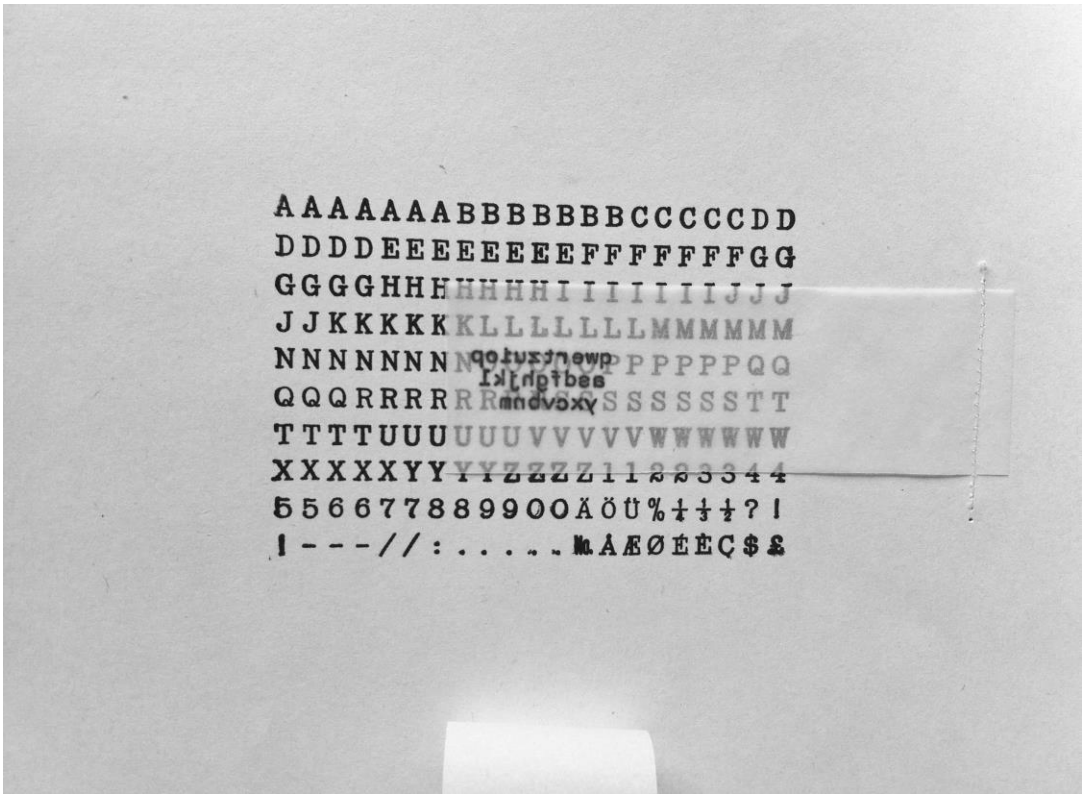


Fig. 10. Warnke, Uwe. *Sprachkomplex II*. Detail.

The vertical layering of variously transparent materials, moreover, enables a visual merging of two distinct alphabet sets. By using the structuring capacity of the typewriter and a geometric organization of preprinted capital letters, the piece encourages multi-directional reading (that is

to say, horizontal, vertical, and diagonal). It encourages novel constellations and permutations, enhanced by visual, sonorous, and tactile dimensions. The poem thus provides a rich linguistic arsenal from which almost anything within the confines of the Latin alphabet can be made.

At the same time, "Sprachkomplex II" operates within a tightly regulated economy of available linguistic material and its preestablished usage, in which varying degrees of reproduction and creation apply. The main block of signs was stamped on – rather than assembled – using a template from a children's printing press Warnke had purchased in the GDR in the 1980s.[106]

Fig. 11. Children's printing play set used by Warnke for *Sprachkomplex II*.

In the children's play set – and consequently in Warnke's imprint of it – each sign is repeated in proportion to its frequency in East German language usage at the time; likewise, the symbols were pre-selected and included with the letters and numbers depending on their prevalence.[107] Warnke's "Sprachkomplex II" thus first stages a flight of language from context, only to re-immerse this language back in the same context. Perhaps most emblematic of this playful

[106] This information was given to me in my interview with Warnke on July 30, 2015.
[107] These two pieces of information were likewise given to me in my interview with Warnke on July 30, 2015.

tension is the poem's rectangular shape. Although this rectangle encourages multidirectional and multilayered ways of reading, it nevertheless maintains its rigidity of form, preventing an irretrievable rupturing of the pre-given.

If Warnke's piece straddles the line between dismantling and reinstating encrusted and reproduced material, Karla Sachse's visual poem "Collage," produced in 1989 goes a step further. Sachse's "Collage" consists of a paper bag, stamped with official slogans, insignia, and an imprint of the Volkseigener Betrieb "Optima" where the object had been made:

Fig. 12. Sachse, Karla. *Collage.* 1989.

Fig. 13 and 14. Sachse, Karla. *Collage.* 1989. Details.

Fig. 15. Sachse, Karla. *Collage.* 1989. Detail.

By adding a receipt for "ein Kilo überreife Tomaten" to the pieces, Sachse injects a theme of imminent decay into the reproduction of optimist vocabulary. Yet on the inside, the artist also includes preprinted cut-up letters of the alphabet.

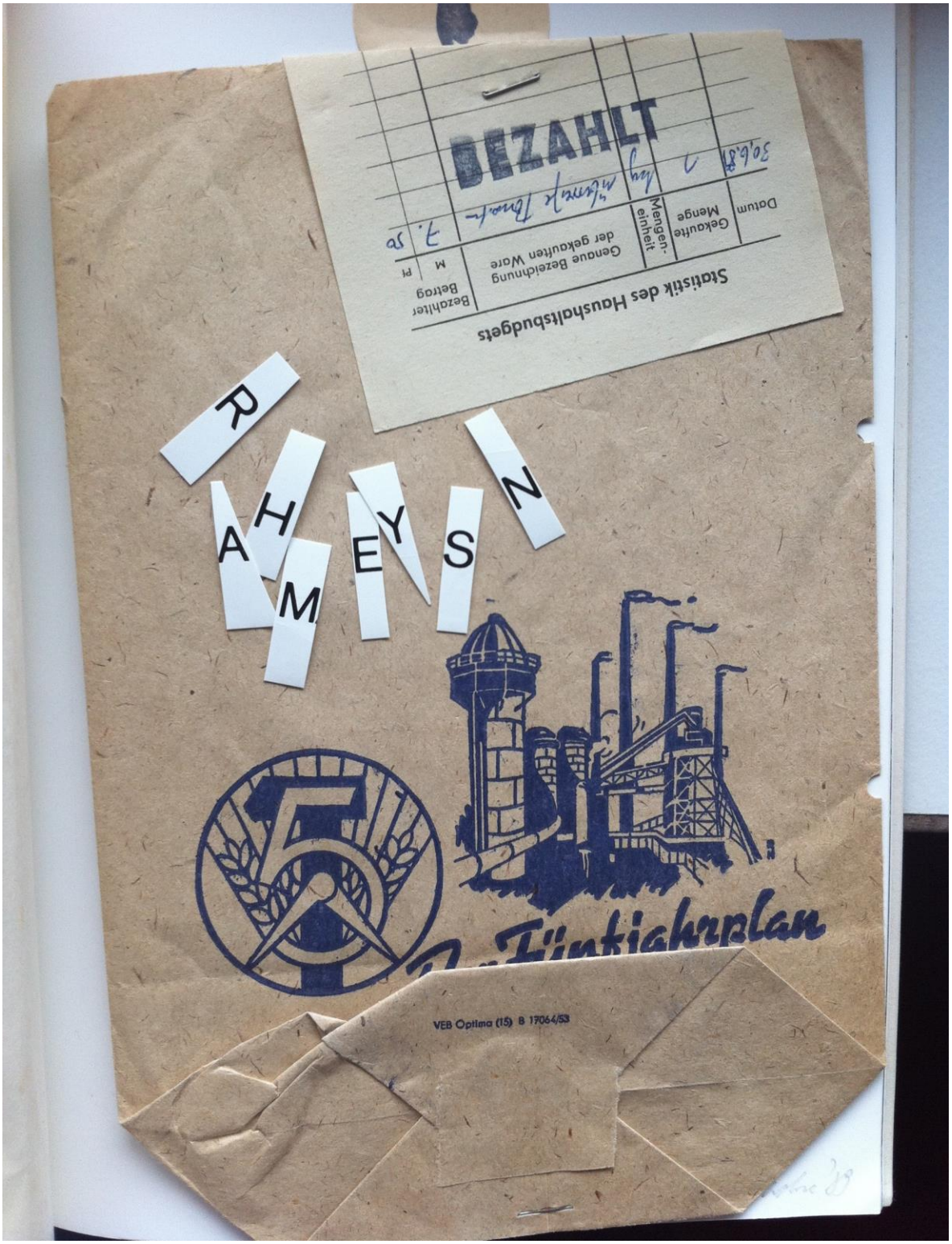


Fig. 16. Sachse, Karla. *Collage.* 1989. Detail.

This language has been fully reduced to its elementary building blocks: while the paper bag features two colors and an embellished font, the cut-up letters are black and white, and printed using a clean typeface without serifs. Such language components can be reassembled into novel linguistic formations and even enter into new constellations with the reproduced textual and visual elements. In Sachse's piece, destructive practices of aesthetic appropriation and fragmentation break apart incorporated material with an eye to its more active reconstruction.

The paper bag featured in Sachse's piece, together with her deployment of the cut-up technique references an earlier text produced by the Romanian-French Dadaist poet Tristan Tzara in 1920. Tzara's text is a "recipe" for how to make use of the technique of collage in order to recombine existing linguistic materials for the composition of poetic texts:

> TO MAKE A DADAIST POEM
>
> Take a newspaper.
> Take some scissors.
> Choose from this paper an article of the length you want to make your poem.
> Cut out the article.
> Next carefully cut out each of the words that makes up this article and put them all in a bag.
> Shake gently.
> Next take out each cutting one after the other.
> Copy conscientiously in the order in which they left the bag.
> The poem will resemble you.
> And there you are – an infinitely original author of charming sensibility, even though unappreciated by the vulgar herd.[108]

Tzara's proposed poetic process is de-skilled, anti-subjective, and opposed to genius notions of creativity. Tzara hands the process of selecting preexisting material over to chance and eliminates even the last remnants of an artist's touch from the creative process by advising to use a pair of scissors, rather than separating individual words of the newspaper by hand. The basis of this poetic process is an insistence on what Johanna Drucker with respect to Tzara's cut-and-

[108] Tzara, Tristan. "Chance Words." The Museum of Modern Art. Web. 22 July 2015.

paste poetic experiments terms the "social and communal character of language," where an instance of poetic expression is reduced to an incidental utterance within the linguistic field (Jackson, Vos 41). "The poem" – composed entirely of appropriated, reassembled elements – "will resemble you," writes Tzara. With no small amount of irony, Tzara continues to describe the author who operates in such a way as "infinitely original," having just overturned the myth of the solitary artistic genius who creates *ex nihilo*. Tzara and Sachse's works emerge at two very different historical moments – in the aftermath of the First World War and in the "really existing socialist" state that soon after ceased to exist. Despite these very different sets of circumstances, to Sachse, Tzara's manual provides a formal blueprint for conceiving of the writing self when the discourse in which this self is implicated has become compromised.[109]

V. Conclusion: Prenzlauer Berg and Authorship

Sachse's appropriation of official GDR language is on the one hand critical of it, while at the same time allowing her to acknowledge her participation in – and constitution by – her linguistic milieu and, by implication, the socialist system. Similarly, Warnke and Deisler's collages and readymades reassemble the quotidian and the non-artistic, exposing the mimetic deterioration **i**nflicted on this language by the state apparatus of the SED. Faktor's "Das erste Manifest der Trivialpoesie," furthermore, surveys the effect such deterioration had on literature and culture in

[109] The widening of the official canon in the GDR of the 1970s gave the green light to several publications and exhibitions on the avantgardes and in particular on Dada in the late 1970s and 1980s. To claim that the state gave full, unobstructed access to what it had previously censored, would be an exaggeration. For instance, in a 1986 text dedicated to Hans Arp, the East German poet Elke Erb remarks that "Band 1 [of Arp's writings], Wiesbaden '64 ist in der Uni- und in der Staatsbibliothek 'nicht am Platz,' und 'vermißt.' So bin ich auf die Texte beschränkt, die bei mir sind." Erb, Elke. "Ich bin in Strassbourg geboren: Notizen zu Arp. *ariadnefabrik* 1 (1986): 13-22. 18. Nevertheless, Erb's observation also shows that the PB writers owned and discussed texts by Dada artists and writers. At times, moreover, it seems that the PB poets additionally consulted new editions that were being published in the late GDR. In an essay from 1986, Gerhard Wolf relates Papenfuß's writing to the influence of Kurt Schwitters's Dadaist poetry, which, as Wolf makes explicit, had recently been published in the GDR for the first time: "Eben erschien ein erster Auswahlband von Schwitters in der DDR." Wolf, Gerhard. "Zu einem Aspekt junger Lyrik in der DDR: 3. und 4. Ansatz." *ariadnefabrik* 4 (1986): 2 – 14. 11.

the GDR. The poets and artists' remarkable reliance on GDR discourse, which is moreover incongruous with their ostensible attitude of rejection toward the socialist state, is perhaps most concisely captured in Warnke's response to the question as to why he had composed his pieces solely from the preexisting and the found: "Es gab kein anderes Material."[110] In such pieces, the writing – or reassembling – self is either disavowed or conceived as merely derivative. However, the potential for renewed, more robust language continues to be entertained throughout this diverse body of work, where recourse to the historical avantgardes represents a key component in these incipient efforts at formulating viable forms of writing. This component is noticeable both in Faktor's experimentation with the indexical re-grounding of his "trivial poetry," and in novel constellations elicited by Warnke and Sachse's multimedial texts well into the last few months of the existence of the East German state. This new language, to paraphrase Susan Buck-Morss's assessment of the peaceful revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989, was already being produced within the old socialist regime, rather than resulting from socialism's defeat.[111] Efforts to revive the GDR's socialist discourse situate the Prenzlauer Berg collective within a canon of committed twentieth-century avantgardes critical of but nevertheless dedicated to the communist cause.

[110] The citation is taken from interview with Warnke on July 30, 2015.
[111] Buck-Morss, Susan. *Dreamworld and Catastrophe the Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000. 228.

CHAPTER 3

A Communism Off the Frame: John Heartfield and His Legacy in the GDR

I. Introduction

In 1984, the East German underground circulated a poem titled "*Die Kunst ist in Gefahr*!" Written by the Prenzlauer Berg poet Jan Faktor, the poem consists of a list of words that appear to be related solely by their shared suffixes that have been distorted by the poem's peculiar orthography:

Die Kunst ist in Gefahr!

Drees
Regrees
Kongrees
Progrees
Exprees
Komtees
Akzees
Prinzees
Prozees
Abszees
Exzees
dees
Wortees
Textees
Bandees
Kunstees (1 – 16)[112]

Given these linguistic violations, it may at first seem that the title of the poem references a "danger" that the poem's experimentation poses to another, perhaps a more traditional notion of art. Yet this reading is complicated by the fact that the title of the poem is also a citation – and the italics indicate that we should know it is a quotation. The text that it cites had been written nearly sixty years earlier, in 1925, by the artist George Grosz and the poet and publisher Wieland

[112] Faktor, Jan. "Die Kunst ist in Gefahr!" *Liane: Poetikmaterialheft 1*. July 1989. 13. Faktor's poem was first presented at an underground meeting of the PB poets in spring 1984.

Herzfelde, at a time when communist writers of the Weimar period grappled with the question of what role art and the artist should be allocated in relation to the communist movement. In this particular text, "Die Kunst ist in Gefahr!" (1925), Grosz and Herzfelde propose that the communist struggle should be accompanied and aided by technically innovative art with a mass appeal.[113] In this chapter, I will first turn to this 1925 source text and its cultural prehistory. I will subsequently return to Faktor's poem in order to assess the significance of its formal experimentation from within the context of an already established, "really existing socialism" in East Germany.[114] With this comparison in mind, I will pursue the development of John Heartfield's photomontage during the Weimar period, because the development of Heartfield's work evinces considerable overlaps with the Soviet cultural program of socialist realism, yet departs from the doctrine in ways that would have a negative influence on the photomonteur's later reception in the officially socialist realist culture of the GDR.

For at least one of the authors of the source essay for the title of Faktor's poem, George Grosz, the view that an artist could have a place in the communist movement signaled a switch from a position that had ostensibly denied that possibility. Soon after joining the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) in 1920, two years after the end of the First World War and amidst the wake of Germany's failed revolution of 1918 – 1919, Grosz and Herzfelde's brother, the artist and fellow communist party member John Heartfield, started making collages with which they were hoping to expedite the demise of existing society. With violent compositions and fragmented forms Grosz and Hearfield wished to summon the destructive energies of the period and incite a communist-inspired revolt. The art of both past and present was, in their view,

[113] "Die Kunst ist in Gefahr: Ein Orientierungsversuch." Herzfelde, Wieland. *Zur Sache: Geschrieben und gesprochen zwischen 18 und 80.* Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau, 1976. 106-124. I am using a reprint of the essay, published in the GDR in 1976.
[114] Bahro, Rudolf. *Die Alternative: zur Kritik des real existierenden Sozialismus.* Köln: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1977.

unsuitable to fulfill these tasks and deserved to be vitiated. As Brigid Doherty documents, Grosz and Heartfield would enact their disdain toward the institution of art and its conventional practices by pasting cut-up and disassembled reproductions of past masterpieces into their collaged works.[115] The initial literary to this iconoclasm – to which "Die Kunst ist in Gefahr!" responds five years later – is a pamphlet that Grosz and John Heartfield co-authored in 1920. Titled "Der Kunstlump," the pamphlet denounces art for having thus far served to entertain bourgeois museum-goers, fostered respect for the wealthy, and in other ways propped up those in positions of economic power.[116] Responding to a period of civic unrest in the Weimar Republic in 1920, Grosz and Heartfield embrace the destruction of existing culture, a destruction which they understood as a sign of a disintegrating status quo. Briefly told, amidst bloody clashes between pro-democratic workers and rightwing militia, a stray bullet had sent through a gallery window damaged a painting by Rubens.[117] The latter prompted the artist and the pamphlet's titular "Kunstlump" Oskar Kokoschka to respond in an article in which he implored the street fighters to move their skirmishes to a place "wo menschliche Kultur nicht in Gefahr kommt" (as cited in Grosz, Heartfield 4). Responding to Kokoschka's article in turn, Grosz and Heartfield consider Kokoschka's primary concern for the masterpieces rather than the workers as typical of bourgeois artists, who are complicit with the conditions against which the workers have been demonstrating, by allying themselves with institutions hostile to social progress. The pamphlet

[115] Doherty, Brigid. "The Work of Art and the Problem of Politics in Berlin Dada." *October* 105 (Summer 2003): 73 – 92. 77.
[116] Heartfield, John and George Grosz. "Der Kunstlump." *Der Gegner* 1. 10 – 12 (April 1920): 48-56. I am citing from the manifesto as it was reprinted in Riha, Karl. *Dada Berlin. Texte. Manifeste, Aktionen.* Stuttgart: Reclam, 2002. 84-87.
[117] On March 12 1920 a street battle erupted in the German city of Dresden during a period of civic unrest in Germany that surrounded the so-called Kapp-Lüttwitz putsch of the constitutional government in Berlin. The fight took place between workers striking against the overthrowing of the government on the one side, and the *Reichswehr* troops loyal to the antidemocratic putschists on the other (Doherty 73). Dozens of people died and many more were wounded that day. The Dresden street battle took place near the city's Zwinger Museum, sending a bullet through the museum's window that damaged Rubens's painting *Bathsheba* from 1635 (Doherty 73).

then welcomes the flying of bullets into galleries and palaces – "in die Meisterbilder der Rubens" – rather than into working-class neighborhoods (6).

Contrary to how some contemporary readers understood the pamphlet, Grosz and Heartfield attempted with their anti-art rhetoric to deflate the social status of past culture and not advocate its literal destruction (Doherty 75). The authors criticize those who consider art as separate from, or superior to the society in which it is embedded, and tacitly demand an aesthetic revolution that would join in the political one, once art has been cleansed of all commercial and bourgeois interests.[118] Yet in spite of the pamphlet's explicit support of the communist cause, it was met with sharp criticism from the KPD's then chief art critic Gertrud Alexander, who condemned what she saw as Grosz and Heartfield's invitation to "vandalism."[119] In a response published by the party newspaper *Die Rote Fahne,* Alexander argues for the preservation of classical cultural heritage, so that in the post-revolutionary period it could serve the proletariat as both a source of pleasure and edification and as a cultural repository from which the proletariat will create their own, post-revolutionary culture (Brauneck 64, 71). By the same token, Alexander does not consider what she sweepingly terms contemporary art ("modernen Richtungen") useful to either the revolutionary struggle or post-revolutionary culture (Brauneck 72). She contends that even though a number of contemporary artists claim to be revolutionary – Heartfield and Grosz included – they ought to be unmasked as products of the bourgeoisie's

[118] Despite Berlin Dadaists' claims to have invented photomontage (simultaneously made by Grosz and Heartfield as well as by Raoul Hausmann and Hannah Höch), the technique originated in commercial advertising and the illustrated press. Buchloh, Benjamin H. D. "From Faktura to Factography." *October* 30 (Autumn 1984): 82 – 119. 98.

[119] Alexander, Gertrud. "Herrn John Heartfield und George Grosz." *Die Rote Fahne: Kritik, Theorie, Feuilleton 1918-1933.* Ed. Brauneck, Manfred. München: Wilhelm Fink, 1973. 63-65. 63. I am also paraphrasing Alexander's article "Kunst, Vandalismus und Proletariat: Erwiderung" (Brauneck 69-74), written a few days after Alexander's initial response to Grosz and Heartfield.

decay and disintegration.[120] The KPD's verdict lasted until 1926, when the Party recognized the political utility of Heartfield's photomontages, which in the meantime he had developed into his agitational and highly successful book covers and posters for the Malik Press, which belonged to his brother Wieland Herzfelde. Heartfield was enlisted for the Party's *Agitprop Abteilung* on the condition, however, that his work be treated as an unaesthetic "agitprop."[121] Working for the Malik Press and the KPD enabled the artist to develop what Andrés Zervigón has described as Heartfield's "most valuable contribution to interwar European culture: political propaganda based in the aesthetic invention of Germany's avantgarde" (194).

Heartfield, whose reception and legacy within German communist cultures will be the main focus of this chapter, did not author "Die Kunst ist in Gefahr!" (1925): the essay was authored by Grosz and Herzfelde. Nevertheless, I see the 1925 essay as representative of an aesthetic that also underpins Heartfield's agitational work. The later essay elaborates on the role of art in relation to the communist struggle, with some important departures from the position expounded in the earlier "Der Kunstlump." In the later essay, Grosz and Herzfelde explain that when the Dadaists ostensibly threatened art with destruction, earning the wrath of their opponents, who demanded that photomontaging Dadaists should keep their hands off "sacred art" (*heilige Kunst*), in reality the Dadaists were protesting what they saw as artists' indifference toward their social milieu (Herzfelde, "Die Kunst ist in Gefahr" 118). Despite alluding critically

[120] Soon after clashing with Heartfield and Grosz over "Der Kunstlump," Alexander published a scathing review of the First International Dada Fair, which was an exhibition in which both Grosz and Heartfield participated. In the review, Alexander is especially appalled by the fact that some of the exhibits deface the reproductions of past masterpieces, including the *Mona Lisa* and Boticelli's *Flora* (Brauneck 75). Alexander maintains that by wishing to harm the bourgeoisie, the Dadaists are merely drawn toward bourgeois decadence of which they themselves are a manifestation.

[121] In KPD's view, propaganda (conceived as the introduction of the basic elements of Marxist-Leninist theory to Party members) and agitation (the awakening of interest in this education and a means of drawing the workers out of passivity) could function only in combination with one another. Zervigón, Andrés. J*ohn Heartfield and the Agitated Image: Photography, Persuasion, and the Rise of Avant-garde Photomontage*. Chicago; London, 2012. 192. Agitational propaganda ("agitprop") was conceived of as an "unaesthetic and straightforwardly educative expression of 'proletarian-communistic ideas' in a colorful and pithy' [*plakativ*] style" (Gertrud Alexander as cited in Zervigón 193).

to Alexander's aesthetic conservatism, the 1925 essay also attempts to overcome a rift with the KPD over "Der Kunstlump," conceding that the Dadaists had misdirected their anger against the narrow and overrated institution of art, when they should have created and promoted politically tendentious art (*Tendenzkunst*) "im Dienste der revolutionären Sache" (Herzfelde, "Die Kunst ist in Gefahr" 119). Even in its amended form, however, Grosz and Herzfelde's vision of revolutionary art still departs from Alexander's aesthetic. Unlike Alexander, they see the need for progressive artists to acknowledge that the arrival of the illustrated press and the cinema has made traditionally mimetic art disciplines (such as painting) passé: "Mit der Erfindung der Photographie begann die Dämmerung der Kunst. Sie ging ihrer Rolle als Berichterstatterin verlustig. […] Hindenburgs leiddurchfurchtes Antlitz ist der Menschheit durch keinen Rembrandt, durch keinen Dürer erhalten. Von Dempseys Muskeln zeugt kein Michelangelo" (108). The "superior" (*überlegenen*) mimetic possibilities afforded by photographic technology have rendered traditional art "mühsehlig," and "unzeitgemäß" (109). The authors further praise photography for its documentary powers, speed, efficiency, timeliness, popular appeal, and for its potential for creating the conditions of a collective reception. Given the changes that new technologies such as photography have wrought onto art, artists who do not wish to become mere "Leerläufer" – that is, obsolete and vacuous social figures – are left with two options, according to Grosz and Herzfelde (124). They can either become their environment's designers, architects and engineers by joining the admittedly exploitative industry, or they can join the ranks of the oppressed as "Schilderer und Kritiker" and fight for social progress by shaping and spreading revolutionary ideas with methods appropriated from technologically advanced mass media (122-24). In both cases, the essay concludes, the notion of art as something inviolable and sacrosanct is rightfully "in danger" of being overcome.

The relative formal difficulty of Faktor's poem in 1984 GDR has none of the mass appeal propagated by Grosz and Herzfelde, but it similarly preoccupies itself with factographic innovation in art, this time from within an already established socialist state.[122] Faktor's poem consists of a list of words that share the same suffix (*-es*), extended by the doubling of the vowel "e" and occasional elimination of an "s" (e.g. in "Kongrees"). Though the words of the poem might at first appear to be arranged randomly, some of them echo and distort terms that would have permeated East Germany's *Kulturpolitik* at the time. These include, for instance, "Drees" – a distortion of the loanword "Dres," which is the Latin abbreviation for *Drs.*, and might function in the poem as a synecdoche for literary criticism; "Kongrees" (from *Schriftstellerkongress* where directives for GDR literature would have been debated and decided), and "Progrees" (another loanword that denotes one of the central demands that the GDR placed on literature, appointing it a vehicle of progress toward the communist future). Faktor's poem does not merely note these terms borrowed from GDR's literary jargon, but distorts them with harsh-sounding endings. For example, the notion of progress is parodied by the poem's implicitly linear syntax of the list form. In its opening, the poem switches between "Regrees" (2), "Progrees" (4), the acceleration of that progress in line 5 ("Exprees"), and a deflation of the "Progrees / Express" sequence by the non-sequitur "Komtees" in line 6. Progress is, moreover, parodied by the poem's backward organization. As closer inspection makes apparent, most of the poem's words have been organized in alphabetical order, starting from the last letter of each word as opposed to the first one. All of the words thus begin identically, with the letters "see-" such as in "seerD,"

[122] Factography is a Russian-language neologism coined from *фактография,* describing an "aesthetic practice preoccupied with the inscription of facts." Fore, Devin. "Soviet Factography: Production Art in an Information Age." *October* 118 (Fall 2006): 3 – 10. 3 – 4. Fore distinguishes the term "factography" from "documentary," by pointing out that a documentary, at least according to its earliest definition from the mid-1920s, strives to create the most objective and impartial depiction of reality. With reference to the conception of factography as outlined by its most eminent practitioner, Sergei Tretiakov, Fore explains that the Soviet the aesthetic practice aims not merely at a factually apt reflection of reality but actively seeks to transform and intervene in it too (Fore 3 – 4).

and continue to move down the alphabet – "seerD," "seergeR," "seergnoK," "seerpxE," "seetmoK," "seezkA," and so on. This organization further points to the poem's dual origin: first, in Faktor's inventive literary practice, and second, in Erich Mater's reverse dictionary of contemporary German usage, which had been published in the GDR in 1967 and which Faktor would often consult when writing his poetry.[123] On the one hand, the poem lets the facticity of Mater's systematization of language speak for itself. On the other hand, Faktor also intervenes in Mater's list by distorting the words' endings and breaking their reverse alphabetization in order to formulate the following, more coherent statement: "Abzees / Exzees / dees / Wortees / Textees / Bandees / Kunstees" (10-16). The sequence denotes a sense of pathology ("Abzees," "Exzees") that permeates the East German cultural milieu, from language to art ("Wortees," "Kunstees"). What exactly poses the "danger" to art in Faktor's title is left ambiguous: the danger might come from the East German *Kulturpolitik* that has burdened literature with demands. Alternatively, the quotation in the title is placed in the mouth of the cultural establishment, just as it had been uttered by the KPD sixty years prior. Aesthetic experimentation is, once again, banished by the Communist Party's progress-oriented but aesthetically conservative policies.

Of interest to me is that in order to critique his "really existing socialist" (Rudolf Bahro) milieu and as an officially unsanctioned GDR author, Faktor turns to an avantgarde tradition that in the 1920s had devised aesthetic means to prop up the communist cause, and in the early 1930s had contributed to the initial formation of socialist realism (inaugurated in 1934 as the Party's main aesthetic program and likewise adopted by East Germany much later). Yet this avantgarde

[123] This information was given to me in my interview with Faktor on July 2 2015 in Berlin-Pankow. Erich Mater's *Rückläufiges Wörterbuch der deutschen Gegenwartssprache* (1967) was published in Leipzig, GDR. It reverse-alphabetized the most frequently used words in the GDR. It is also mentioned (in the context of another poem) in Faktor, Jan. *Georgs Versuche an einem Gedicht und andere positive Texte aus dem Dichtergarten des Grauens.* Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau, 1989. 114.

also had a complicated relationship to the Communist Party and its cultural policies. This chapter relates the development of Heartfield's work in the Weimar period to positive reactions to Heartfield's work in the Soviet Union (which he visited between 1931 and 1932), and to his ambivalent reception in the GDR, where he spent the last eighteen years of his life (1950 – 68). Even though Heartfield's reception in the GDR evolved from being initially marginalized to being later rehabilitated, the photomonteur's work generally enjoyed a museum-like status – i.e. it was enshrined in the state's cultural history – until increased access to it in the 1970s and the 1980s led to its revival in the multimedial works by the Prenzlauer Berg group. This chapter therefore charts points of considerable overlap between socialist realism as it first crystalized in the Soviet Union in 1932 – 34, and Heartfield's photomontage in particular before turning to Heartfield's role in the GDR and Prenzlauer Berg's relation to his photomontage aesthetics. Drawing from Leah Dickerman, I suggest that Heartfield's photomontage and socialist realism in its foundational years share an ambivalent attitude toward photography as a medium, but then lose that affinity when, after its foundational phase, socialist realist policies shift from depicting both "what is" and "what ought to be" (Katarina Clark) toward depicting the latter only (what ought to be): a shift that later affected Heartfield's reception in the GDR. Heartfield generally made a poor "cheerleader for the Communist Party," excelling in manipulating photography's documentary claims into destructive and dystopian visions of his photomontaged works.[124] I argue, however, that precisely by generating dissent, Heartfield's photomontage encourages the viewer's active participation in the process of articulating and working toward a communist ideal. I further argue that Heartfield's appropriation of materials and their critical re-presentation

[124] Kriebel, Sabine. *Revolutionary Beauty: The Radical Photomontages of John Heartfield*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014. 112.

is later resumed – albeit by different formal methods – by the officially unsanctioned, underground activities of the PB artist Reinhard Zabka in the 1980s GDR.

II. John Heartfield: A Critical Voice of Communism

Heartfield's career as a photomonteur was long, prolific, and transnational. To give a brief synopsis: his first montages date back to a photographic journalism in which Heartfield was engaged during the First World War and with which he tried to defy the idealized representation of the war by the German press.[125] After a brief period of working with cinematic animation, Heartfield returned to using photomontage in order to register and incite revolutionary impulses at approximately the time when he also joined the KPD (in 1919) and the Berlin Dada movement. Throughout the 1920s Heartfield sharpened his photomontage into a massively popular tool of political propaganda in his book and poster designs for the Malik Press, the KPD's newspaper *Die Rote Fahne*, and an assortment of unaffiliated left-wing periodicals. Between 1931 and 1932, Heartfield made agitational and educational pieces in the Soviet Union, where he collaborated with both the *Oktiabr* factions of the Soviet avantgarde as well as *Oktiabr*'s rival group, the Russian Society of Proletarian Photo Journalists (ROPF), a subgroup of the better known proletarian realist association RAPKh (Russian Association of Proletarian Artists).[126] Between 1929 and 1938, he completed what is widely considered his most defining work: over two hundred mass-circulated and vastly popular photomontages for the Comintern-sponsored *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* (*AIZ*). Following the Reichstag fire and the NSDAP's victory in 1933, Heartfield escaped to Prague, Czechoslovakia, where he continued his work for

[125] Zervigón offers a cultural history of how mass-produced postcards, assembled from photo fragments with new printing technologies that had emerged before World War One and accompanied by nationalist captions, were being circulated as part of the state's warmongering propaganda (46-64).
[126] Gassner, Hubertus. "Heartfield's Moscow Apprenticeship 1931 – 1932." Heartfield et al. *John Heartfield*. Harry N. Abrams, 1992. 256 – 89.

the *AIZ* until he had to flee once again from National Socialism, following the fallout of the Munich agreement of 1938, but this time to the United Kingdom. There he continued to produce book designs for an assortment of British and German exile presses. He immigrated to the nascent German Democratic Republic from London in 1950. After seven years without SED support, he became an officially sanctioned artist – a status he maintained until his death in 1968.[127]

Heartfield scholarship has generally privileged the earlier stages of the photomonteur's career, not paying much attention to his work and legacy in the GDR. One reason for this omission is the fact that Heartfield's artistic production greatly decreases during the last eighteen years of his life, which he spent in the socialist state. This remarkable decline in productivity has generally been attributed to Heartfield's poor health.[128] However, looking back at his life in East Germany in a 1966 interview, Heartfield said: "Ich wäre der Designer des Sozialismus geworden, wenn die mich nur gelassen hätten,"[129] – pointing instead to what for him had been a politically unfavorable climate. In an article that unearths documentary evidence about Heartfield's political standing in the GDR between 1950 – 57, Michael Krejsa shows that the artist's initial situation in the GDR was more serious than scholars have previously assumed. Krejsa documents that in 1950 Heartfield was interrogated by a special commission of the SED because of his alleged links to Western secret services via the American aid worker Noel H. Field, and to dissenting groups within the KPD of the Third, Stalinizing period (the so-called

[127] Roth, Nancy. "Heartfield and Modern Art." Heartfield et al. *John Heartfield.* 18 – 29. 27.
[128] Heartfield's absence from the state's cultural life was often justified by his poor health. Herzfelde later notes that the fact that his brother has made "verhältnismäβig wenig Fotomontagen" in East Germany is not only due to his health, but also because of a certain "Missverständnis" which he encountered in the GDR upon his arrival (as cited in Klatt 274).
[129] The statement comes from Heartfield's interview with the West Berlin gallery owner Jule Hammer. As cited in Krejsa, Michael. "Wo ist John Heartfield?" *Kunstdokumentation SBZ / DDR: 1945 – 1990.* Ed. Feist, Günter, Gillen, Eckhart and Beatrice Vierneisel. Berlin: DuMont, 1996. 110-26. 110.

Versöhnler circles).[130] He was subsequently refused membership to the SED (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*) – after having been a member of the KPD from the party's foundation in 1919 until its transformation into the SED in 1946. Without official support, Heartfield was unable to find work, save for occasional commissions for poster and stage design for the Berlin Ensemble. Moreover, Krejsa shows that because of Heartfield's tenuous association with politically suspect groups, a trial against him was in the works until preparations for it were discontinued in 1956 with the onset of the Khrushchev Thaw.[131] Between 1956 and 1957 the state's position on Heartfield was reversed and he was admitted to the Party and appointed to the *Akademie der Künste der DDR*. Through personal interventions of the officially sanctioned and influential authors Bertolt Brecht and Stephan Hermlin, in 1957 the state formally acknowledged the significance of Heartfield's artistic production with a retrospective exhibition and numerous awards.[132]

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[130] As Krejsa shows, Heartfield was scrutinized because of his association with three particular groups. The first one included his alleged links to the Western secret services – mainly via the American aid worker and alleged secret agent Noel H. Field. The allegations were dropped after Field's rehabilitation in 1954. The second group concerned Heartfield's interwar stigmatization as a so-called "Versöhnler" – a derogative term that was used to designate party members critical of reinstating Ernst Thälmann as the KPD's leader during the Wittorf affair of 1928, a fraught episode in the KPD's history that catalyzed a Stalinization of the party and a cleansing of its internal fractional groupings, linking Heartfield with one such dissenting faction. Although Heartfield was at no point directly involved in the Wittorf affair, he moved in what were considered to be *Versöhnler* circles of the KPD's graphic studio and VIVA-Verlag – circles that the KPD, and later the SED in the GDR, accused of sabotaging the communist victory. As Krejsa shows, the Wittorf affair affected the politics of the early GDR period, when letters of self-criticism for having once belonged to a *Versöhnler* group continued to be circulated by the national press. The last group that stigmatized Heartfield to the GDR authorities was the Münzenberg media conglomerate that had owned the AIZ, an illustrated magazine in which Heartfield tended to publish his work following the Wittorf affair (as opposed to KPD-owned periodicals). Because Münzenberg's press was accountable directly to the Comintern in Moscow, it enjoyed a degree of independence from the KPD. However, the conglomerate's owner, the communist political activist Willi Münzenberg, was likewise held in suspicion by the KPD for his opposition to Thälmann's leadership, and was to be later expelled from the party and in 1940 assassinated in France, possibly on Stalin's orders.

[131] The Khrushchev Thaw began after Stalin's death in 1953 and culminated in Khrushchev's "secret speech" at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party in 1956, in which he denounced Stalin's crimes.

[132] The events at the 4th Writers' Congress, which took place in January 1956, a few weeks before Khrushchev's de-Stalinization speech, likewise contributed to Heartfield's rehabilitation in the GDR. At the congress, the GDR's then minister of culture, Johannes R. Becher attacked the prevalent schematization of literature. Becher, Johannes R. "Von der Größe unserer Literatur: Rede Johannes R. Bechers zur Eröffnung des IV. Deutschen Schriftstellerkongresses, 9. Januar 1956, Wortlaut des im 'Neuen Deutschland' veröffentlichten Auszugs."

Despite this apparent rehabilitation, the change in official attitudes amounts to what I consider only a partial re-admittance of Heartfield into the good graces of the state. Pointing to this fact is not only the relative paucity of his artistic production even in the years that followed his rehabilitation, but also the way his photomontage continues to be discussed by official cultural documents and the East German press from late 1950s until his death in 1968.[133] These texts almost invariably historicize Heartfield's work, anchoring it the context of his anticapitalist and antifascist dissent. For example, an SED document from 1957 describes Heartfield as an artist whose significance lies in the past struggle against exploitation and fascism.[134] Another document (from 1963) allows for Heartfield's contemporary relevance, but only in present-day West Germany, where workers are reportedly appropriating Heartfield's photomontaging practices for their own agitational work (Schubbe 808). The obituary that the *Zentralkomittee der SED* issued after Heartfield's death in 1968 also praises the artist's antifascist work.[135] The document additionally claims that in the GDR Heartfield supported the construction of socialism "with all his strength," but to illustrate the claim it mentions only Heartfield's various appointments and awards. Similar readings are echoed by – the relatively limited – scholarship on the artist published in the GDR during his lifetime. Bodo Uhse, who in 1957 wrote the catalog introduction to Heartfield's first GDR exhibition, finds Heartfield's work relevant only insofar as its antifascism still resonates with the nuclear threat emanating from the West.[136] The first substantive monograph on the artist (from 1962) celebrates his photomontages as "einmalig," "großartig," "nie wieder erreicht" and as products of "ganz besondere[r]

Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur und Kulturpolitik der SED. Ed. Elimar Schubbe. Stuttgart: Seewald, 1972. 395 – 408. 398.

[133] The changes to the artist's official reception in the GDR of the 1970s and 80s will be discussed in the following section.

[134] Arnold, Walter. "Unsere Kunst dient der Arbeiterklasse." (Schubbe 464 – 67. 465).

[135] "Nachruf des ZK für John Heartfield." *Neues Deutschland* 27 April 1968.

[136] Heartfield, John et al. *John Heartfield und die Kunst der Fotomontage*. Berlin: Deutsche Akademie der Künste, 1957. 60.

Zeitumstände," which continue to be relevant only in the unregenerate West.[137] Overall, while cultural documents and GDR scholarship from the late 1950s and 1960s value the antagonistic relationship of Heartfield's photomontage to capitalism and fascism, they concur in seeing his method as having no critical relevance for the socialist present.

To offer an aesthetic explanation of this remarkable concurrence, Nancy Roth has argued that the fragmentation inherent in Heartfield's montages would have contradicted official demands for a "complete" portrayal of reality that was placed on art by the GDR's aesthetic program of socialist realism (27). Roth attributes the state's rejection of photomontage to cultural standards shaped by Georg Lukács's writings on realism from late 1930s, which discuss montage in general terms as capable of representing only a fragment of the larger whole (27). In this way, montage provides a superficial reflection of a seemingly amorphous surface of life – "ein trostloses Grau in Grau" – as Lukács puts it, and fails to uncover complex interrelations that inform reality's disintegrated surface under capitalism.[138] In Lukács's view, a correct reflection of reality by art would contextualize an artwork's every detail vis-à-vis the whole – something that montage cannot possibly achieve, given its "eingleisige Verbindung" of atomized components and indistinct details (328). My concern here is not whether Lukács's general remarks on montage are justified, but rather with the fact that his ascription of a limited demonstrative potential to montage is not applicable to Heartfield. Works that in the GDR

[137] Herzfelde, Wieland. *John Heartfield: Leben und Werk*. Dresden: VEB Verlag der Kunst, 1962. The quotations that herald Heartfield's uniqueness come from a laudatory letter to the artist by the writer and fellow Academy member Alfred Kurella from 1961 (as cited in Herzfelde, John Heartfield 329). In his biographical essay on Heartfield published in the monograph, Herzfelde writes that his brother's works are not obsolete in the postwar period, given that an array of social ills, from unemployment and strikes to racial discrimination and violent colonization, continue to persist "wo der Nachkriegskapitalismus herrsch[t]" (80-81).

[138] Lukács, Georg. "Es geht um den Realismus." *Werke, Probleme des Realismus I: Essays über Realismus*. Vol. 4. Luchterhand, 1971. 313-43. 328. Importantly, attributing the GDR's negative evaluations of photomontage to Lukács's remarks on the technique does not explain Heartfield's continuous marginalization by the GDR after 1957, when Lukács's theories were largely excised from the state's cultural politics on account of the critic's role in the Hungarian uprising of 1956, as Bernhard Spies documents. Spies, Bernhard. "Georg Lukács und der Sozialistiche Realismus in der DDR." *Literatur in der DDR: Rückblicke.* Ed. Arnold, Heinz-Ludwig and Frauke Meyer-Gosau. München: Edition Text + Kritik, 1991. 34-44. 34.

would have been considered the most representative of Heartfield's *oeuvre* – i.e. his political posters for the KPD and the *AIZ* magazine covers (given that these are the works to which the SED documents and GDR scholarship on Heartfield almost exclusively allude) – foreground sparseness and clarity by blending only a few photo-fragments into unified pictorial fields, and link carefully selected details to larger social realities of the day. Furthermore, contrary to Lukács's general assessment of montage, Heartfield's mass audiences in the 1920s and 1930s read his montages as forceful, political missives.

One such piece from the early years, for instance, juxtaposes only three main fragments with one another: a photographic strip depicting a row of skeletons, an enlarged insert of a Prussian general, and another photographic strip depicting marching child-cadets. The last two fragments appear to have been obtained from the contemporary German press. Titled *Väter und Söhne* (1924), the montage is among the first pieces in which Heartfield no longer juxtaposes conspicuously distinct photographic fragments, but blends those fragments by retouching their sharp edges and differences in tone, texture and hue into an illusionistic pictorial field. Nevertheless, the resulting effect is not entirely harmonized and does not represent a return to a raditional realist idiom, of which Heartfield was at times accused.[139] Rather, the photomontage has been "sutured," to borrow a term Sabine Kriebel uses to theorize Heartfield's holistic but disharmonious pictorial fields (11). Kriebel adopts the term "suture" from medical terminology (as a mending of a rupture) and from film theory, where "suture" denotes a set of strategies, such as the suppression of distinct filmic shots used to make the spectator unaware of a film's

[139] Heartfield's pictorial organicism at times prompted criticism from his Soviet photomontaging peers, who at times read his emphasis on illusionistic space and visual narrative as allied with traditional, bourgeois figurative easel painting and therefore as retrograde and not revolutionary. See, for instance, Gough, Maria. "Back in the USSR: John Heartfield, Gustavs Klucis, and the Medium of Soviet Propaganda." *New German Critique* 107.107 (2009): 133 – 83.

constructed-ness. In Kriebel's view, the use of suture endows Heartfield's photomontages with

Fig. 17. Heartfield, John. *Väter und Söhne.* 1924. Photomontage.

two intersecting strategies. First, it draws the viewer into the image by appropriating familiar representational conventions of the Weimar Republic's photographic culture, which Heartfield would have mimicked from advertising and the illustrated press and honed during his work as a

commercial book designer.[140] Second, the sutured illusionism thus created simultaneously countermands passive spectatorship with methods that range from cognitive disjunction to wordplay and direct address. It thus makes sutured photomontages effective and critical tools of mass mobilization (Kriebel 11).

To illustrate the strategies of suture on the example of *Väter und Söhne*: despite having been seamlessly blended together, the montage continues to mobilize the axes alongside which it has been sutured, utilizing them as points of collision and vectors that generate several interrelated narratives. In the photomontage, the cadets in the diagonal space off center seem to be marching toward the dark space that fills the lower edge of the montage, as if they are being led by the general, who appears to be standing further ahead. The montage's superimposition of the general over the skeletons, to which he is similar in both size and rigidity of posture, establish a horizontal movement between the two photo-fragments, conflating the general as a symbol of Prussian state and military power with the skeletons as universal symbols of death. Heartfield's placement of the skeletons above the cadets (whom he in turn miniaturizes) guides the eye along the vertical axis, suggesting another possible narrative. If followed from the bottom to the top, the children become the skeletons, if followed from top to bottom, the children replace the skeletons. Taking clues not only from these representational conventions pertaining to pictorial composition and size but also from the photomontage's title, the skeletons might be the "Väter," who had been led to their premature deaths just as their "Söhne" will be, loading the piece with referents to then recent World War One and a prescient, future perspective. Despite the fact that the montage contains few textual components, the visual is heavily inflected by the

[140] Zervigón attributes this development in Heartfield's work to his activities as a book cover and poster designer for Herzfelde's Malik Press: an establishment that was dedicated to promoting revolutionary art, but was not directly affiliated (and financially supported) by the KPD. The Malik books were predominantly sold in commercial bookstores where they were displayed not for their political content but for the attractiveness of their covers (185-86).

linguistic subtext of the montage's visual narratives as reflected in the title.[141] Overall, *Väter und Söhne* would derive its powerful effect from viewers' familiarity with the representational conventions of the Weimar photographic press (such as styles and compositional devices), the press's attendant discourses of text and image (in the photomontage's use of a title that strongly inflects the image), and from private interpretation against the backdrop of a shared historical context.

The extraordinary intelligibility of photomontages such as *Väter und Söhne* became subject to much praise in the Soviet Union, where Heartfield arrived in April 1931 to participate in photographic projects and to teach photomontaging techniques to Soviet factory workers. Heartfield's Soviet trip coincided with heated debates in Soviet cultural circles about how best to address the Soviet government's demands for new visual propaganda that had been issued only two months before. This new propaganda was supposed to "expose and assess reality," appeal to and educate the masses, and be based on the poster and the photograph that "penetrate all spheres of everyday life" (as cited in Gassner 258). However, the government's eager promotion of the communicative and technological possibilities afforded by contemporary photographic culture was accompanied by a concomitant mistrust toward photography as a medium, as the state's simultaneous founding of institutions for image production and control (such as State Press for Art or IZOGIS) made evident. Before his arrival, Heartfield was a relatively unknown artist in the USSR, even though the Soviet audiences may have been familiar with some of his work for the Comintern-sponsored, transnational *AIZ*.[142] Six months after his arrival, it was Heartfield's

[141] A contemporary anecdote further testifies to the rhetorical power of *Väter und Söhne* at the time it was made. The image was reportedly almost destroyed by a disgruntled "*völkisch* type," who saw the poster in the Malik Press's window display. The anecdote was later circulated by *Die Rote Fahne* (as cited in Zervigón 185).
[142] Heartfield began to work regularly for the *AIZ* in 1929. Nevertheless, he was first formally introduced to the Soviet public in an interview for the Soviet art journal *Artists' Brigade* in spring 1931 by Egon Erwin Kisch, an acclaimed journalist, Prague Circle author and Heartfield's main contact in the Comintern. In the interview, Kisch assumes the Soviets have no prior familiarity with Heartfield or his work (Gassner 256).

photomontage that Soviet critics deemed exemplary for contemporary Soviet artists and praised for its "simplicity," "exactness," its use of "'only fundamental and essential' photographic elements," and to follow the "right course in the application of photomontage."[143] At Heartfield's 1931 solo exhibition in Moscow, the first such exhibition to be dedicated to a Western artist in the USSR, his posters and book jackets proved extremely popular also with the public. What was it about Heartfield photomontages that made them popular with Soviet critics and audiences alike?

Although the initial adoption of photography in the USSR was slow, by the mid-1920s developments in photomechanical reproduction and printing technology made it economical and widespread, engendering a modern media culture saturated with photographic images that was comparable to other industrialized countries.[144] The Soviet government, on the one hand, understood the need for mass communication for its political project, and valued photography for its potential to bind and influence its spectators on a massive scale. Crucially, however, it was the strength of photography's power of authentication and testimonial force, grown out of the demand for documentation in the photographic age, in which the government was particularly invested. On the other hand, the Soviet government was wary of the evidential power of photography. Its call on artists to "expose and assess reality" with photographic technology betrays an ambivalent attitude toward photography, which led to widespread practices of revising, retouching, and in other ways visibly altering photographs into what Leah Dickerman terms "false documents" (144). These artifacts at first appear to have been merely censored –

[143] As cited in Gassner 264, 268. The critics contrasted Heartfield's work with the photomontages of the Constructivist *Oktiabr* group and its leading photomonteur Gustav Klucis, whose photomontages explored "harder cuts," "pronounced contrasts," a multitude of fragments, and pictorial texture (*Faktur*) that, in 1931 were deemed to be "inundated with mechanically assembled material" (as cited in Gassner 264). The criticism of Klucis, Gassner explains, was partially motivated by a political campaign that sought to dismantle distinct Soviet artistic schools (266).

[144] Dickerman, Leah. "Camera Obscura: Socialist Realism in the Shadow of Photography." *October* 93 (Summer 2000): 138-53. 139.

Dickerman for instance describes one such photograph as featuring "mysterious hands and elbows," while in a different photograph, "an amorphous blob has settled over Lenin's shoulder, marking the spot where Lev Trotsky once stood" (142). However, in Dickerman's view, the manipulation is so conspicuous it exceeds a mere desire to eradicate elements of the past based on the exigencies of the present, especially given that Soviet audiences would often be familiar with the un-retouched versions of the photographs. Rather, Dickerman sees them as denoting the desire to anchor photography's potentially ambivalent and mutable meaning by asserting a "dominance and control over the medium [of photography] itself" (143). The apprehension toward the medium of photography as outlined by Dickerman echoes an ambivalence with which Heartfield himself regarded the photographic image. In one autobiographical account, Heartfield attributes the beginnings of his photomontage to a realization about photography's power to authenticate and "lie" at the same time – something that was regularly done during the First World War.[145] He then recounts how his realization about photography's semantic instability and susceptibility to ideological abuse – particularly but not exclusively through the use of the caption – motivated his strategy of challenging wartime propaganda with its own means. He would do this by appropriating pre-circulated, readymade imagery and linguistic constructions (such as propagandistic slogans and clichés), engaging with them on their own terms and thus critically intervening in the reality they reproduced.[146]

Crucially for my argument about Heartfield's reception in the GDR, these strategies of conspicuously altering photographs to anchor and contain their malleable meaning as outlined by

[145] As Heartfield specifies, "Photos of the war were being used to support the policy to hold out when the war had long since been settled on the Marne and the German army had already been beaten." The citation comes in English and it come from an interview that curator Bengt Dahlbäck conducted with Heartfield in 1967 (as cited in Heartfield, et al 14).

[146] Heartfield's early photomontage from 1917, for example, exposes the notion of a *Heldentod*, a private, martyrlike, and meaningful death disseminated via propaganda postcards during the First World War, as a vacuous cliché, by juxtaposing the text "So sieht der Heldentod aus" with photo-fragments depicting mechanically slaughtered, anonymous corpses strewn across a WW1 battlefield.

Dickerman and echoed by Heartfield, correspond to what Katarina Clark deems the defining structure of socialist realism.[147] In its foundational definition, socialist realism, which began to form from several artistic platforms in the latter part of the 1920s, was formalized in 1932 and made into a Soviet-wide cultural program two years later, demands a "historically concrete presentation of reality in its revolutionary development."[148] At the heart of this doctrine thus lies an incongruity that Clark calls socialist realism's "modal schizophrenia" of striving to capture in a single stroke both "what is" and "what ought to be" (Clark 37). As a result of this dichotomy, Clark suggests, socialist realism owes much of its incongruity to utilizing a "utopian or mythic" mode of representation for the depiction of "what ought to be" and a "realist" mode of representation for "what is," often making sudden transitions from one mode to another within the space of a single work.[149] The former mode represents a world that is perfected and complete, typically told as a past legend (or epic), but in the case of the socialist realist work of art, an equally closed and perfected set of future prospects (such as the official version of history culminating in communism's arrival) would also fall into this category. The latter mode, by comparison, represents an imperfect and incomplete world of "what is," characterized by a "disintegration of the holistic world view" (Clark 38).

We can see how this dual structure pertains to Heartfield through the example of a photomontage he made during his time in the USSR. Titled *Lenin Montage for USSR in*

[147] Clark, Katarina. *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981. 37.
[148] This is the first official definition of socialist realism, formulated at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934. The full sentence from which my quotation is taken is as follows: "Socialist realism, the basic method of Soviet literature and literary criticism, demands of the sincere writer a historically concrete presentation of reality in its revolutionary development." As cited in Robin, Regine. *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992. 11.
[149] Clark's particular concern is how the two representational modes coexist in the socialist realist novel, maps them onto Mikhail Bakhtin's distinction between the epic and the novel outlined in his work *Epos i roman* (first published in 1975), where the epic model stands for "what ought to be" and the model of the novel results from the disintegration of the epic one, when writers began to subvert the old, holistic forms with iconoclastic means such as parody (37 – 40). The socialist realist novels Clark analyzes would frequently oscillate between those two modes.

Construction No. 9 (1931), the piece was made for an international photographic magazine *USSR in Construction* published in Russian as well as English, French, and German, and it mobilized the documentary power of photography in order to countervail anti-Soviet propaganda (Kriebel 113). *Lenin Montage* is part of a series on socialist Moscow and consists of three distinct but overlapping components: an image of a local Lenin Memorial, superimposed over an aerial shot of a cityscape that is partially covered by an airplane's wings. However, the image could have been assembled by using only two photo-fragments depicting the Lenin monument and the aerial shot respectively, given that the airplane wings could possibly be a logical extension of the aerial view shot from an airplane. More likely, however, the wings and the view have been sutured together as in a condensed expression of the USSR's technological advances, which permeate the world on and above ground. Though the Lenin photo-fragment has clearly been added to the work, its placement is sutured into the image by drawing on the visual vocabulary that evokes ghost photography: even after his death, Lenin's spirit still haunts the country. *Lenin Montage*, however, is not a typical example of Heartfield's sutured illusionism. An intriguing feature of the montage is its Constructivist composition, characterized by sharper edges, more abrupt transitions, pronounced contrasts between elements, and the use of *faktura*, or "the assemblage of textures" (Buchloh 86). This aesthetic borrowing could be, as Kriebel suggests, Heartfield's expression of solidarity with the Constructivist *Oktiabr* group, which was already under critical fire at the time, partially because it was allegedly lacking the acclaimed organicism, simplicity, and intelligibility so characteristic of Heartfield's photomontages; Kriebel also suggests that the montage could be Heartfield's tactical circumvention of conflicting aesthetic rules by combining them in one heterogeneous image (115). Alternatively, this aesthetic reference could mean Heartfield's engagement with the emergent socialist realist aesthetic. Given that when socialist

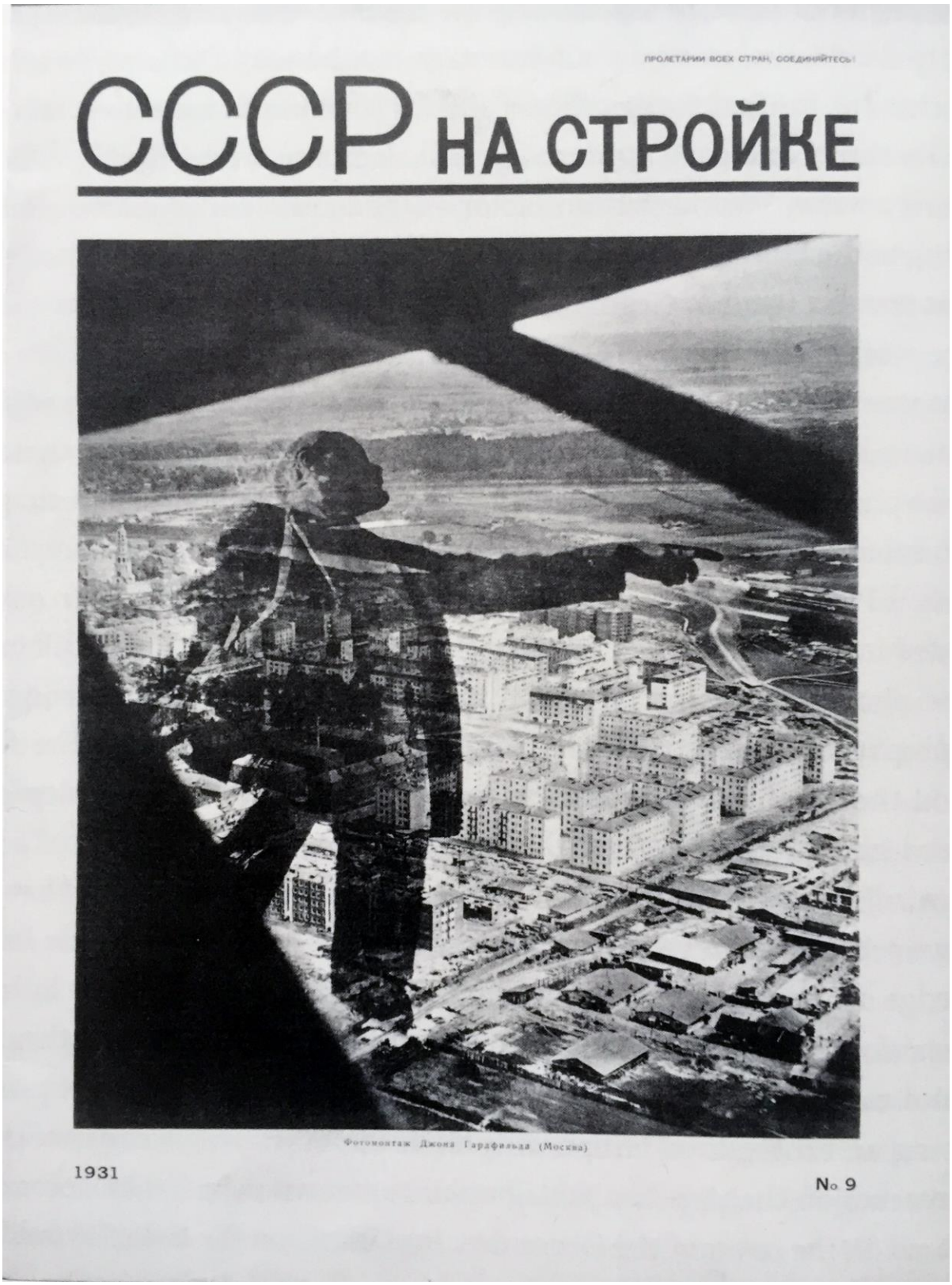

Fig. 18. Heartfield, John. *Lenin Montage for USSR in Construction No. 9*. 1931. Photomontage.

realism first emerged, it lacked a fundamental set of congruent aesthetic principles and presented itself as a "summary" and "synthetic" art that picked over the remnants of styles, "combining and conjugating these aesthetic devices at will" (Fore 243, 244); the doctrine was thus an heir to, rather than a replacement of, previous Soviet artistic movements, of which all were officially disbanded by 1932 (Fore 244).

Furthermore, I see the two competing aesthetics in *Lenin Montage*, as serving a different purpose in relation to the dichotomy of socialist realism defined by Clark. The image's utopian component ties a heroic past, represented by Lenin, to the communist future by means of the left-to-right vector of Lenin's hand, a vector conventionally used to visualize a forward movement in time. Its realist dimension is in turn delivered through the iconicity and documentary evidence of the newly constructed workers' housing on the ground. Their imperfect form – the formal grid and the houses' *faktura*, and the jagged edge of the city – suggests that construction is still underway – and indeed, a few of the houses right underneath Lenin's outstretched arm are still in the process of being built. By thus combining aesthetic paradigms of the avantgarde and sutured illusionism, *Lenin Montage* encapsulates the "what is / what ought" to be of socialist realism. It is therefore all the more intriguing that the photomontage was met with official criticism. Soviet pundits were disappointed not to find in it what they called the "positive side of reality" (such as images of heroism and social harmony), leading them to conclude that Heartfield was much stronger in depicting the negative than the "positive" (as cited in Gassner 272). Another reviewer disparaged Heartfield's work as an "offense against the cause of glory, honor, and heroism" (as cited in Gassner 271). Here, Clark's observations are a useful lens with which to interpret this startling criticism of what seems to be a quintessentially socialist realist piece, at

least according to the doctrine's initial conception. In her analysis of socialist realist novels, Clark registers a relative "emasculation" of the "what is" in favor of its mythic and utopian element (41). Works that were more committed to "mythmaking," she writes, became part of the Soviet canon, while works that were committed to the description of experience, however revolutionary, became marginalized. By contrast, despite lending the image a fair amount of monumentality with the Lenin figure, the "what ought to be" of *Lenin Montage* is largely off the frame. The photomontage is still utopian, I argue, though it refuses to develop a "positive" depiction of an ideal society as desired by the critics. Rather, it arouses the viewers to participate in the articulation of what the utopian ought to be, appealing to the viewers' critical engagement with the existing, made perhaps most apparent by the imperfect forms of the ongoing construction below.

Thus, the perceived failure to offer and outline a vision of an ideal society eventually alienated Heartfield from Soviet culture.[150] Judging by the perception of his work by GDR scholarship and SED documents as primarily antagonistic (toward capitalism and fascism), in the GDR Heartfield's work may have been also written off as representative of what David Bathrick terms "negative culture."[151] Even though after 1956, the country steadily expanded its pool of officially sanctioned artists and movements, "[w]hat would not disappear," writes Bathrick, "was this reestablishment within GDR socialism of the classical antagonism between the institution of affirmative culture, on the one hand, and its potential subversion at the hands of some form of modernism, on the other" (91) – an opposition that, as I have shown, makes up the structures of both Heartfield's photomontage and the foundational conception of socialist realism as well.

[150] Gassner comments that when Soviet critics eventually denounced Heartfield's work, the artist already left the country. By the mid-1930s, photomontage was largely replaced by the "post-photographic" socialist realist painting (Dickerman 138).
[151] Bathrick, David. *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press,1996. 87 – 95.

Despite what Herzfelde rightly terms Heartfield's "ausgesprochen sozialistisch-realistische Kunst,"[152] the troubled reception of Heartfield in the GDR ought not to be attributed to his lack of socialist realist credentials, but rather to the critical mimicry that informs his aesthetic practice.

III. The Heartfieldian Spirit at Prenzlauer Berg

The gradual relaxation of East Germany's cultural policies seems to have peaked in 1971, when the freshly inaugurated General Secretary of the SED Erich Honecker proclaimed that there were to be no more taboos in the GDR's cultural production.[153] Especially between 1970 and 1976 (until the expatriation of poet and songwriter Wolf Biermann), the SED was willing to modify its ossified notion of *Kulturerbe* and bring in traditions that were previously shunned, such as the proletarian avantgarde tradition in which Heartfield would have been included.[154] The Biermann expatriation of 1976 did not seem negatively to affect the burgeoning of GDR scholarship on the now *salonfähige* avantgarde. These studies, however, of which the majority were published between the late 1970s and early 1980s, still tend to discourage contemporary East German artists from reviving the avantgardes and Heartfield in particular in their work. In the first substantial study on the avantgardes to be published in the GDR in 1979, the initial decision to consider Heartfield among socialism's "enemies" is explicitly referred to as a

[152] As cited in Klatt, Gudrun. "Proletarisch-revolutionäres Erbe als Angebot. Vom Umgang mit Erfahrungen proletarisch-revolutionärer Kunst während der Übergangsepoche. *Literarisches Leben in der DDR: 1945 – 1960.* Ed. Münz-Koenen, Ingeborg. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1980. 244-292. 274. The original article, in which Herzfelde introduces both his brother as well as the montage technique, was first published in 1957 in the first issue of the literary journal *Junge Kunst* (Klatt 274).

[153] Honecker, Erich. "Hauptaufgabe umfaßt auch weitere Erhöhung des kulturellen Niveaus." *Neues Deutschland.* December 18. 1971.

[154] Hohendahl, P. U. "Theorie und Praxis des Erbens: Untersuchungen zum Problem der literarischen Tradition in der DDR." *Literatur der DDR in den siebziger Jahren.* Ed. Hohendahl P. U. and Patricia Herminghouse. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1983. 13 – 52. 36 – 40.

mistake.[155] The study's introduction mentions Heartfield as an artist who disproves earlier theories that had considered all avantgarde phenomena as products of the downfall of bourgeois art (Barck, et al 14-15). However, the author still warns in general against a revival (*Wiedererweckung*) of these former ideas and practices, stating that an awareness of the avantgarde's historicity is a precondition for its potential relevance.[156] A similar argument is advanced specifically with regard to Heartfield in a study on the Weimar-era avantgardes that the *Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR* compiled between 1975 – 79 and published in 1980.[157] The volume singles Heartfield out as among the few artists to have created an innovative art in the pursuit of the communist cause, praising the development of montage "als ästhetische Möglichkeit revolutionären Kunstschaffens" (Nössig 92-94). At the same time, it tacitly advises against reviving photomontage within the cultural production of the day, positioning it as a decisive interlude (*Zwischenspiel*) within socialist realism's developmental trajectory, but that now has no critical relevance in the socialist present (Nössig 63). In sum, though the literature published on Heartfield after the more general changes in the GDR's *Kulturpolitik* of the 1970s attempts to resituate the artist as part of the socialist cultural heritage, the documents generally musealize his work by limiting it to a stage within the development of the socialist realist aesthetic.

Yet such dissuasion seems to have achieved little with regard to the effect that increased discussion and access through exhibitions and publications on both Heartfield and the technique of photomontage had on the youngest generation of East German artists, and particularly the so-called Prenzlauer Berg (PB) poets, who proceeded to summon photomontage in their own

[155] *Künstlerische Avantgarde.* Ed. Barck, Karlheinz, Schlenstedt, Dieter and Wolfgang Thierse. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1979. 22.
[156] The original German reads: "[d]as Bewußtsein der Geschichtlichkeit der Avantgarde ist Voraussetzung für ihre mögliche Aktualität" (Barck, et al 18).
[157] *Literaturdebatten in der Weimarer Republik: Zur Entwicklung des marxistischen literaturtheoretischen Denkens 1918 - 1933.* Ed. Manfred Nössig, Johanna Rosenberg, and Bärbel Schrader. Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau, 1980. 95.

intermedial work. With what exactly from Heartfield does late East German artistic dissent engage? In what I find to be a particularly illustrative observation about the artist, made by the erstwhile PB poet and critically acclaimed contemporary German author Barbara Köhler, Köhler remarked that Heartfield's photomontage was a "tolle Entdeckung," and that she particularly appreciated his less "convincing" (*überzeugende*), "less striking" (*nicht so plakative*) works.[158] In her description, Köhler expresses a preference for the less structured, semantically ambiguous aspect of Heartfield's work – perhaps one that allows its viewer to assemble a narrative from its critical appropriation of what Clark describes as "what is." In what follows I will illustrate how some of these strategies borrowed from Heartfieldian photomontage manifest themselves in works by the Prenzlauer Berg.

In 1987 an associate of the PB group, the East German artist Reinhard Zabka (b. 1951), made a series of flyers and submitted them to an art contest commissioned by the state youth organization *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (FDJ). In what seems like a rare act of admission of problems on the ground by an East German institution, the contest invited artistic responses to the theme "Was uns hindert" – and there is no indication that Zabka ever heard back from its organizers. Aiming to laugh at the state's disintegrating power structures such as the FDJ, as Zabka claims in his catalog entry on the series, the artist made a total of eight flyers. Each flyer was assembled from ready-made imagery and newspaper headlines, and dedicated to a particular theme ("Alltag," "Sport," "Wohnungsbau," etc.). According to Zabka, the competition's goal was to improve the "schwingende Vertrauen in die Jugendorganisation durch kritische Kunstwerke."[159] At the time the flyers were made, the youth's interest in FDJ memberships had plummeted amidst increased political unrest and repressive measures that Mary Fulbrook

[158] The remark comes from my interview with Barbara Köhler on May 2 2013 in Ithaca, NY.
[159] *Poesie des Untergrunds*. Ed. Thomas Günther. Berlin: Edition Galerie auf Zeit, 2011. 96.

describes as characteristic of the last two years of GDR history.[160] A sense of disillusionment and crisis likewise permeate Zabka's photomontages. Titled "Flugblätter zur Verteidigung des höheren Blödsinns," Zabka arranges clippings from GDR illustrated magazines and newspapers into novel satirical entities that disparage much of what they appropriate as malfunctioning and senseless.

A particularly acerbic example is Zabka's "Wohnungsbau" flyer. The photomontage is centered over a pink-colored paper covered with stamps and newspaper clippings. It crowds animals, figures, natural elements and buildings into its single yet disharmonious visual field. The montage realizes what appears to be a contemporary fantasy of living "on the beach," captured by a pre-circulated headline that Zabka had cut out from the newspaper and pasted in the lower left-hand corner of the piece. In the montage, Zabka transplants a photo-fragment of an urban communal building (*Plattenbau*) from the outskirts of an East German city where it would have typically stood (and by the 1980s housed a significant proportion of the East German populace), to a beach.[161] As indicated in the headline, the montage's additionally stages the promise of a beautiful life in a kitschy scene of nude female bodies and white horses to the left of the building – a scene that clashes with the *Plattenbau*'s drab appearance to comic effect. In the lower part of the image, a photographic insert of what appears to be a rabbit hutch further

[160] Fulbrook, Mary. *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2005. 128. FDJ's roots go back to the Second World War when the organization gathered antifascist youth (Fulbrook 128). Later, FDJ came under the control of the SED leadership. In the GDR the organization's goal was not only to socialize young people (aged fourteen to twenty-five), but to train them and harness their energies into projects of strategic [e.g. paramilitary] importance to the GDR" (Fulbrook 128). An FDJ membership was not compulsory, though a lack of it would have been interpreted as "conspicuous nonconformity" and a liability for those wanting to have a serious career (Fulbrook 128).

[161] *Plattenbau* designates an apartment block made from prefabricated concrete slabs, which the GDR started building on a massive scale from the 1960s onwards (Fulbrook 52). Such projects were also emblematic of the state's adoption of *Konsumsozialismus*, a policy with which from the mid-1970s it aimed to provide East German citizens with both advanced social policies as well as Western-style consumer goods that were widely available under capitalism.

deflates the seaside idyll above. The rabbit hutch noticeably resembles the *Plattenbau*, its cages

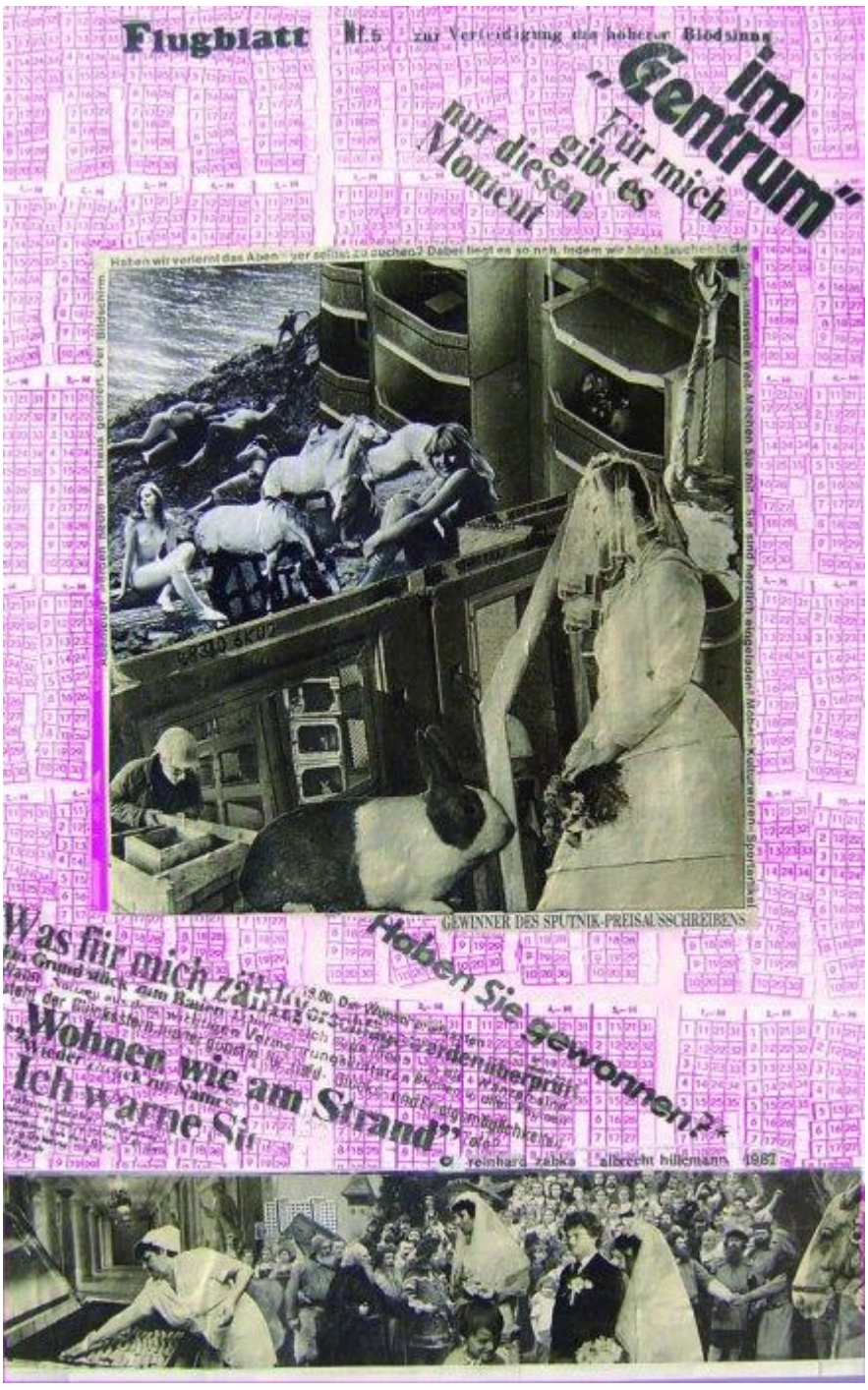

Fig. 19. Zabka, Reinhard. *Flugblatt Nr. 5.* 1987. Photomontage.

mirroring the balconies of the building, and the rabbits inside the cages echo the inhabitants gathered on the balconies of the *Plattenbau*. A worker in the lower left-hand corner is building a construction, which could be either a rabbit hutch or another building, thus further eradicating any difference between the two. An unlikely encounter at the forefront of the montage brings together what the montage presents as two images of confinement: a colossal rabbit faces a bride, whose coy and downcast demeanor contrasts with the more liberated beach scene on the left – an impression that appears to be sealed by the noose hanging over her head. Are both foregrounded figures likely to become the cooped-up inhabitants of their respective abodes? In its formal equation of cages used to keep animals with East German housing housing, Zabka gives a bleak portrayal of communal GDR living, exacerbating his dystopian vision with the enthusiastic and idyllic proclamations pasted below ("Wieder zurück zur Natur," "Haben Sie gewonnen?").

In another image from the FDJ series, *Flugblatt Nr. 1* (1987), Zabka critiques the East German domestic space and familial relations with analogous visual and linguistic tactics. This montage, too, has been assembled from newspaper clippings and set against a faint pink outline of a fragmented telephone book. It features three people, possibly family members, in what looks like a domestic space in a state of utter disarray: broken furniture, piles of books, tumbling house fronts, and hordes of domestic products and consumables. The montage draws the viewer into this virtual disarray with corporeal tactics. The figures in the photomontage interpolate the viewer by staring at him or her directly, while the round table in the lower section of the piece implicitly situates the viewer at the table. The newspaper clippings surrounding the montage offer additional interpretative clues. Some of the clippings seem to have been obtained from East German home improvement magazines (e.g. "die Möglichkeiten, einen Tisch zu decken,"

"So schützen Sie Ihre Wohnung vor Einbrechern") and some seem quite

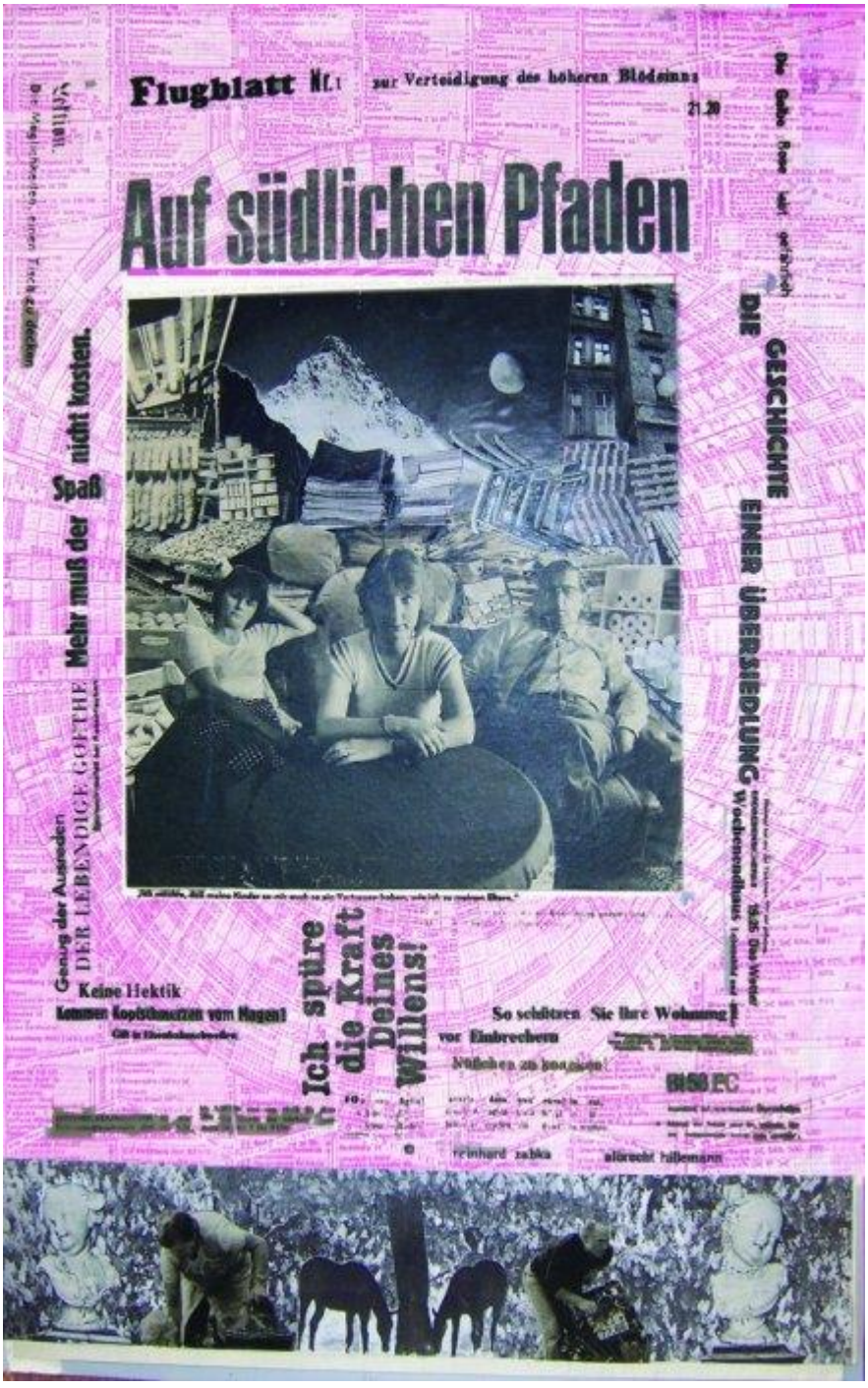

Fig. 20. Zabka, Reinhard. *Flugblatt Nr. 1.* 1987. Photomontage.

unrelated to anything in the piece (e.g. "der lebendige Goethe," "Auf südlichen Pfaden"). However, two particular clippings resonate with the disturbing image. The first is a fragment in the upper right hand corner, which reads "Die Geschichte einer Übersiedlung," where "Übersiedlung" could mean "relocation" in the sense of "emigration" – a frequent occurrence and a taboo subject in the GDR at the time. The second quotation, finely printed directly below the image, reads: "Ich möchte, dass meine Kinder zu mir auch so ein Vertrauen haben wie ich zu meinen Eltern." The line could relate to the figure of the daughter in the middle of the image, whose trust in her parents clashes with the imploded, disorganized domestic space, of which the characters seem quite oblivious. Alternatively, it could be spoken by the parents as an expression of yearning, because their offspring (the figure in the middle) does not trust them as much as they had trusted their parents. The piece might thus speak to the perception of broken trust between the GDR's generations, on which PB poets have often commented.[162]

What interests me in particular about these flyers, however, is that by juxtaposing dreams and fantasies transmitted by the official press with snippets of GDR reality, they unmask that reality as a failed one not only by the standards of those clichés, but by making apparent the loss of significance behind their content as well. Underlying this "negative" representation is, therefore, another, positive one, which Zabka lets the viewer decipher. In the first "Wohnungsbau" montage, Zabka's critical depiction of the GDR's communal housing measures the failure of these projects against the social purpose they were once supposed to fulfill: organizing the socialist environment and facilitating an egalitarian form of living. *Flugblatt Nr. 1* produces analogous insights by attacking the state's flawed intergenerational and social

[162] See for instance Elke Erb's introduction to the 1985 PB anthology *Berührung ist nur eine Randerscheinung*. In her foreword, Erb writes that Prenzlauer Berg literature "spiegelt ein neues gesellschaftliches Bewußtsein als Bewußtsein einer Jugend, die nicht mehr Objekt der ererbten Zivilisation sein will und kann." *Berührung ist nur eine Randerscheinung: Neue Literatur aus der DDR*. Ed. Erb, Elke and Sascha Anderson. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1985. 15.

cohesion. Overall, the reality of these failures, as shown by Zabka, is just as much an expression of "laughing at the disintegrating powers" as it is a call on the spectators to construct their own positive visions in their imaginary.

To summarize: although Michael Krejsa has illuminated political reasons behind Heartfield's troubled reception in the East German state between 1950 – 57, Krejsa does not explain what seems to have a been a continuous apprehension of the state toward the photomonteur even after his rehabilitation by 1957, as both SED documents and GDR scholarship published after 1957 suggest. The reason behind Heartfield's persistent marginalization in the East German state might be a primarily aesthetic one. Though Heartfield contributed in key ways to the development of socialist realism – an aesthetic that the GDR also eventually adopted –, the photomonteur was eventually criticized for what Soviet critics perceived as an insufficient positive depiction of the monumental or the utopian. Given that this binary, as argued by Bathrick, continued to inflect the cultural politics of the GDR until the state's demise, Heartfield's photomontage may have been deemed as being too much on the "negative" side of this spectrum. However, while Heartfield's photomontages generally gravitate toward critical or unflattering depictions of reality's reprehensible or imperfect aspects, his montages tend to locate the utopian in what they do not show. They are thus more democratic in their emphasis on the viewers' own articulation of what the communist ideal ought to be. Analogous practices and qualities are legible in the photomontages by the PB artist Reinhard Zabka, who in the 1980s assembles readymade and pre-circulated elements of the GDR's photographic culture and the press into disharmonious and crowded scenes. While the PB artist draws from the formal arsenal of Heartfieldian photomontage – especially by interlinking the visual with the linguistic of his photomontages, and by drawing on Heartfield's

own methods of drawing the viewer into the image, Zabka's work is predominantly Heartfieldian because its critical appropriation alerts his viewers to their environment's deficiencies. The PB artist allows his GDR viewers to make sense of the present crisis, encourages them to compare what is with "what should have been," and arguably leaves open the possibility of a regeneration of East German society in the viewers' imaginary.

CONCLUSION

Common to the disparate artists and writers united under the "Prenzlauer Berg" moniker is not only their shared belonging to the same generation of East German writers (few notable exceptions aside) but also a shared interest in and critique of a phenomenon, which their texts and artworks invariably register as a kind of linguistic exhaustion within the East German state. In so doing, the PB poets join in a transgenerational struggle with East German discourse, recorded already in the late 1950s in a note by Heiner Müller, in which Müller sees a language that is pure, precise and creative as the precondition of social progress.[163] Similarly, the protagonist of Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt?* (1990) not only suffers under state's oppressive surveillance but also from the emptiness of her literary language.[164] Toward the end of the novella, Wolf attempts to describe and circumvent this crisis with the neologism "WACHSTUMWOHLSTANDSTABILITÄT" (65), coined from the conjoining of the three words inscribed on a ubiquitous Party banner often seen by the protagonist; Wolf's simultaneously critical and creative gesture is embraced and further developed by the formal mimicry of the PB group.

In their formal experiments, PB poets launched a radical critique of GDR discourse, variously described by Lorenz and Thulin's programmatic essays as hollow and repetitive. The PB poets' voraciously appropriative practices – notably in Deisler, Sachse, and Warnke's collages and readymades discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation – fragment and reassemble the GDR discourse, exposing the pervasive effects of its mimetic deterioration in

[163] Hörnigk, Frank. "Texte, die auf Geschichte warten: Zum Geschichtsbegriff bei Heiner Müller." *Heiner Müller Material: Texte und Kommentare.* Ed. Frank Hörnigk. Leipzig: Reclam, 1989. 123 – 35. 135.
[164] Wolf, Christa. *Was bleibt?: Erzählung.* Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau. 1990. Wolf's novella was originally written in 1979 and published in 1990.

political, cultural, and quotidian realms. The artwork by Wunder that I discuss in the first chapter, furthermore, points up the effect that such repetition has had on language, by juxtaposing it against the state's relentless narratives of a steady progress toward the communist horizon. On the other hand, Papenfuß's poetry, which transgresses linguistic, formal, visual, and acoustic conventions in order to wrest this language "aus sinnlosigkeit in alle sinne," as one of his texts declares,[165] mines GDR discourse for new possibilities including a distinctly communist future among them. A similar regeneration of the ailing socialist discourse through innovative aesthetic strategies can be discerned in works by other PB poets, signaling that the possibility of the communist future pursued by the East German state and its cultural policies continued to be debated up to the state's sudden demise in 1989. In these debates, the avantgardes from before and after the Second World War play a key role, given that they lend the pieces discussed here the formal arsenal with which to mobilize the destructive energies underlying their aesthetic provocations and reapply them to the particular context of 1980s East Germany. Moreover, the frequent intrusion of the precirculated and the readymade in, for instance, PB collage, often entails a validation of that which is reused, even if this is done in a critical vein. The PB poets' recourse to the avantgardes thus exceeds a mere repetition of avantgarde styles, because it interferes in its particular cultural and political context, showing us a hitherto unexamined function of the avantgarde in the communist state beyond the well-noted experimental theater of Brecht, Müller or Braun.

As I show in chapter three, the practices of formal mimicry inform not only the literature and art by the PB collective, but also the structure of John Heartfield's photomontages and the ambivalent temporal demands of socialist realism at the point of its formation between 1932 and 1934. This striking commonality between these various movements and figures of Central and

[165] Papenfuß, Bert. *dreizehntanz*. Berlin: Aufbau, 1988. 183.

Eastern European dissident communist cultures erodes at least some of the aesthetic and political divisions that GDR scholarship has thus far imposed between the PB group and writers and artists critical of but committed to the communist cause. The lens of mimicry, furthermore, helps us fulfill Julia Hell's call for GDR scholarship that would paint a vivid picture of GDR literature as an expression of both *Staatsnähe* and *Staatsferne,* rather than privilege one or the other.[166] Though Hell makes this demand in the context of her discussion of Anderson's involvement with the Stasi, attention to this oscillation of *Nähe* and *Ferne* is equally useful for gauging the Prenzlauer Berg's complex relationship to the state's political project and aesthetics. Hell's desideratum for GDR studies stems from a need to revise our understanding of dissent under Central and Eastern European communism not only as more variegated in its aesthetic practices, but also more democratic in its political content and pedagogy. It is striking how many of the pieces under discussion defy the subjugation under cultural norms or dogmatic political projects imposed from above, asking instead that readers or viewers become the coproducers of these pieces, engaging their critical reasoning and creative imaginaries. While nobody can know what the exact outcome of such creative engagement might be, as Brecht once reportedly said to Benjamin,[167] the collective, democratic, and emancipatory potential inherent to such open-ended productive processes is indispensable for the art and literature of the communist movement.

[166] Hell, Julia. "Loyal Dissidents and Stasi Poets: Sascha Anderson, Christa Wolf, and the Incomplete Project of GDR Research." *German Politics & Society*. 20. 4. 65 (Winter 2002): 82-118. 112.
[167] Benjamin, Walter. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Sweppenhäuser. *Gesammelte Schriften*. Vol. 6. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972. 537.

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