

WRITING A NEW SOCIETY:

***AUFBAU* IN GDR LITERATURE 1949–1962**

by

MATTHEW RUSSELL HINES

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College of Arts and Law

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a survey of the early literature of the German Democratic Republic and an exploration of the political implications of cultural production in the period 1949–1962. Across four literary-analytical chapters, a sample of novels, plays, and poems illustrates the breadth and diversity of politico-aesthetic approaches in the *Aufbau* years and thereby expands upon existing scholarship on early GDR literature by deepening the understanding of intellectuals' interaction with and participation in political discourse. This study aims, broadly, to address myopic characterisations of *Aufbau* literature by asking how parallels to, deviations from, and ambiguities in the state-sanctioned aesthetic method of socialist realism and other politico-aesthetic norms might be read as politically significant for the GDR's history and as indicative of an overlooked potentiality in socialist cultural production.

The application of a theory of allegory not only unites several strands of Walter Benjamin's own work around a single but diverse literary corpus; it also offers a contribution to the existing body of scholarship on the period by presenting a hermeneutic tool with which to identify how cultural objects represent significant examples of a polysemic, socialist-affirming aesthetic practice. Benjamin's allegory serves as a structural methodology to identify patterns of fragmentation, montage, and internal disintegrity, and to differentiate texts that embody these patterns from others structured by a realist totality and total narrative coherence, which count as symbolic. Insofar as techniques identified as allegorical became targets of Party and critical attention, they serve here as markers for deviations from political and, sometimes, aesthetic norms outlined by the SED.

This analysis is presented according to a spectrum of political conformity to Party-mandated and -inspired norms, and of aesthetic conformity to allegoricism. The first chapter concerns Benjamin's theories of allegory and symbol as principal methodological devices, though each subsequent chapter introduces a distinct aspect from across Benjamin's oeuvre. After an examination of two exemplary socialist realist novels as symbolic in the third chapter, the fourth chapter centres on novels by and about refugees and expellees from former German territory west of the Oder and Neißerivers in what appears to be the first GDR-focussed analysis of its kind. In Chapter Five, plays by Inge and Heiner Müller, and others exemplify the debate around didactic and dialectical theatre, as well as the legacy of Bertolt Brecht, in the *Aufbau*. Finally, in the sixth chapter a collection of unpublished poems – drawn, among others, from the 'Lyrikabend' at the *Akademie der Künste* on 11 December 1962 – represents the most experimental and divergent literature produced at the time, which is collated through an allegorical reading.

As an authoritarian state with a socialist programme, the GDR constituted a unique setting to explore the possibility that art could invoke political change because of the idiosyncratic ambiguities enjoyed by intellectuals as part of a precarious dialectic between autonomy and affiliation, which I term the authority trap. This activity on the part of intellectuals remained precarious because often subversive, but it played a highly productive and constructive role in the period, providing evidence of an artistic network that experimented with official aesthetic policies to write a new society in the *Aufbau*.

For my grandparents

In memory of Laurence Dengreville-Jebanno

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Figure 2: Paul Klee, Angelus Novus, 1920, oil transfer and watercolour on paper, 31.8 × 24.2 cm, Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Image licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported License.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AdK – Akademie der Künste

ALV – Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen

CDU – Christlich-Demokratische Union Deutschlands

CPSU – Communist Party of the Soviet Union

DBD – Demokratische Bauernpartei Deutschlands

DSV – Deutscher Schriftstellerverband

DVV – Deutsche (Zentral)Verwaltung für Volksbildung

FDGB – Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund

FDJ – Freie Deutsche Jugend

GDR – German Democratic Republic

HVV – Hauptverwaltung Verlagswesen

HVVV – Hauptverwaltung Verlage und Buchhandel

KPD – Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands

LDPD – Liberal-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands

LPG – Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft

MfK – Ministerium für Kultur

NDPD – National-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands

NSDAP – Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei

SBZ – Sowjetische Besatzungszone

SED – Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

ZK – Zentralkomitee (der SED)

ZVU – Zentralverwaltung für Umsiedler

CHAPTER ONE

THE GDR'S *AUFBAU* AND ITS INTELLECTUALS:

AN INTRODUCTION

More than thirty years have passed since the forty-year-old GDR ceased to exist. In that time, considerable academic advances have been made in diversifying and complicating binary notions such as state and people or 'Geist' and 'Macht', but these have yet to impact fully on scholarship on the early years in the state.¹ Cultural production from the GDR's earlier history in particular has received less scrutiny, often on account of political biases that read the art of this period as aesthetically weak, ideologically instrumentalised, or even contextually irrelevant. This study aims, broadly, to address such myopic characterisations by asking how parallels to, deviations from, and ambiguities in the state-sanctioned aesthetic method of socialist realism and other politico-aesthetic norms might be read as politically significant for the GDR's history and as indicative of an overlooked potentiality in socialist cultural production.

The works of both well-known and long-forgotten authors across a range of forms and genres are examined through a structural or materialist theory of allegory drawn from the writings of the philosopher and critic Walter Benjamin to describe certain shared characteristics in this corpus as increasingly experimental vehicles for identifying and examining perceived issues in the *Aufbau* present. Precedent exists, for example in David Bathrick's study *The Powers of Speech* (1995), for describing how intellectuals, particularly in the later years, questioned and critiqued SED behaviour in the hope of correcting – rather

¹ See footnote 18 for examples.

than negating – the GDR’s course, which Bathrick recognises as the attempt to establish a ‘polysemic’ discourse in the state.² This study builds on such existing analyses by proposing a hermeneutic method that details how intellectuals in the GDR’s early years intended to achieve change not through what literary theorist Georg Lukács called aesthetic ‘Einheitlichkeit’, but with disparate fragments (‘Splitter’) used as building material.³

Numerous histories of the early GDR have already been written, many of which define the origin of the state differently, choosing 7 October 1949 (the GDR’s founding date) or referencing the European surrender in May 1945 as a ‘Nullpunkt’, ‘Kahlschlag’, ‘tabula rasa’, or ‘Stunde Null’, after which Soviet and German communists began work in East Berlin.⁴ Events did not unfold so simply, however. The ‘Gruppe Ulbricht’, consisting of Stalin’s favoured German communist exiles, set foot back in Berlin in April 1945 to begin preparations for the SBZ.⁵ But their party, the KPD, had engaged a commission as early as February 1944 to explore the ‘ideologische Umerziehung’ that they would initiate after the fall of fascism.⁶ The ‘Aufbau’ (lit. construction), the term employed by the SED to describe the path towards socialism in 1952, pertinently thematises the ideological and physical (re)construction that the KPD had been exploring and that dominated the period. The ideological formation of an *Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat* consisted in announcing the development of a socialist consciousness, which took as its inspiration ordinary workers and farmers (the

² “[L]iterary dissidence in the GDR often began not as a philosophical or political challenge to the ideological principles of Marxist-Leninism but as a sometimes unintended fall into ‘polysemic’ modes of address that, by virtue of their multiplicity of meaning, were perforce understood and evaluated as negative, that is, as subversive of the official, ‘monosemic’ mode of discourse” – David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 17.

³ Georg Lukács, ‘Es geht um den Realismus’, *Das Wort*, 6 (1938), 112–138 (pp. 127–128).

⁴ Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR: Erweiterte Neuausgabe* (Leipzig: Kiepenheuer, 1996), p. 70. See Stephen Brockmann, *German Literary Culture at the Zero Hour* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004) and the GDR-published volume *Kunst der DDR*, ed. by Ullrich Kuhirt (Leipzig: Seemann, 1982), I: 1945–1959, p. 14.

⁵ Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, pp. 71–72.

⁶ Jens Wehner, *Kulturpolitik und Volksfront: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands, 1945–1949* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992), I, p. 62.

proletariat) and represented a new political path. The necessity of a physical ‘Aufbau’, on the other hand, captured the chance to define the GDR through careful architectonic steering, building up the ruins of a country decimated by war.⁷

The *Aufbau* period did not begin in July 1952 when the SED officially declared it, however, nor on 7 October 1949, but in those months prior to the Nazis’ surrender, in the capital of the Soviet Union. The *Aufbau* movement therefore stretched from before the GDR’s foundation until the beginning of the 1960s, at which point the construction of the Berlin Wall marked a new epoch in the history of the state, such that *Aufbau*, for the purposes of this study, describes the years 1945–1961. This broader application is anachronistic but appropriate because the term conveys the temporary and anticipatory nature of a society in the midst of goal-oriented change.⁸ At the same time, the literary examples examined in this study do not fit neatly into this range, testifying to the perennial risk of applying rigid categories to fluid chronologies; whilst the earliest work considered was not published until 1949, some texts from the Chapter Six first reached a public in 1962. However, this analysis exemplifies patterns within the broader historical period in the GDR, for which the texts discussed serve as mere examples, among many. In this Introduction, following a brief survey of the cultural politics of the *Aufbau*, I review the state of GDR historiography and of research into early GDR literature. I then address the research questions that underpin this study.

⁷ Wolfgang Emmerich, ‘The GDR and its literature: an overview’, in *Rereading East Germany: The Literature and Film of the GDR*, ed. by Karen Leeder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 8–34 (p. 14). For the SED’s politico-architectural aspirations, see Chapter Six.

⁸ Ingeborg Münz-Koenen, ‘Einleitung’, in *Literarisches Leben in der DDR 1945 bis 1960: Literaturkonzepte und Leseprogramme*, ed. by Ingeborg Münz-Koenen, Therese Hörnigk, et al. (Berlin: Akademie, 1980), pp. 7–22 (p. 15).

From 1952, the SED explicitly publicised the role foreseen for the arts in this movement through the proclamation of an ‘Aufbau einer sozialistischen Kultur’, to which literature was expected to contribute by highlighting workers and their social transformation, and educating them so that they might become authors themselves as per the *Umerziehung* planned by the initiators of the project.⁹ Culture therefore became a political venture even from the conception of the state, in particular through the propagation of socialist realism as an aesthetic method, which the Party approved, sanctioned, and even expected in artistic production. Originally conceived in the USSR in the 1930s, socialist realism, of which I give a more detailed overview in Chapter Three, occupied KPD members more intensely following the Second World War on account of the positive steering that it could effect for their ideological transformation from fascism to socialism.¹⁰ It suffices here to say that socialist realism was intended to bolster the development of socialism in political discourse through aesthetic means, such as coupling a realist style with characters who, inspired by a hero, tread their own path to socialism by adopting certain Party-political, philosophical, and moral characteristics.¹¹

The SED explored various avenues to influence and steer the arts in the new socialist state. At the third Party congress in 1950, for example, speakers emphasised the cultivation of the ‘kulturelles Erbe’, such as by performing ‘classical’ plays or promoting canonical literature

⁹ Bernhard Greiner, ‘Arbeitswelt als Perspektive literarischer Öffentlichkeit in der DDR’, in *Handbuch zur deutschen Arbeiterliteratur*, ed. by Heinz Ludwig Arnold (Munich: text+kritik, 1977), I, pp. 83–122 (pp. 83–84); Ulrike Goeschen, *Vom sozialistischen Realismus zur Kunst im Sozialismus: Die Rezeption der Moderne in Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft der DDR* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001), pp. 13–26; Hans Lauter, *Der Kampf gegen den Formalismus in Kunst und Literatur, für eine fortschrittliche deutsche Kultur* (Berlin: Dietz, 1951).

¹⁰ Note that references to the policy prior to 1952 often referred merely to realism rather than socialist realism – Magdalena Heider, *Politik-Kultur-Kulturbund: Zur Gründungs- und Frühgeschichte des Kulturbundes zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands 1945–1954 in der SBZ/DDR* (Cologne: Wissenschaft & Politik, 1993), p. 117.

¹¹ Achim Wolter, ‘Die internationale Bedeutung des sozialistischen Realismus’, *Neues Deutschland*, 5 October 1951, 4; Egon Rentzsch, ‘Die Entwicklung der Kunst unter den Bedingungen des Sozialismus’, *Einheit*, Sonderheft (1952), 1174–1182; [n.a.], ‘Thesen zum sozialistischen Realismus’, *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, 3 (1958), 120–132; Thomas Lahusen & Evgeny Dobrenko (eds.), *Socialist Realism Without Shores* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1997). For an extended discussion, see Chapter Three.

and the continued application of some of its characteristics, and thereby declared ‘den Formenkanon einer bestimmten Entwicklungsetappe bürgerlicher Kunst als überhistorisch gültig’.¹² In order to direct contemporary art further and in response to the slow development of GDR art, at the same congress Hans Lauter, a member of the *Zentralkomitee*, proclaimed the Party’s ‘Kampf gegen den Formalismus in Kunst und Literatur, für eine fortschrittliche deutsche Kultur’.¹³ The anti-formalism campaign took aim at experimental art from the Expressionists to Bertolt Brecht and GDR artists, problematising works that appeared to detract from or question socialist ideals, to avoid a realistic style, or to prioritise form over content.¹⁴ An article in the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* explains the motivation behind this policy:

Der Formalismus behandelt die reale Welt, die lebendigen Farben und Klänge mit Verachtung. Er lehnt in der Malerei die Unversehrtheit der Gestalt ab, wie er in der Musik die Melodie und Klarheit der Phrasen ablehnt. Der Formalist hat eine geringschätzige Einstellung dem breiten Publikum gegenüber.¹⁵

Formalism became the antithesis of (socialist) realism and, according to Günter Mayer, a Soviet ‘Sammelbegriff für unterschiedliche, v.a. avantgardistische Orientierungen künstlerischen Schaffens, die dem parteioffiziell sanktionierten “sozialistischen Realismus” auf irgendeine Weise widersprachen’.¹⁶ Whilst the texts explored in this study did not

¹² Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, pp. 120–121.

¹³ Lauter, *Der Kampf gegen den Formalismus in Kunst und Literatur*; Leonore Krenzlin, ‘Das “Formalismus-Plenum”. Die Einführung eines kunstpolitischen Argumentationsmodells’, in *Brüche, Krisen, Wendepunkte: Neubefragung von DDR-Geschichte*, ed. by Jochen Černý (Leipzig, Jena & Berlin: Urania, 1990), pp. 52–61 (p. 53).

¹⁴ Krenzlin, pp. 13–14, 20–21; Stephan Bock, *Literatur – Gesellschaft – Nation: Materielle und ideelle Rahmenbedingungen der frühen DDR-Literatur 1949–1956* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1980), p. 270; Alexander Dymshitz, ‘Über die formalistische Richtung in der deutschen Malerei’, *Tägliche Rundschau*, 19 & 24 November 1948, 11; N. Orlov, ‘Wege und Irrwege der modernen Kunst’, *Tägliche Rundschau*, 20 & 21 January 1951, 4; Alexander Dymshitz et al., ‘Formalismus in der Sackgasse’, *Neues Deutschland*, 20 February 1949, 7.

¹⁵ Cited in Thomas Christ, *Der sozialistische Realismus: Betrachtungen zum sozialistischen Realismus in der Sowjetzeit* (Basel: Wiese, 1999), p. 31.

¹⁶ Günter Mayer, ‘Formalismus-Kampagnen’, in *Historisch-kritisches Wörterbuch des Marxismus*, ed. by Wolfgang Fritz Haug (Hamburg: Argument, 1999), pp. 619–635 (p. 619).

explicitly fall prey to the campaign against formalism, the ensuing debate influenced cultural innovation throughout the *Aufbau* period thereafter.

Since the GDR's founding, the SED had not perceived acceptable progress in the predominance of socialist realist works in the cultural sphere of the state, not least because of artists' own scepticism; after much wrangling in an attempt to do so through persuasion, the Party declared socialist realism the official aesthetic model at its 'Parteitag' in 1952.¹⁷ From 1952 at the latest, the sanctioned model of socialist realism, the anti-formalism campaign, and the 'Erbe' discussion became benchmarks for artists in a politicised environment, although none offered a concrete and static apparatus with which to produce or appraise art. Indeed, countless works of art entered public circulation without fulfilling the criteria of socialist realism, leading often to severe criticism on the part of critics from Party-affiliated organs such as the journal *Neue Deutsche Literatur* and the Party newspaper *Neues Deutschland*. Others, despite containing critical elements, attracted little or no negative attention from critics, or earned praise but in publications with a limited readership, such as *Sinn und Form*. Nonetheless, it remained possible for authors to publish both 'formalist' and non-socialist realist literature, for example, and thereby to expand and complicate the boundaries imposed officially on GDR culture, thus nullifying the absolutism of Party proclamations about formalism and socialist realism, as seen in several of the texts analysed in this study.

¹⁷ See Carsten Gansel (ed.), *Erinnerung als Aufgabe?: Dokumentation des II. und III. Schriftstellerkongresses in der DDR 1950 und 1952* (Göttingen: V & R Unipress, 2009); Johannes R. Becher, 'Der Aufbau einer sozialistischen Kultur bedeutet, dass die führende Rolle der Arbeiterschaft in doppelter Hinsicht in Erscheinung treten muss' – BArch SAPMO DY 30/40454, pp. 58–61.

This activity on the part of intellectuals remained precarious because often subversive, but it played a highly productive and constructive role particularly in the *Aufbau* years, providing evidence not of a dissident or counter-political campaign to deconstruct and jeopardise the Party and the state, but of a larger artistic network, including lesser-known authors, that circumvented official aesthetic policy in order to improve it and the wider political climate in the GDR. Throughout this study, I show how writers contributed to political discourse, but also utilised that position to further an expansive and polysemic agenda.

***Aufbau* and Authority: GDR Historiography**

Such a reading expands upon a limited body of research that focuses specifically on *Aufbau* literature. This work has often overlooked the rich literary history of the period, instead identifying a pattern of corroboration between intellectuals and the SED, and casting cultural production as a mimetic mouthpiece for Soviet propaganda typified by genres such as the ‘Betriebsroman’ and ‘Produktionsstück’. In the literary sphere, critics have written of a ‘simplistische Bestätigungsliteratur’ (Wolfgang Emmerich), hyperbolically optimistic and production-obsessed works (Eva Kaufmann), or an ‘impoverished’ style and ‘stereotypical’ characters (Bill Niven).¹⁸ Concessions are made to recognise some degree of polysemism, but the vast majority of existing analyses of the GDR’s early literary sphere draw conclusions primarily from Party sources, hence the proclamation of authors praised by authorities at the time as typecast *Aufbau* writers, to the detriment of more thorough and nuanced examinations of cultural discourse at the time. This mischaracterisation or space for expansion played a crucial role in the motivation for and development of this study.

¹⁸ Wehner, I, p. 3; Wolfgang Emmerich, ‘Affirmation-Utopie-Melancholie: Versuch einer Bilanz von vierzig Jahren DDR-Literatur’, *German Studies Review*, 14:2 (1991), 325–344 (p. 333); Eva Kaufmann, ‘Aufbau-Literatur’, in *Metzler Lexikon DDR-Literatur*, ed. by Michael Opitz & Michael Hofmann (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2009), pp. 11–13 (p. 12); Bill Niven, *Representations of Flight and Expulsion in East German Prose Works* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2014), pp. 50–51, 56.

Overviews by Gerd Dietrich and Stephen Brockmann in cultural histories of the GDR and its early years in particular do, by contrast, foreground the polysemism and the homogeneity of literary works from the period.¹⁹ Brockmann's two monographs on the period – *German Literary Culture at the Zero Hour* (2004) and *The Writers' State: Constructing East German Literature, 1945–1959* (2015) – describe the central characteristics of *Aufbau* literature as including 'a basic political commitment to antifascism and socialism, a belief in the social and political efficacy of literature, the rejection of *l'art pour l'art*, an emphasis on particular themes, narratives, or characters (conversion, coming-of-age, generational conflict, the world of work, father or mother figures etc.), and even particular stylistic or aesthetic devices or strategies'.²⁰ Whereas Brockmann draws upon some literary texts to demonstrate his historiographical research, I foreground the evidence in literary works of how authors sought to influence political discourse.

An emphatic focus on textual analysis of novels, plays, and poems rather than purely historical research in this study acknowledges the calls for GDR Studies to turn specifically to cultural objects because they can 'structure meanings and belonging, provid[e] frameworks for ordering and expressing individual experience, forg[e] new avenues for dissidence as well as conformity, and ope[n] diverse scholarly perspectives on everyday experience and its relation to social practices', as Erica Carter, Jan Palmowski, and Katrin Schreiter write.²¹ Such work has already begun, for example in Matthias Aumüller's monograph on the novel form

¹⁹ Gerd Dietrich, *Kulturgeschichte der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), I: *Kultur in der Übergangsgesellschaft 1945–1957*. Note also Stephan Bock's *Literatur – Gesellschaft – Nation*, which broadly but lucidly surveys several debates from the period with reference to the literary sphere.

²⁰ Stephen Brockmann, *The Writers' State: Constructing East German Literature, 1945–1959* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2015), pp. 1–2.

²¹ Erica Carter, Jan Palmowski & Katrin Schreiter, 'Conclusion', in *German Division as Shared Experience*, ed. by Erica Carter, Jan Palmowski & Katrin Schreiter (New York: Berghahn, 2019), pp. 289–298 (p. 290).

in the period or in the edited volume *Der 'neue Mensch'* by Katrin Löffler, but an unequivocally literary-analytical approach of the *Aufbau* more broadly has yet to be published.²²

Aumüller underscores a crucial theoretical condition for research on *Aufbau* literature when he refers to the need to look beyond the 'angemessene poetologische Dimension' of a work and focus on the 'Hintergrund des Korpus bzw. der Systeme, die [das Werk] realisiert'.²³

Numerous analyses of GDR literature both take Party discourse as the definitive source of all cultural production and disregard the works of that corpus as tokens of an absolute ideology, thereby applying criteria from a liberal democracy as a benchmark for analysing a distinct political network and system. Whilst debates continue about the ethical necessity or otherwise of applying some democratic lens for studies on the GDR's human rights record or the access to civil liberties such as freedom of movement,²⁴ in the following I concur with Aumüller and others that studies into GDR cultural production must be read as if from within the socialist system to ascertain how and why authors sought to remould it.

Such an approach elicits significant contradictions between the object of study – the GDR and its early years – and my own societal positionality, which necessitates a constant awareness of the albeit inconsistent but nonetheless considerable divide to be crossed. Approaching the state on its own terms, not that of a western neoliberal democracy, therefore means overlooking questions of politicisation and freedom of expression if they

²² Matthias Aumüller, *Minimalistische Poetik: Zur Ausdifferenzierung des Aufbausystems in der Romanliteratur der frühen DDR* (Münster: Menits, 2015); Katrin Löffler (ed.), *Der neue Mensch: Ein ideologisches Leitbild der frühen DDR-Literatur und sein Kontext* (Leipzig: Universitätsverlag, 2013). Marc Silberman's much earlier *Literature of the Working World: A Study of the International Novel in East Germany* (Bern: Lang, 1976) equally deserves mention here, though it does not focus solely on the period in question.

²³ Aumüller, *Minimalistische Poetik*, p. 356.

²⁴ See for example Ned Richardson-Little, *The Human Rights Dictatorship: Socialism, Global Solidarity and Revolution in East Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Konrad H. Jarausch, *Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, trans. by Eve Duffy (New York & Oxford: Berghahn, 1999); Mary Fulbrook & Andrew I. Port (eds.), *Becoming East German: Socialist Structures and Sensibilities after Hitler* (New York: Berghahn, 2013); Ulrich Mählert (ed.), *Die DDR als Chance: Neue Perspektiven auf ein altes Thema* (Berlin: Metropolis, 2016).

would dominate in a literary analysis focussed primarily on the capacity of cultural products to influence cultural policy. As such, this study aligns itself with something like the third of Andrew I. Port's chronological 'waves' in GDR historiography.²⁵ I hesitate to echo Port's teleological strategy on account of the ambiguities between such divisions, in particular where 'second-wave' works continue to be published today, thus I refer to more generic methodological 'streams' that trace a dynamic in scholarly discourse, but also tolerate pro- and regressive positions. The following brief overview of GDR historiography rests on a modified version of Port's work.

The first stream of historiography focuses above all on the structures of power in the GDR. Focussing on administered (e.g. by the Stasi) and resisted (e.g. by high-profile, critical figures) examples of this power, the first-stream approach foregrounds the contravention of western values and democratic ideals within the state, but thereby also reifies it by condensing its history into pockets or niches of power. Much of this work appeared in the first decade or so following 1989, when the object of study could no longer offer resistance to mischaracterisation, allowing the terroristic behaviour of the Stasi, the frequent violations of the constitution by and within the GDR's justice system, and the construction (and fall) of the Berlin Wall to suffice as a historical summary.²⁶ However, the GDR relied on a functioning legislature, produced multiple constitutions, had a border that was porous to

²⁵ Andrew I. Port, 'The Banalities of East German Historiography', in *Becoming East German*, ed. by Fulbrook & Port, pp. 1–32 (pp. 1–2). This Introduction lacks the space for a comprehensive historiographical overview, but such work occurs in, among countless other sources, Stephan Ehrig, Marcel Thomas & David Zell (eds.), 'Introduction: The GDR Today', in *The GDR Today: New Interdisciplinary Approaches to East German History, Memory and Culture* (Oxford & New York: Peter Lang, 2018), 1–16.

²⁶ See for example Alf Lüdtkke, "Helden der Arbeit" – Mühen beim Arbeiten: Zur missmutigen Loyalität von Industriearbeitern in der DDR', in *Sozialgeschichte der DDR*, ed. by Harmut Kaeble, Jürgen Kocka & Hartmut Zwahr (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994), pp. 188–213; Jürgen Kocka, 'The GDR: A Special Kind of Modern Dictatorship', in *Dictatorship as Experience*, pp. 17–26; Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR* (London: Arnold, 2002), pp. 33–34, 54.

select citizens and to cultural and media transfer, and was governed by a Party that did not exercise absolute authority.

These contradictions led to a perspectival re-evaluation that tells the GDR's story from a quotidian or individual point of view, as embodied by the approach of 'Alltagsgeschichte', which I recognise as the second stream.²⁷ Such studies focus on ordinary citizens' behaviour in a repressive state, elaborating on their experience of authority in terms of how they tolerated, but also tested, shared, influenced, resisted, and ignored it.²⁸ The description of the GDR as a dictatorship – a state characterised by 'absolute rule unrestricted by law, constitutions, or other political or social factors within the state' – previously found increasing favour alongside the totalitarian epithet, but second-stream analysis diversifies this notion by applying contradictory descriptions such as 'Fürsorgediktatur', 'limits of dictatorship', 'participatory dictatorship', or 'human rights dictatorship'.²⁹ These terms highlight the SED's humanist intentions alongside the politicisation of individual lives in line with the ambitions of the socialist project, whether seeing citizens as separate from or consciously engaged in the apparatus of authority, though Corey Ross urges caution around a power-based lens that sees participation, even if by resistance, as predetermined.³⁰ Mary Fulbrook, however, develops the concept of normalisation, according to which individuals

²⁷ See Alf Lüdtke (ed.), *Alltagsgeschichte: zur Rekonstruktion historischer Erfahrungen und Lebensweisen* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1989).

²⁸ Thomas Lindenberger, 'Die Diktatur der Grenzen. Zur Einleitung', in *Herrschaft und Eigen-Sinn in der Diktatur: Studien zur Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR*, ed. by Thomas Lindenberger (Cologne: Böhlau, 1999), pp. 13–44 (p. 22).

²⁹ Lincoln Allison, 'Dictatorship', in *A Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics and International Relations*, 4th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) <<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199670840.001.0001/acref-9780199670840-e-350?rskey=ZFx1CT&result=401>> [accessed 5 December 2019]. See for example Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949–1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Richard Bessel & Ralph Jessen (eds.), *Die Grenzen der Diktatur: Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996); Jarusch, *Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*; Ross, *The East German Dictatorship*.

³⁰ Ross, pp. 64–65; Richard Bessel & Ralph Jessen, 'Einleitung: Die Grenzen der Diktatur', in *Die Grenzen der Diktatur*, ed. by Bessel & Jessen, pp. 7–24 (p. 13); Carl J. Friedrich & Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 279; Mary Fulbrook, *The People's State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 12; Mary Fulbrook, 'Ein "ganz normales Leben"? Neue Forschungen zur Sozialgeschichte der DDR', in *Das war die DDR: DDR-Forschung im Fadenkreuz von Herrschaft, Außenbeziehungen, Kultur und Souveränität*, ed. by Heiner Timmermann (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2004), pp. 115–134 (p. 15); Lindenberger, 'Die Diktatur der Grenzen. Zur Einleitung', p. 20.

internalised authority and regarded it as compatible with the desire to lead a ‘normal’ life: approximately one fifth of adults in the GDR held a position of political responsibility at some level, which they ‘normalised’ structurally and subjectively, perhaps to their own advantage.³¹ These and other theoretical conceptualisations of the GDR thus engender, in contrast to the first stream, an understanding of the state in its own context, which means recognising the systemic differences in socialism that marked people’s lives.

A more recent perspectival shift has occurred in the third stream of GDR historiography, which combines both top-down and bottom-up, macro- and microlevel analysis and is characterised, for example, by transnational, interdiscursive, interdisciplinary, and intersectional approaches. Acknowledging ambiguities, the lacunary overreach of SED authority, and yet the substantial politicisation of life in the GDR, such research investigates the quotidian interactions and entanglements of state politics and the population on a social, intranational, and cultural level, and explores the SED’s efforts to improve citizens’ quality of life. Volumes published tend to focus on objects such as literature, music, advertising, fashion, and gastronomy in order to exhibit the entanglement of authority and individual agency, something which this study aims to echo.³² Notably, the third stream is generally based on a conceptualisation of the state derived from the theoretical advances of the previous streams but applies them dynamically to a range of objects. Authority thus still occupies a central position in this perspective, yet the focus has shifted towards specific and

³¹ Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, pp. 258–259; Port, ‘The Banalities of East German Historiography’, pp. 11–13; Fulbrook, ‘Ein “ganz normales Leben”?’ Neue Forschungen zur Sozialgeschichte der DDR’, pp. 120–123

³² See for example Alf Lüdtke (ed.), *Everyday Life in Mass Dictatorship: Collusion and Evasion* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016); Juliane Fürst & Josie McLellan (ed.), *Dropping out of Socialism: The Creation of Alternative Spheres in the Soviet Bloc* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016); Ehrig, Thomas & Zell, *The GDR Today*; Carter, Palmowski & Schreiter, *German Division as Shared Experience*; Karen Hagemann, Donna Harsch & Friederike Brühöfener (eds.), *Gendering Post-1945 German History: Entanglements* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn, 2019); Tom Smith, *Comrades in Arms: Military Masculinities in East Germany* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn, 2020); Eric Burton et al., *Navigating Socialist Encounters: Moorings and (Dis)Entanglements between Africa and East Germany during the Cold War* (Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021); Anandita Bajpai (ed.), *Cordial Cold War: Cultural Actors in India and the German Democratic Republic* (London: Sage, 2021).

targeted examples from a range of facets, in which Party discourse and policy remain relevant but are tempered by a bottom-up counter-movement.

Alf Lüdtke distinguishes power from authority, defining the former as the use of one's will over others, implying hierarchical superiority, and the latter as how power is expressed socially, indeed institutionally, and therefore how it is recognised and acknowledged by others.³³ Authority, as opposed to power, is understood as 'social praxis', which functions in society via 'fields of force' in which a relationship, albeit asymmetrical, plays out between parties that are themselves unequal and contradictory, according to Lüdtke.³⁴ In the GDR, authority was 'socially produced' because of its reliance on touch points in social praxis, as Corey Ross proposes, which means breaking from a strict and rigid hierarchy in favour of a model that captures the agency of the so-called 'ruled' to acquiesce, challenge, or change authority by participating in it.³⁵ The 'ruled', in Thomas Lindenberger's analysis, constitute the 'weaker' group, but could remain subjects or actors, meaning that they had the agency to accept, obey, or challenge authority.³⁶ In a continuation of this thesis, Richard Bessel and Ralph Jessen propose that, paradoxically, the more the SED wanted control, the more people on all levels and on their own terms became involved in the praxis of authority through the expansion of administrative structures in formal (Party) and informal (hobby group) contexts.³⁷ Such a system of authority captures the ambiguities in SED behaviour, entanglements between individual motivations and Party-oriented behaviours, and contradictions that allowed people to lead lives in a manner that suited them. This approach

³³ Alf Lüdtke, 'Einleitung: Herrschaft als soziale Praxis', in *Herrschaft als soziale Praxis. Historische und sozial-anthropologische Studien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), pp. 9–63 (p. 9).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

³⁵ Ross, p. 50; Lindenberger, 'Die Diktatur der Grenzen. Zur Einleitung', p. 22.

³⁶ Thomas Lindenberger, 'Alltagsgeschichte und ihr möglicher Beitrag zu einer Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR', in *Die Grenzen der Diktatur*, ed. by Bessel & Jessen, pp. 298–325 (p. 315).

³⁷ Bessel & Jessen, 'Einleitung: Die Grenzen der Diktatur', p. 15.

eschews the imposition of authority upon normal citizens on account of their – willing or intentional – entanglement within such a system in order to recognise their conscious agency and the potential contradictions within it.

Aside from or, indeed, within that system of authority, the SED's efforts to improve the lives of GDR citizens were accompanied by a mode of governance that I consider authoritarian, where 'the rulers demand unquestioning obedience from the ruled. [...] But it is possible to be authoritarian in some spheres while being more liberal in others'.³⁸ Thus whilst repressive, authoritarian regimes do not impose the claim to absolute authority in some respects, allowing a degree of political and social diversity seen in the GDR, which had five semi-autonomous political parties (SED, LDPD, CDU, NDPD, DBD), a non-absolute ideology, and an incomplete control of mass media and mobilisation, to give just a few examples.³⁹ This political category provides a means of distinguishing the chronological positioning of states, historical or modern, and their ideological flavours, thus locating the GDR between democracy and totalitarianism.⁴⁰

If authoritarian designates a mode of governance, 'socialist' describes the political programme behind many policy decisions as well as the politicised structuring of a society, including the nationalisation of industry, the expansion of mass organisations (FDGB, FDJ), and the heightened availability of cultural material to the public.⁴¹ Though the term socialism

³⁸ Lincoln Allison, 'Authoritarianism', in *A Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics and International Relations*, 4th edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) <<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199670840.001.0001/acref-9780199670840-e-79?rskey=Po9pRI&result=89>> [5 December 2019].

³⁹ Hermann Weber, *Geschichte der DDR* (Munich: Taschenbuch, 1999), pp. 38, 133; Ross, p. 24; Simone Barck, Christoph Classen & Thomas Heimann, 'The Fettered Media: Controlling Public Debate', in *Dictatorship as Experience*, ed. by Jarausch, pp. 213–240 (pp. 213–214).

⁴⁰ Ross, p. 24.

⁴¹ Barck, Classen & Heimann, p. 230; Fulbrook, *The People's State*, p. 35; Ross, p. 63.

contextualises this radical reconception of society, it has proven so perplexing in historical debates, suggesting that historians have repeatedly ascribed aspects of a liberal-democratic worldview as the touchstone for analysing the GDR. East German socialism heralded a society in which participation served the interests of someone or something in that society, including oneself and officially the state. The presumption of divisible private and public spheres in which one could choose to act politically or not neglects the fundamental restructuring of a socialist society; in place of such a realm, the SED blurred the distinction between private and the public through politicisation, as David Bathrick explains:

[T]o 'speak' meant to function within the paradigms of a carefully delineated and heavily encoded linguistic network and to have internalised the dominant narrative patterns that ensured meaning as part of the life-world.⁴²

Bathrick acknowledges politicisation both as an expression of authority and as a socially constructed phenomenon that codified the behaviour of East Germans. This pattern also stabilised the trajectory of the state, as the combination of socialism with authoritarian governance fossilised certain political behaviours alongside arbitrary bureaucratic practices and repressive surveillance.

A further, crucial tool is that of *Eigen-Sinn*, advanced by Alf Lüdtke, Thomas Lindenberger, and others.⁴³ Initially developed outside of GDR Studies, its application has helped to explain both how subversive behaviour within the GDR did not jeopardise its existence and how participation, equally, did not merely or always serve Party ends, not least because the SED's programme was based on a mutually dependent ideology, i.e. one that required the

⁴² Bathrick, p. 17.

⁴³ See for example Alf Lüdtke, *Eigen-Sinn: Fabrikalltag, Arbeitererfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse, 1993).

involvement of all in order not to collapse.⁴⁴ The term is a rendering of ‘Eigensinn’ (stubbornness, ‘self-will’, lit. ‘own meaning’) and uses the literality of German morphology to emphasise obstinacy and the fierce protection of one’s own interests.⁴⁵ Lindenberger distinguishes *Eigen-Sinn* from political resistance and opposition, since it could entail refusing to sign a ‘Betriebskollektivvertrag’ in order to protect Sunday pay and preferable base wages, and simultaneously joining the SED in order to get a promotion at work.⁴⁶

Eigen-Sinn therefore consists of a ‘dynamic’, not of pro- or anti-state behaviour, which can contradict itself:

Die DDR war eine Gesellschaftsordnung, in der es durchaus möglich war, sowohl Mitglied der Kirche als auch mehrerer Massenorganisationen und einer ‘Blockpartei’ (zum Beispiel der CDU) zu sein; in der man die Sozial- und Gesundheitspolitik gutheißen konnte und zugleich die begrenzte Reisefreiheit und die ständigen Lücken in der Versorgung heftig kritisierte; und in der man Eingaben schreiben konnte, die sowohl als Lob der DDR-Ideale wie auch Kritik an den bestehenden Verhältnissen ausdrückten.⁴⁷

Eigen-Sinn refers to citizens’ own participation in authority and explains how their behaviour often forced the SED to make alterations and volte-faces because of the clear overlap between Party and people, consensus and dissent.⁴⁸ Foregrounding the perspective of citizens, including functionaries and others, *Eigen-Sinn* also explains the widespread

⁴⁴ Arguably, the erosion of that collective affirmation amongst the GDR public led to the fall of the Wall and the demise of the state.

⁴⁵ See e.g. Lindenberger, ‘Die Diktatur der Grenzen. Zur Einleitung’, pp. 13–44; Fredric Jameson, ‘On Negt and Kluge’, in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. by Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 42–74 (p. 51).

⁴⁶ Lindenberger, ‘Die Diktatur der Grenzen. Zur Einleitung’, p. 23; Andrew I. Port, *Conflict and Stability in the German Democratic Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 43.

⁴⁷ Mary Fulbrook, ‘Historiografische Kontroversen seit 1989’, in *Views from Abroad: Die DDR aus britischer Perspektive*, ed. by Peter Barker, Marc-Dietrich Ohse & Dennis Tate (Bielefeld: Bertelsmann, 2007), pp. 41–51 (p. 44).

⁴⁸ Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, pp. 12, 267–268; Ross, p. 122.

politicisation of society in the GDR and the choice to overlook or manipulate it as individuals saw fit.

Research Questions

With a framework in hand that reads the state as authoritarian and socialist, this study poses several questions about the GDR's cultural sphere and its implications for political discourse: do works of *Aufbau* literature evidence a systemic – and therefore non-anomalous – attempt on the part of intellectuals to look beyond socialist realism and other Party-imposed frameworks toward a more productive, tolerant, and polysemic aesthetic discourse? To what extent did authorities criticise this practice for its purported destructive tendency and thereby disregard the authors' pro-socialist orientation? How, therefore, did the non-conformist elements of this corpus instead present a constructive contribution to the *Aufbau* movement? Does Walter Benjamin's theory of allegory offer a potential tool for understanding the means by which works that contradicted elements of a monosemic system also expanded upon it positively? Insofar as processes of censorship or revision impacted the texts in question, how did this affect their potential for expanding *Aufbau* discourse? In the following chapters, I examine how a framework that draws on Benjaminian allegory can provide a better understanding of this corpus and its potential in the socialist context. Through close textual analysis, I interrogate the cultural politics of the period through its objects in an attempt to do justice to a society and a Party that were, in many senses, obsessed with cultural production.

The Intellectual: Precarious Dialectic

The analysis throughout this study concerns the GDR's intellectuals and their relationship to the Party, a complex entanglement that cannot be rationalised according to binary opposites and that contradicts the notion that intellectuals' inclusion in political discourse necessitated an outright betrayal of their independence. The typology of the intellectual is disputed, controversial, and heterogeneous, but its application to the GDR lies at the heart of this study insofar as writers, deemed as intellectuals, had a particular relationship to the state in this role. The prestige of their social status meant that their affiliation to the system of authority brought them greater prominence than many other citizen actors; but the impact of this status on their cultural production remains an important question. As I examine the possibility of polysemic and alternative approaches to the *Aufbau* reality beyond that propagated by the SED, the precise positioning of intellectuals in political discourse and their capacity for influencing the direction of that discourse also remain central questions. By offering a general typology of the intellectual that I then apply to the GDR specifically, I provide an analytical foundation that goes further than the lens of *Eigen-Sinn* to account for the specificity of intellectuals' standing and precarity in the state.

The term 'intellectual' alludes to knowledgeable and influential thinkers and carries the burden of elitist connotations that hark back to its heritage in the bastion of bourgeois and upper-class, educated men qualified by their own specious self-logic to pontificate on all matters. But as the old guard, there including the Church, lost its social prominence, intellectuals' composition became more accessible and diverse.⁴⁹ This typology does not portray intellectuals now as a narrow circle of elite thinkers (Julien Benda), nor via Kurucz's

⁴⁹ Wolfgang Emmerich, 'Deutsche Intellektuelle: was nun? Zum Funktionswandel der (ostdeutschen) literarischen Intelligenz zwischen 1945 und 1998', in *After the GDR: New Perspectives on the Old GDR and the Young Länder*, ed. by Laurence McFalls & Lothar Probst (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 3–27 (p. 5).

and Gramsci's topos of 'cultural' (thinkers and artists) and 'organic' (technical, administrative) professionals, using class or occupation to define their identity, since that definition would oddly imply, for instance, that a tax administrator automatically counts as an intellectual.⁵⁰ Similarly, an individual's education has little to do with their intellectual activity, as qualification alone does not suffice to count a person as an intellectual; indeed, a lack of higher education has failed to impede many intellectuals in their work.⁵¹ Likewise, the homogenising notion of their common defence of shared 'standards of truth', as Werner Mittenzwei argues, rests on a definition of intellectuals as part of a sacred social stratum relied upon for 'absolute' truths (and absolute 'truths'), whereas such universals relate only to idealistic ventures in specific societies.⁵² Instead, I draw from M. Rainer Lepsius' argument that intellectuals are bound by critical, even morally critical (Raymond Aron), behaviour, consisting of a reflexive interrogation of society irrespective of class, profession, or political ephemera.⁵³ This critical-reflexive activity need not evince intellectuals' constant opposition to the status quo but implies an intellectual remove, even if the risk remains that intellectuals can err in their reflexion, as the congregation around a national(istic) mission through affiliation to state politics in the Third Reich demonstrates.⁵⁴ This typology also allows for a distinction between non-/intellectual behaviour, such that one's activity can both dictate or foreclose attribution to this group.

⁵⁰ Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), pp. 4–5; Dieter Koop, 'Intellektuelle in der DDR oder Die Kunst beherrscht zu werden', *Hochschule Ost*, 3 (1995), 9–17 (p. 13).

⁵¹ For Pierre Bourdieu, intellectuals derive their skills from learned competence and authority, which they apply in their commentary – 'Fourth Lecture. Universal Corporatism: The Role of Intellectuals in the Modern World', *Poetics Today*, 12:4 (1991), 655–669 (p. 656). See also Siegfried Prokop, *Intellektuelle in den Wirren der Nachkriegszeit: die soziale Schicht der Intelligenz der SBZ/DDR* (Berlin: Edition Zeitgeschichte, 2010), I: 1945–1955, p. 18.

⁵² Said, pp. xii–xiii; Werner Mittenzwei, *Die Intellektuellen: Literatur und Politik in Ostdeutschland 1945–2000* (Leipzig: Faber & Faber, 2001), pp. 18–19; Bourdieu, p. 669; Sabine Kebir, 'Bertolt Brecht als archetypischer DDR-Intellektueller', *Hochschule Ost*, 3 (1995), 94–99 (p. 96).

⁵³ Koop, pp. 15–16; Said, p. 36.

⁵⁴ Mittenzwei, *Die Intellektuellen*, p. 22.

Intellectuals' critical reflection must take place outside of what Joseph Schumpeter calls 'professional responsibility', that is any corporate interests or identities, since these would blur the typology according to occupation-based biases.⁵⁵ Indeed, Said separates intellectuals from all kinds of affiliation (political, religious, economic, corporate) to make them *fully* autonomous, but this veers too close to the ivory tower of previous eras.⁵⁶ Autonomy also features in Bourdieu's model, however only alongside the necessity of the intellectual's 'complicity' in politics for critical-reflexive commentary, making them 'bidimensional' as they are strung between two forces.⁵⁷ I expand Bourdieu's approach to outline a tension between autonomy and affiliation because I distinguish political discourse, which characterises all activity including intellectual, from party-political discourse, which pertains to parties, their adherents, and organs.⁵⁸ The two discourses inherently overlap, but they are two distinct forces. Affiliation refers to overt causes such as religion and political preference, but also to what Said terms the inevitable 'hidden hierarchies, preferences, evaluations' that derive from corporate and personal affiliation, which produce bias.⁵⁹ The space for critical-reflexive activity, by contrast, is found in the autonomous sphere. Both autonomy and affiliation hold negative connotations because the former harks back to the nineteenth-century trope of ivory-towered pontification, the atrophied abode of *l'art pour l'art*, and the latter to the risk of party politics, religion etc. to intellectual integrity, which, if excessive, can jeopardise autonomy. Insofar as they enable intellectual activity and provide some social anchorage, however, the two terms also have their benefits, leading to a tension – a precarious dialectic – that permanently destabilises the intellectual's position in society.⁶⁰ Intellectuals, therefore,

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 10–11.

⁵⁶ Said, p. xii.

⁵⁷ Bourdieu, pp. 656, 660.

⁵⁸ This understanding of politics incidentally rides closer to the etymological root in the Greek 'politika' (Πολιτικά), which referred to the affairs of the cities and, by intimation, to social matters.

⁵⁹ Said, p. 94.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 658.

can or must take on an affiliation in order to gather material for their autonomous work, but it further destabilises their precarious dialectic.

Intellectual activity necessarily emerges into political discourse in the form of what I broadly understand as cultural expression and production, making culture the touchstone of the precarious autonomy-affiliation dialectic. As such, cultural practitioners – such as writers, dramatists, and poets – are often intellectuals. However, a convenient alignment of profession and intellectual typology should not mean that one elides the two; rather, I arrive at calling artists intellectuals by analysing their cultural activity, which coincides with their profession.⁶¹ According to each intellectual's own interests and causes, the audience to whom they offer their musings differs; Said thus writes of the intellectual's subjective, personal 'representations' to a certain audience, i.e. what they say and how.⁶² Unitising this public into a sole audience for all intellectuals would yoke them under one state affiliation and destabilise the precarious dialectic. In this vein, Christopher Fynsk and Bourdieu warn of the risk of the 'public' intellectual, who can necessarily only ever spread themselves across the subjective mores of public affiliations, be they national, political, corporate, or other.⁶³ Fynsk instead safeguards differences of opinion for the maintenance of critical-reflexive activity and proposes the 'local' intellectual who avoids the corrosive pull of universals and comments on the basis of their own reflection, helping them to develop interests through autonomy and also generate competence.⁶⁴ But they must also engage with an audience in order for this competence to grant them authority, thus demonstrating that a dialogical interaction with

⁶¹ One may coherently argue that using the word 'profession' to describe such activity corporatises culture and that other phrasing is preferable in order to elucidate the difference between cultural expression and hour-based, salaried work.

⁶² Said writes that the representations of the intellectual are 'what he or she represents and how those are ideas are represented to an audience' – Said, p. 113.

⁶³ Christopher Fynsk, *The Claim of Language: A Case for the Humanities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 72; Bourdieu, p. 668.

⁶⁴ Fynsk, p. 73.

their audience and an intertextual discourse through cultural commentary define intellectual endeavour.

Lenin's Intellectuals and The GDR Intelligentsia

GDR intellectuals, by dint of their privilege in the state, arguably veered closer to the public than local figures from Finsk's analysis. By examining the similarities that emerge between the role cast for intellectuals in the Soviet Union and in the GDR, I consider the impact that their public personae had on their capacity to balance autonomy and affiliation in the state. Lenin envisaged a new 'intelligentsia' to replace the 'petit-bourgeois' elite that had otherwise predominated and envisioned workers and farmers forming a new intellectual class that would fuse with and replace the 'old' intellectuals, having gained equal status and education.⁶⁵ The new 'intelligentsia' could thus be identified according to class and profession (proletariat of workers and farmers) in a society consisting of the ruling workers' class, farmers, and bourgeois intellectuals.⁶⁶ In short, Lenin's typology places the 'old' intellectuals in a party-sponsored and privileged stratum of skilled workers and cultural practitioners, who could, furthermore, expand their social prominence by taking up the offer of party-political positions in return for partisanship.

This system represents an affiliation to the state and thus *a priori* disrupts the autonomy-affiliation dialectic, as intellectuals' centrality would ultimately entail a degradation of autonomy. In the Soviet Union's political system, however, the characterisation of autonomous intellectualism as a leftover of bourgeois intellectualism meant that its decline

⁶⁵ Koop, p. 11.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

was welcomed in favour of clear party affiliation.⁶⁷ The bond around the utopian vision of the socialist state nonetheless limited intellectual activity to system-immanent critique, since intellectuals (and others) hesitated before pursuing critical thought that would undermine or even transcend the socialist system on account of their shared belief in it. The intellectual in Lenin's typology can, therefore, be characterised by the higher prestige of their authority through material and symbolic privilege, the prevalence of functionary engagement alongside intellectual activity, and thus the even greater precarity of their dialectical position. Collusion with the Party did not represent a prerequisite, however, for an intellectual's performance of a critical-reflexive function in a lively culture of debate, meaning that they could fulfil functionary commitments and maintain critical-reflexive practice at the same time.

The SED defined intellectuals similarly to Lenin's model and sought to create an intelligentsia consisting of the 'Funktionselite' (academics, doctors, technicians, lawyers, pedagogues) and the 'Kulturelite' (artists and performers), and thus claiming equal recognition for artists and skilled workers.⁶⁸ The ideological term 'intelligentsia' referred to a class and profession in this sense, which meant that a new class, a 'politisch[e] Bürokratie', was to be established, although that goal proved a source of continued alienation for proletarian workers and thus was arguably one of the SED's first key ideological blunders.⁶⁹ Status in the privileged intelligentsia still depended on 'Parteilichkeit' or Party loyalty, yet its realisation proved harder than originally thought, as the SED did not wield totalitarian power, encountered resistance to its model, and even detracted from this ambition with other policy decisions.

⁶⁷ Wolfgang Emmerich, 'Between Hypertrophy and Melancholy: The GDR Literary Intelligentsia in its Historical Context', *Universitas*, 8 (1993), 273–285 (p. 276).

⁶⁸ Koop, p. 14; Peer Pasternack, 'Kopfarbeiter im Umbruch und Wissenschaft im Umbau. Drei Typologisierung', *Hochschule Ost*, 3 (1995), 29–43 (pp. 32–33).

⁶⁹ Bernhard Greiner, *Von der Allegorie zur Idylle: Die Literatur der Arbeitswelt in der DDR* (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1974), p. 44.

The immediate campaign of denazification also posed difficulties to the GDR intelligentsia', inasmuch as certain 'intellectual' professions, such as doctors, included a high proportion of former NSDAP members, some of whom had to remain in post to guarantee a provision of services.⁷⁰ Similarly, the authorities' decision to define intellectuals according to profession threw up a conflict because many, particularly pedagogical, professionals had yet to qualify fully in the rush to fill vacated posts, making their immediate inclusion in a job-based grouping questionable.⁷¹ Seeking to solve these issues and synthesise old and new intellectuals from the two sides of the Second World War, the SED invited, for example, exiled writers to return and also tolerated 'bourgeois' intellectuals so long as they no longer affiliated themselves to or sympathised with National Socialism.⁷² This approach found favour with left-wing intellectuals, the dominant group, many of whom returned from exile or immigrated to the SBZ/GDR out of a shared belief in the SED's socialist *Aufbau* and the anti-fascist, democratic force behind the humanist and pro-unity 'Nationale Front'.⁷³ These compromises indicate how the Party's ideological zeal did not easily translate to functional reality in a time of radical political transition, but also denotes the extent to which the SED brooked compromise to achieve its political goals.⁷⁴

At the same time, the willingness of 'old' intellectuals to immigrate to the GDR because of a utopian bond to the socialist project represents a compromise of its own. Annette Simon terms this the 'anti-fascist loyalty trap' because the repulsion towards the crimes of the Third

⁷⁰ Weber, p. 62. Bialas also mentions the Church in this regard – 'Ostdeutsche Intellektuelle und der gesellschaftliche Umbruch der DDR (East German Intellectuals and the Social Upheaval in the GDR)', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 2:33 (2007), 289–308 (p. 293); Prokop, I, pp. 16–17.

⁷¹ Magdalena Heider & Kerstin Töns (eds.), *SED und Intellektuelle in der DDR der fünfziger Jahre: Kulturbund-Protokolle* (Cologne: Edition Deutschland-Archiv, 1990), p. 5; Fulbrook, *The People's State*, p. 198.

⁷² Brockmann, *German Literary Culture at the Zero Hour*, p. 93; Prokop, I, pp. 68, 111–113.

⁷³ Mittenzwei, *Die Intellektuellen*, pp. 69–71; Mary Fulbrook, 'East Germans in a Post-Nazi State: Communities of Experience, Connection, and Identification', in *Becoming East German*, pp. 33–55 (p. 36).

⁷⁴ Bialas, 'Ostdeutsche Intellektuelle und der gesellschaftliche Umbruch der DDR (East German Intellectuals and the Social Upheaval in the GDR)', p. 293.

Reich led to rapid support for the SED ‘for fear of being excluded from the antifascist consensus’, as Sara Jones writes, and resulted in the willingness to tolerate its mistakes in other areas as ‘das kleinere Übel’ vis-à-vis fascism.⁷⁵ However, since the typology of the socialist intellectual excused above does not entail a total loss of autonomy even in cases of Party affiliation (i.e. for the intellectual-functionary), one must presume that at least some intellectuals retained their lucidity (rather than pure servility) in parallel with genuine political support for the Party in other instances, and should therefore not take the loyalty trap to imply the absolute impossibility of resistance to, or genuine support for, the SED.

The envisioned unity of ‘Geist’ (culture) and ‘Macht’ (functionaries and politicians) around the same socio-political ethos meant that the SED gradually tried to recast the intelligentsia as a privileged and ideologically and institutionally central elite working in support of its aims.⁷⁶ Authorities therefore sought to address intellectuals’ material difficulties in the early *Aufbau* years with a series of improvements devised with the *Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands*.⁷⁷ The organisation, headed by intellectual-functionary Johannes R. Becher, sought to unite intellectuals from different political backgrounds around the common, humanist, and anti-fascist renewal of Germany following the War.⁷⁸ From March 1949, it helped to arrange aid in the form of ‘Spezialistenpakete’ (food, fabric etc., later available in intellectuals-only shops), building loans, help with employment, pension

⁷⁵ Annette Simon, ‘Antifaschismus als Loyalitätsfalle’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1 February 1993, repr. in Manfred Agethen, Eckhard Jesse & Ehrhart Neubert (eds.), *Der missbrauchte Antifaschismus: DDR-Staatsdoktrin und Lebenslüge der deutschen Linken* (Freiburg: Herder, 2002), pp. 145–154 (p. 150); Herfried Münkler, ‘Antifaschismus als Gründungsmythos der DDR’, in *Der Antifaschismus als Staatsdoktrin der DDR* (Sankt Augustin & Berlin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2009), pp. 31–49; Sara Jones, ‘Introduction’, in *Complicity, Censorship and Criticism: Negotiating Space in the GDR Literary Sphere* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 1–31 (p. 10). See also Wolfgang Emmerich, ‘Selektive Erinnerung: Selbstbegründungsmythen der literarischen Intelligenz in Ost und West nach 1945’, *Rastocker Philosophische Manuskripte*, 4 (1997), 95–114 (pp. 109–112); Emmerich, ‘Between Hypertrophy and Melancholy’, p. 280.

⁷⁶ Frank Hörnigk, ‘Die Literatur ist zuständig: Über das Verhältnis von Literatur und Politik in der DDR’, in *Geist und Macht: Writers and the State in the GDR*, ed. by Alex Goodbody & Dennis Tate (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), pp. 23–34 (p. 30).

⁷⁷ Prokop, I, pp. 200–201.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

provisions, new cultural prizes, a re-established *Akademie der Künste*, new worker-farmer university faculties, and a central pedagogical institute.⁷⁹ By 1959, intellectuals consequently enjoyed a demonstrably higher standard of living and a privileged symbolic role at the centre of the state.⁸⁰

That said, such efforts did not succeed unconditionally, as the 1948 currency reform burdened the finances of writers reliant on overseas publishing fees, whilst *Aufbau*-specific policies from 1952 had other repercussions, for example on travel opportunities.⁸¹ With growing scepticism about the prospect of German reunification following the GDR's signing of the Warsaw Pact, a collective defence agreement for the Soviet Bloc, in May 1955 and a second Soviet defence treaty in September of that year, some intellectuals turned against the Party's direction, reacting by migrating west, for example.⁸² The SED's vision for intellectuals seems, therefore, to have jarred with its other early ideological ambitions, resulting in a disjuncture between ideology and reality that makes it difficult to talk of a unified policy towards intellectuals at this time. Josef Naas, director of the *Akademie der Wissenschaften*, summarised in 1947: "Sozialismus und deutsche Intelligenz sind zwei Pole, deren Anziehungskraft noch sehr schwach entwickelt ist."⁸³

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 212.

⁸⁰ Prokop, II: 1956–1965, pp. 329, 334, 371–372, 378.

⁸¹ The 'IN-Scheine', supplementary ration cards for the intelligentsia, did not reach any teachers in the 'Ober-' and 'Berufsschulen' or 'new' intellectuals, and only 2,000 of 18,000 doctors. Their replacement with 'Intelligenzläden' in May 1953 did not prove a success either, since fewer groups (only academics and technical intellectuals) had access and some branches never opened, for example in Leipzig, leading to a de facto 'Herabsetzung des Lebensniveaus' – Prokop, I, pp. 198, 211–218; Mittenzwei, *Die Intellektuellen*, pp. 62, 205; John C. Torpey, *Intellectuals, Socialism, and Dissent: The East German Opposition and its Legacy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 25.

⁸² Prokop, I, p. 229, II, pp. 329, 382; Eberhard Schulz, *Zwischen Identifikation und Opposition: Künstler und Wissenschaftler der DDR und ihre Organisationen in den Jahren von 1949 bis 1962* (Cologne, PapyRossa, 1995), p. 54. The FRG became a member of the NATO alliance in the same month as the GDR signed the Warsaw Pact, arguably indicating a growing distance from reunification on both sides.

⁸³ Prokop, I, p. 112.

In fact, intellectuals' resistance to what they perceived as errors of political judgement occurred from the very beginning of the state's history. At the start of the *Aufbau*, the SED detected hesitation from some intellectuals about their future and their material difficulties.⁸⁴ Intellectuals seemed immediately concerned not with Party-political ambition but with the legacy of fascism and the hope of a development towards peace and unity, which alienated them from the SED's political agenda – for example, the founding of the state on 7 October 1949.⁸⁵ Whilst Simon's loyalty trap specifies intellectuals' support of the Party through their shared aims of peace and German unity, the SED clearly believed that it had yet to win the intellectuals over to its immediate cause.⁸⁶

The Party's recognition of a discrepancy between its own ideals and the expressions of some intellectuals importantly evidences a degree of *Eigen-Sinn* from individuals otherwise considered faithful to the state, as occurred in their response to the uprising in June 1953.⁸⁷ When workers across the state took to the streets in protest at higher productivity norms (essentially a cut in wages) and living costs, most intellectuals remained behind closed doors – but not (just) to wait the crisis out. Both the *Kulturbund* and *Akademie der Künste* offered concrete suggestions for reform.⁸⁸ Analysis by the *Kulturbund* of its own meetings across the GDR in 1956 detected signs of continued irritation, and the 'Klubs der Intelligenz' enjoyed their heyday throughout this period of reckoning with the crimes and mistakes associated with Stalin's rule in the Soviet Union, described as Stalinism, and the repercussions thereof

⁸⁴ Mittenzwei, *Die Intellektuellen*, p. 74.

⁸⁵ Prokop, I, pp. 111–113, 169–172.

⁸⁶ That said, many intellectuals were themselves also Party officials, meaning that they equally benefited from continued material support.

⁸⁷ Hörnigk, p. 23.

⁸⁸ These proposals included: the protection of freedom of expression and research; guarantee of justice; abidance to the constitution; German unity; artistic and academic interaction and cooperation with West German and other European groups; and better holiday and pension provisions for intellectuals – [n.a.], 'Erklärung der Deutschen Akademie der Künste: Vorschläge an die Regierung übergeben', *Neues Deutschland*, 12 July 1953, 4; [n.a.], 'Sammlung der Intelligenz: Vorschläge des Kulturbundes für die demokratische Entwicklung unseres Kulturlebens', *Berliner Zeitung*, 8 July 1953, 3; Dietrich, I, pp. 591–593; Brockmann, *The Writers' State*, pp. 223–224.

in the GDR.⁸⁹ Moreover, these depredations did not take place over a number of days, but prevailed in the weeks, months, and years thereafter.⁹⁰ Thus, the sustained, institutional pressure for reform exerted by intellectuals on the SED in the aftermath of the uprising arguably put a patent onus on the Party to reform, comparable to that exerted by demonstrations on the street, which verifies the thesis that intellectuals' critical-reflexive commentary was both retained in the *Aufbau* and even vital in driving through development.

The examples do not suggest a balanced retention of autonomy alongside affiliation, however, as certain limitations impacted intellectuals' work, including their response to the 1953 uprising. When a government denies the possibility of critique, for example, Pierre Bourdieu raises the alarm in defence of autonomy and suggests that intellectuals use the state's helping hand to free themselves, paradoxically taking the privilege provided by the state in order to 'affirm their independence'.⁹¹ More than just exercising their *Eigen-Sinn* here, therefore, intellectuals practised the resistance described by Bourdieu, as they used their state-sponsored platform (such as in major organisations) to reaffirm autonomy when it came under threat from Party affiliation.⁹² Not only did artists targeted under the anti-formalism campaign, for example, seek innovative and sometimes subversive ways to pursue

⁸⁹ Prokop, I, p. 236, II, p. 300; Heider & Töns, *SED und Intellektuelle in der DDR der fünfziger Jahre*. Many traces of Stalinism remained in the GDR, not least in its architectural legacy, but the guiding principles of Stalinist governance – a one-party, non-democratic mode of governance with centralised administration, high levels of control, degradation of personal and intellectual freedom, ignorance of human rights, dogmatic ideology, economic planning, the subordination of unions and mass organisations to the Party, and clear social distinctions (e.g. privileged bureaucracy) – were called into question in the latter half of the 1950s, particularly by the GDR's intellectuals. Similarly, economic, infrastructural, and transpolitical limitations made it impossible for those principles adopted by the SED to be applied in full. See Ross, pp. 24–28; Port, *Conflict and Stability*, pp. 50–52, 84; Bessel & Jessen, 'Einleitung: Die Grenzen der Diktatur', p. 10; Mario Keßler & Thomas Klein, 'Repression and Tolerance as Methods of Rule in Communist Societies', *Dictatorship as Experience*, ed. by Jarusch, pp. 109–121 (p. 117).

⁹⁰ Brockmann, *The Writers' State*, p. 229; Katarzyna Śliwińska, *Sozialistischer Realismus in der DDR und Polen: Doktrin und normative Ästhetik im Vergleich* (Dresden: Thelem, 2005), p. 203.

⁹¹ Alexander Amberger, *Babro – Harich – Havemann: Marxistische Systemkritik und politische Utopie in der DDR* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2014), p. 12; Bourdieu, p. 663. Compare Boris Groys' reference to asceticism, which generates 'sovereignty, authorship and autonomy' by using self-imposed discipline by participation in order to reinstate intellectual distance – Boris Groys, *The Communist Postscript*, trans. by Thomas H. Ford (London & New York: Verso, 2009), p. 111.

⁹² Bourdieu, p. 663.

their activity further; others directly addressed perceived misdirections through contributions to official conferences and articles in the press or academic literature etc.⁹³ In this way, the *Aufbau* policy of granting intellectuals structural influence in expectation of Party support paradoxically fed their hunger for improvement, evincing a more dialectical relationship between the political and intellectual elites than the SED envisaged.

Intellectuals' participation in authority does not suggest that they were so absorbed into the SED's institutions that they became guilty of 'strukturelle Komplizenschaft' in them, as Ohlerich claims, nor were they incapable of genuine support for the *Aufbau* programme.⁹⁴ Likewise, I do not suggest that intellectuals' insistence on a degree of autonomy evidences a liberal political discourse, since such a reading neglects the fundamental structural distinction between the GDR and FRG and the limits to autonomy. I instead favour a dialectical approach that tolerates the SED's ideological expectation of intellectuals to show an interest in Party politics, and of Party functionaries and politicians – by virtue of personal contact and privileges, material and institutional – to show an interest in intellectuals.⁹⁵ However, the much-debated unity of 'Geist' and 'Macht' failed to extend beyond the realm of the ideal because the 'Realpolitik' of the *Aufbau* entailed manifold complications; it must give way to a dialectical understanding of how intellectuals retained their autonomy.⁹⁶

⁹³ See for example Wolfgang Harich's open reproach of the realism debate in an article that provocatively evokes Lukács' own piece of the same title from 1938: "Immer wieder werden Eigenarten der schöpferischen Methode eines Künstlers und seines individuellen Stils als formalistisch gebrandmarkt, auch wenn die Grundtendenz seines Schaffens, auf die es ankommt und die durch ermutigenden Zuspruch gefördert werden sollte, gegenständlich und realistisch ist. [...] Solche Tendenzen könnte leicht aufgedeckt werden, wenn es über die Probleme der Ästhetik einen echten Meinungskampf gäbe. Davon aber kann gar keine Rede sein" – Harich, 'Es geht um den Realismus', *Berliner Zeitung*, 14 July 1953, 3.

⁹⁴ Gregor Ohlerich, 'Eine Typologie des sozialistischen Intellektuellen', in *Das war die DDR*, ed. by Timmermann, 527–540 (p. 534).

⁹⁵ Mittenzwei, *Die Intellektuellen*, p. 179.

⁹⁶ Wolfgang Bialas, *Vom unfreien Schweben zum freien Fall: Ostdeutsche Intellektuelle im gesellschaftlichen Umbruch* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1996), p. 8.

Deriving Autonomy from ‘Parteilichkeit’: The Authority Trap

If the intellectuals’ behaviour echoes Bourdieu’s theory in that they used their political platform in order to defend and even regain their independence, I argue that intellectual autonomy in the *Aufbau* relied upon the authority granted through affiliation with the Party apparatus. This signifies a paradox at the heart of the socialist intellectual typology, insofar as partisanship could help an individual to establish greater distance from the Party. The author Anna Seghers, for example, had established an international reputation as a writer and anti-fascist during her exile in Mexico and retained a lifelong need and desire to travel to visit family members or to attend important conferences abroad.⁹⁷ That authorities allowed Seghers an almost unparalleled level of autonomy and privilege in this regard stems from the authority generated through her prestigious literary career even before 1947, which the SED in turn recognised in rendering her a high-profile national figure. Seghers became president of the DSV in 1952, bringing her even greater authority in the Party-political realm, which in turn allowed her more autonomy for critical-reflexive engagement, be that in private, her writing, or in a semi-public capacity. Her concession to Party pressure to move to East Berlin and surrender her Mexican passport may imply a loss of that autonomy, but her heightened participation overall actually garnered more opportunities for distance, rather than the opposite.⁹⁸ Autonomy and authority thus became interdependent.

Erwin Strittmatter, one of the GDR’s best-selling writers, was nominated to first secretary of the DSV in 1959 following years of Party engagements, despite his forceful criticism of the SED’s direction in 1953 and 1956.⁹⁹ That the SED proposed him for the position could

⁹⁷ Helen Fehervary, ‘Anna Seghers’ Response to the Holocaust’, *American Imago*, 74:3 (2017), 383–390 (p. 383); Kurt Batt, *Anna Seghers: Versuch über Entwicklung und Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Röderberg, 1973) p. 172; Ute Brandes, ‘Anna Seghers’s Politics of Affirmation’, in *Anna Seghers in Perspective*, ed. by Ian Wallace, *German Monitor*, XLIII (Amsterdam & Atlanta: Rodopi), 175–198 (pp. 181–183).

⁹⁸ Christiane Zehl Romero, *Anna Seghers: Eine Biographie*, 2 vols (Berlin: Aufbau, 2000), II, p. 53.

⁹⁹ Annette Leo, *Erwin Strittmatter: Die Biographie* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2012), p. 443.

have been an attempt to bring Strittmatter in line by granting him authority, evincing the opposing side of the negotiation that would diminish autonomy. Indeed, being in office did tame Strittmatter's 'Zorn', to which the documentation on his time as a Stasi 'Geheimer Informator' from 1959 attests.¹⁰⁰ Yet his breakdown in 1960, his assertion that his functionary status detrimentally affected his writing, and his comments that his tenure in the DSV merely consisted of his being a 'Briefträger' between union members and the ZK all suggest that this participation in authority did not retrieve enough, or posed too great a threat to, autonomy to warrant continuing. As such, Strittmatter did not return to Berlin after a period of convalescence in 1960, adopted a programme dominated by intellectual activity, ended contact with the Stasi, and kept his position in the DSV at arm's length, concluding:

Die große Lehre für mich: Unter keinen Umständen, auch bei Androhung einer Parteistrafe oder vorübergehender Diffamierung mehr eine Parteifunktion zu übernehmen, in der ich der Partei nach *meinem Ermessen* nicht helfen kann.¹⁰¹

Though he felt sufficiently vulnerable to the dialectical tension in the writer-functionary topos to warrant withdrawing, Strittmatter did not fall back on absolute autonomy, rather combined the two sides in a manner that was to his liking. This negotiation happened away from other functionaries, but arguably only thanks to the authority that he had gained during the 1950s as a writer and a functionary, which sustained him as he relied upon that authority to succeed (or be tolerated) thereafter.

The two examples highlight how participation in authority could strengthen intellectual autonomy in the GDR and that the two forces interdependently pushed and pulled each

¹⁰⁰ Christian Krause, "Die Zusammenarbeit mit dem Gen. ST. wird eine gute Perspektive besitzen" – Das MfS-Material zu Erwin Strittmatter', in *Es geht um Erwin Strittmatter oder Vom Streit um die Erinnerung*, ed. by Carsten Gansel & Matthias Braun (Göttingen: V & R unipress, 2012), pp. 289–314 (p. 293). Since, however, evidence stems from Stasi archives, Strittmatter's true attitude to the collaboration cannot easily be corroborated; see e.g. Krause, p. 296.

¹⁰¹ Leo, p. 268 (italics in original), quoting *Tagebuch*, 23 June 1960.

other in the case of the writer-functionary. Authority could stem from intellectuals' competence in their chosen field or from loyal participation in Party politics, which they could magnify, paradoxically, to insist upon their authority. This praxis turned into a reliance as intellectuals hoped to sustain their activity through 'Parteilichkeit', which ultimately destabilised their position through affiliation. I term this an 'authority trap'. Seghers and Strittmatter, for example, recognised the risks but continued to participate in and gain authority so as to use it to support their own autonomy. Bourdieu proposed that such behaviour might tip the dialectical scales back to the centre. David Bathrick likewise refers to a 'repressive tolerance' in this instance, by which the state released some hold on intellectuals' autonomy 'in order to extend its domination' elsewhere.¹⁰²

Having become established according to a system of ideological values sketched, for example, in Simon's loyalty trap, the authority trap describes how individuals became trapped not in a system that was opposed to them and upon which they had no influence, but rather in a mutually designed system of values that both benefited and limited figures such as intellectuals, who at once maintained the system and were influenced by it. As the examples in this study show, such a dynamic translated directly onto cultural products, as authors who contravened politico-aesthetic norms often more conspicuously yielded to the Party in other respects, for example by editing their manuscripts or delaying publication or performance. The amalgamation of autonomous activity and aspects of affiliation therefore sustained and supported intellectuals' work to expand discursive parameters in the GDR, suggesting both that few, if any, rules were absolute in the cultural sphere and that participation – according to the authority trap – represented a significant method of regaining autonomy.

¹⁰² Bathrick, p. 5.

That said, there was a tipping point at which the authority trap no longer yielded the intended results, since an ultimately significant increase in affiliation (e.g. election into the ZK) would necessitate a loss of autonomy, whilst particularly divergent or even dissident behaviour – a manifestation of autonomy – could elicit expulsion from the system of authority altogether. Members, including intellectual-functionaries, of the SED's ZK clearly declared their affiliation to the Party, but such a position equally earned them greater authority in the state and reflected their superiority in the nomenklatura. The balance proved volatile, thus a reluctance to yield autonomy at such a high level of state-granted authority contributed to Strittmatter's breakdown and withdrawal to the Brandenburg countryside, or Seghers' ill health and reliance on private and semi-public intervention.¹⁰⁵ On balance, though, the risk of overly relying on SED-granted authority was worthwhile for the space that intellectuals could create to pursue intellectual activity on a private and semi-public level.

Authors in the latter chapters characterise the core of this compromise because their critique of an absolute linear optimism – a core principle of socialist realism, for example – came at the price of yielding to the aesthetic and political precepts, for example, or foregoing publication. The tipping point at which state-derived authority jeopardised autonomy resulted in an untenable conflict with the intellectual dialectic, such that overt and sustained criticism or politically integrated, high-level intellectual endeavour were limited. As Chapter Six demonstrates, forthright challenges to Party-sanctioned norms in a show of heightened autonomy deprived the author of publication and – later in the case of Wolf Biermann – even of GDR citizenship. Nevertheless, the unexpected manner in which intellectuals' autonomy was preserved or regained by dint of participation in authority remains a pertinent

¹⁰⁵ Leo, p. 268; Brandes, pp. 180–188; Romero, II, pp. 138, 162.

component of intellectual life within the GDR and therefore paves the way for an analysis of intellectuals' literary output and its potential influence on political discourse in the rest of this study.

Structural Overview and Theoretical Considerations

To answer these challenging questions about the potential of intellectuals to influence cultural policy, I apply an extended reading of Walter Benjamin's theory of allegory to the objects of this study in order to capture the material and discursive weight of aesthetic works in the GDR. The model allows for a reading of literary texts as composed of individual fragments that communicate something to their reader only when collected into a new form. This approach captures the significant rupture in much experimental art from the past century, as the turn towards broken and interrupted forms in movements such as Dada and Expressionism illustrated the devastation engendered by technology, war, capitalism, etc. in art, which had previously been deemed elevated above reality. Benjamin's theory specifically contrasts the historical and continued perceived 'totality' of an aesthetic work, which would have it that montage blurs and disrupts the capacity of art for purposeful signification in a unified structure. Through the baroque 'Trauerspiel' and Charles Baudelaire's poetry, Benjamin sees the potential for the allegorical mode to beget political interventions by recycling fragments into new images – as allegories that reflect the past that produced them – and, thereby, reveal a new perspective on present difficulties, meaning that a fragmented structure bursts open the aesthetic platform away from idealism and political blind spots to reveal something more immanent and open to scrutiny.

The first chapter (*'Aus den Trümmern...': Benjaminian Allegory as Analytical Method*) discusses this theory of allegory, which I elucidate and expand in concert with numerous styles, genres,

and forms of literature from the *Aufbau* period in the four chapters that follow. Each of those chapters begins with a historical overview of the cultural politics at the time and the location of the individual corpus within it in order to detail and expand on knowledge of the politico-cultural entanglements in the *Aufbau*. Not only does allegory unite what Fredric Jameson refers to as the ‘postmodern’ direction and ‘language mysticism’ in Benjamin’s work into a critical aesthetic theory, it offers a tool for reading certain texts from the early GDR as ambitious interventions into political discourse.¹⁰⁴ By outlining Benjamin’s own presentation of allegory and proffering an expansion of the theory to detect political potentiality, this chapter introduces Benjamin’s work to *Aufbau* literature for the first time in this study and, it appears, in GDR Studies more broadly. Whilst I make no claim to having identified a historical interest in Benjamin’s work on the part of these authors, I propose that allegory offers a means of interpreting fragmented literary works as a form of political expression that emphasises the proactivity of the audience’s responses. Allegory thus serves as a methodology to extrapolate the pro-socialist contributions offered by authors in the pursuit of a ‘polysemic’ political sphere in the GDR *Aufbau*, which the following chapters successively explore.

In Chapter Three, entitled ‘*Alles Große und Schöne*’: *Socialist Realism as Symbol*, I develop this analysis with relation to allegory and its anthesis – the symbol. In contrast to allegory, the symbol describes a cohesive aesthetic structure that presents a single, unfragmented image of society and carries a direct meaning to the audience. A symbolist work could have a political message, but it arrives at communicating or signifying that message by drawing from the total capacity of aesthetics to transcend reality and its imperfections, meaning that the

¹⁰⁴ Fredric Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (London & New York: Verso, 1998), p. 38.

symbol both represents a whole and can moderate its mimetic image of reality for creative ends. Socialist realism, for example, projected a comprehensive depiction of GDR society that, thanks to its unified and coherent totality, could even exert an optimistic influence on its audience by steering them towards the GDR's socialist future.

In the chapter, I apply Benjamin's theory of the symbol to socialist realism, reading it in the examples of Eduard Claudius' novel *Menschen an unsrer Seite* and Hans Marchwitza's *Robeisen*. The two novels were considered archetypal works of socialist realism, as they represent GDR society and impose a subjective optimism upon it, even though this subjective perspective necessarily smoothed over the imperfections in the *Aufbau* present. The symbolic belief that a work of art could capture a whole society and communicate some meaning about it to an audience therefore meant misrepresenting reality subjectively to fit the message of a work, for which reason the realist ambitions of socialist realism do not cohere. The chapter asks whether the simultaneous depiction in the novels of the GDR present and skewed projection into a politically-directed future renders them failures in socialist realist theory, and whether socialist realism as a model founders because the difficulty in realising it practically prevented works from making a positive contribution to GDR political discourse, which was, after all, the central ambition of the model.

'Auferstanden aus Ruinen und der Zukunft zugewandt': Allegory and Temporality in Novels by Reinhard Voelkner, Rauchfuss, and Müller-Beeck – Chapter Four – explores some initial, positive alternatives to this kind of symbolism. Using Benjamin's theses in 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte' and the *Passagen-Werk*, I identify as a central characteristic of allegory the inclusion of objects from the past, since these fragments become repurposed from their original contexts in a new constellation. With reference to novels that fictionalise the forced

flight of refugees during and after the Second World War and that evaluate the impact of this in the *Aufbau* present, I characterise the *Aufbau* period as one pulled by the burden of the fascist legacy, the catastrophic and war-torn present, and the utopian vision of a socialist future. Since their consideration of the fascist past disrupts the futurism in socialist realism, the works by Annemarie Reinhard, Benno Voelkner, Hildegard Maria Rauchfuss, and Edith Müller-Beeck contribute a new temporal element to *Aufbau* aesthetics. Their retrospective chronology appears as allegorical, in conversation with Benjamin's *Angelus Novus*, because the clash of temporal directions constitutes a fragmented montage that yields a new perspective upon the construction of socialism. On the one hand, such a model had the potential to inform and better prepare citizens for the GDR future, but the SED did not employ it; on the other, many symbolic elements also remain in these novels, meaning that they do not fully exploit what I read as the allegorical mode.

Chapter Five takes as its focus dramatic texts that cohere more consistently with an allegorical reading, particularly with regard to the role of the audience. Under the heading *Nachgeschaffene Wirklichkeit und direkte Wirklichkeit zugleich: The Theatre Audience & the Tipping Point*, this chapter translates the structural lens of allegory onto a group of 'dialectical' plays in their deconstruction of the fourth wall and involvement of the spectator in the work itself. The spatial renegotiation of the theatre, inspired by Bertolt Brecht's praxis, resulted in a fragmented structure similar to that of allegory, which authors such as Helmut Baierl, Heinar Kipphardt, and Inge and Heiner Müller echo within the texts themselves. These plays identified, problematised, and sought to resolve specific problems in the *Aufbau* present, such as bureaucratisation, the Party's ignorance of quotidian problems (particularly in the world of work), and excessive ideologisation by depicting them directly – not smoothing over them. That this occurred live in the theatre heightened the productivity of the texts in

light of the authors' focus on familiar political problems that they hoped to change, but also offered a potential avenue for circumventing practices of censorship. Each play faced delays and interventions throughout the preparations for performance, however, which led to the subsequent incorporation of numerous symbolic gestures by the authors – testimony to the authority trap's tipping point.

The texts investigated in the sixth chapter, *Allegory, Arcades, Aufbau: Poetry and Literary Suppression*, invite a wholly allegorical reading. Unpublished poems from numerous archival sources, written up until the immediate aftermath of the Berlin Wall's construction, provide evidence of the most experimental and controversial literature penned during the *Aufbau* period. As these texts never appeared in print or did so only subsequent to Party-internal negotiations and concessions, they offer the original form prepared by the authors before having conceded certain elements – read as allegorical – in order to make their publication or performance possible. Conceiving of socialist aesthetics as a non-affirmative but constructive medium that should tolerate critical contributions in allegorical form, the poems represent utopian wishes for the *Aufbau* movement, which I read through the notion of 'Wunschbilder' from Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*. Benjamin sets a precedent by using examples from the architectural sphere for blending old and new material into an innovative new constellation that called for change. By applying this notion to the corpus of poems by Bernd Jentzsch, Sarah und Rainer Kirsch, Herbert Bräuning, and others, I suggest not only that comprehensively allegorical works constructively projected a new image onto their reality, but that this presentation of fragments mimics a kind of building, in which fragments are read literally as material. Seen within the context of the *Aufbau*, these poems thus formed the building blocks with which to build – indeed, write – a new society.

The Conclusion evaluates the extent to which the increasing divergence from and experimentation with criteria of socialist realism and other normative frameworks detected across the chapters indicate that a larger corpus of literary works exists from the *Aufbau* than research has thus far acknowledged. I equally provide alternative texts for each corpus as a pathway for future research. In concert with the research questions outlined above, I revisit the four literary-analytical chapters to ascertain the efficacy of Benjaminian allegorical as a methodology for interpreting structural disunity within texts and consider how this disunity might betray authors' proclivity for utilising art as a platform for political engagement. Finally, I summarise the consequences that this politicisation had for authors depending on their affiliation to or autonomy from the Party, its ambitions for the *Aufbau*, and the criteria and expectations of cultural production.

In summary, this study contains a comprehensive analysis of several literary forms and genres to interrogate the methods by which intellectuals, as materially and discursively privileged members of GDR society, exploited their position to plead for and even practise an expansion of political consciousness in the *Aufbau* period. As an authoritarian state with a socialist programme, the GDR constitutes a unique setting to explore the possibility that art could invoke political change because of the idiosyncratic ambiguities enjoyed by intellectuals as part of a precarious dialectic between autonomy and affiliation. Whereas all GDR citizens interacted with this complex system of authority, the special status of intellectuals meant that authority served, in some cases, to reinstate intellectual autonomy and, therefore, to preserve critical-reflexive activity by tying individuals to what I term the authority trap. This dynamic, which influenced the behaviour and fate of each author mentioned in this study, made it possible for expansions upon state-approved behaviours and regulations – for example the

aesthetic method of socialist realism – to take place and for concessions to be made to the Party in return.

The application of a theory of allegory not only unites several strands of Walter Benjamin's own work around a single but diverse literary corpus, it also offers a contribution to the existing body of scholarship on the *Aufbau* period by identifying a hermeneutic tool that details how such cultural objects in fact represent significant examples of a polysemic and socialist-affirming aesthetic practice. The following chapters observe a certain direction inasmuch as their objects demonstrate an increasing allegoricism; this dynamic illustrates the extent to which socialist realism could not brook an intellectual's autonomous reflections – if not criticisms – of the Party's modus operandi. By the same token, this processual movement also suggests, by the end, that allegorical literature in the *Aufbau* offered new material, laden with socialist ambition and optimistic zeal, with which to pursue and realise that construction.

CHAPTER TWO

‘AUS DEN TRÜMMERN...’:

BENJAMINIAN ALLEGORY AS ANALYTICAL METHOD

Seit mehr als hundert Jahren lastet auf der Philosophie der Kunst die Herrschaft eines Usurpators,
der in den Wirren der Romantik zur Macht gelangt ist.
(Walter Benjamin)¹

Almost inconceivable upheaval does not just characterise the *Aufbau* period: the ravages of war, of shifting political and social affinities, and of major re-evaluations in critical thought also affected other historical epochs celebrated – by Walter Benjamin, at least – for their allegorical traits. Debates concerning Expressionism, realism, and modernism had begun and even advanced greatly in Benjamin’s lifetime (1892–1940), during which he repeatedly questioned whether the task of coming to terms with the ontological consequence and cultural impact of industrialisation and commercialisation had been completed. Benjamin suggested that Expressionism and other movements had been disregarded both as a response to political developments and as *avantgarde* in that respect, allowing the traditions of nineteenth-century aesthetics to become a kind of default and rendering the likes of Fritz Lang and Else Lasker-Schüler deviations and disturbances, rather than major artists in their own right.

In his theories of allegory and the symbol, Benjamin responds to this polarisation by exposing what he regards as the bourgeois defence of ‘timeless’ and ‘universal’ aesthetic truths as tools of political stagnancy and by interrogating an exit route from the apparent

¹ Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, in *Ausgewählte Werke [AW]*, 5 vols (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft [WBG], 2018), I: *Abhandlungen*, 217–444 (p. 336; hereafter referred to as *UDT*).

death drive of mummifying, fetishising criteria. This chapter explores how Benjaminian allegory might serve as a structural tool to do just that: to identify common traits in aesthetic works as allegorical and thereby to differentiate them from other, symbolic traits seen in socialist realism and other aesthetic models.

Walter Benjamin poses something of a problem in critical thought because his ‘anti-philosophical’ method and merely ‘mediated’ materialism have at times impeded the examination or interdisciplinary applications of his work.² Both inclined to repurposing words to his own expanding ends and characterised by the interrelated networks of ideas in his oeuvre, Benjamin produced a substantial and eclectic body of academic and critical work during his all-too-brief life, which ended abruptly in suicide as he fled Nazi persecution in 1940. His theory of allegory, which first appeared in his examination of the baroque ‘Trauerspiel’ in the rejected ‘Habilitationsschrift’ of 1925 entitled *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, constitutes my primary interest in his work. Deriving an understanding of Benjamin’s concepts from a single text proves impossible because of his constellational method, however; therefore, this and subsequent chapters draw respectively from other major works such as the *Passagen-Werk* and ‘Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit’ in order to propose allegory as a broader analytical tool than its application in the *UDT*.

To apply that tool to a socialist corpus is yet further removed from Benjamin’s initial purpose, moreover, but its usage in more recent and very different cultural milieus indicates the significance of allegory as a Marxist hermeneutic that unlocks overlooked potential in

² Fredric Jameson, *Allegory and Ideology* (London & New York: Verso, 2019), epub; Lutz P. Koepnick, ‘Allegory and Power: Walter Benjamin and the Politics of Representation’, *Soundings*, 79:1/2 (1996), 59–78 (p. 75); Terry Eagleton, ‘The Marxist and the Messiah’, *London Review of Books*, 9 September 2021, 27–28.

aesthetic dissonance and socio-political fragmentation. Rather than claim that the authors in this study were familiar with Benjamin's theory, I argue that political conflict in the *Aufbau* period lend themselves to an allegorical reading, which can reveal much about the role played by intellectuals in these early years. Hunter Bivens summarises:

The noncontemporaneity of the present renders the East German *Aufbauzeit* particularly prone to allegory in so far as it is torn by these claims of history and futurity and becomes opaque. The tension in allegory, as [Fredric] Jameson has pointed out, 'consists in the withdrawal of self-sufficiency of meaning from a given representation'. Jameson characterizes allegory as a sort of 'reverse wound', producing an irreducible possibility for the proliferation of meanings.³

Writing about the *Ursprung*, John McCole suggests that Benjamin not only recasts allegory as more than a 'literary trope', but also as engenders a rereading of the Baroque beyond decay and decadence by delving into its core to find 'unsuspected coherence'.⁴ The following analysis derives from this spirit.

Linguistic and Philosophical Origins

As much as allegory serves as an interpretative lens in Benjamin's work, it is also bound intrinsically to what he regards as the task of philosophy: the search for meaning. In the 'erkenntniskritische Vorrede' of the *Ursprung*, Benjamin sketches the task of philosophy as the 'Darstellung der Ideen' (*UDT*, p. 228), which depends, firstly, on the rupturing of phenomena – or things perceived – into their internal elements. One might describe the unlocking of phenomena as the cement of Benjamin's writing, as he suggests that 'concepts' are used, secondly, to describe the elements of individual phenomena in order to undertake

³ Hunter Bivens, 'Obstacity and Allegory in Eduard Claudius's East German Construction Novel *Menschen an unsrer Seite*', *German Studies Review*, 44:3 (2021), 545–564 (p. 550), quoting Jameson, *Brecht and Method*, p. 122.

⁴ John McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 127.

their redemption ('Rettung') and therefore grant them 'Anteil am Sein der Ideen' (*UDT*, p. 228). Because they allow phenomena to access the realm of ideas, concepts are also significant for philosophy in Benjamin's eyes, as they offer a stepping stone between our perception of the world through phenomena and their transformation into ideas – work done through 'Darstellung': "Sache des Philosophen ist es, den symbolischen Charakter des Wortes, in welchem die Idee zur Selbstverständigung kommt, [...] durch Darstellung in seinen Primat wieder einzusetzen" (*UDT*, p. 231). Benjamin therefore sees the task of philosophy as reinstating symbolism in language. In so doing, he makes an explicit link here between semiotics – linguistic signification – and ontological meaning.

Benjamin conceived of the idea, moreover, as a 'monad', a Leibnizian term indicating a structure that is in itself isolated and total in its 'pure immanence', but whose 'never-ending foldings' surround it, continuously opening out to the world but also closing it in, as Dominik Finkelde describes.⁵ Because of its centrality as a descriptive structure in Benjamin's work, the monad features frequently throughout this study as a means of explaining the dialectical connection between objects and ideas. The monad knows its own world in minute detail, yet also has a second, 'hidden' history of the rest of the world of ideas hidden within its folds, making it a perspective that connotes, for Benjamin, a non-Hegelian, unresolving dialectic. If philosophy describes the representation of the idea, it is necessarily concerned with unlocking the monad, pulling apart its phenomena, and yet realising the vastness of the concepts on which they are based. The complex path to the idea should not, therefore, appear esoteric or remote because of the porous monadic structure that anchors the idea in its elemental roots. Incidentally, Benjamin saw in the monad a kind of 'symbolic' – in the

⁵ Dominik Finkelde, 'The Presence of the Baroque: Benjamin's *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* in Contemporary Contexts', in *A Companion to the Works of Walter Benjamin*, ed. by Rolf J. Goebel (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009), pp. 46–69 (pp. 52, 62).

sense of pure, even ‘vergöttlicht[en]’ – character that derives from an Enlightenment notion of the symbol as integral to the philosophical search for meaning.⁶

The essay ‘Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen’, which predates the *Ursprung*, provides a brief insight into the origins of the symbolic form according to Benjamin, beginning with the book of Genesis.⁷ The symbol rests on or harks back to the Edenic purity of language that served communication, specifically as a means of expressing the ‘essence’ of an object; in this way, however, language did not refer to the signs and sounds used for human communication, but rather ‘erstreckt[e] sich auf schlechthin alles’ (*ÜSM*, p. 114). All things desire to communicate themselves, that is their ‘geistiges Wesen’, through language, their ‘sprachliches Wesen’, which prior to the Fall flowed seamlessly because of the unity between the two. The semiotic description of sign and signified, and of their unity, lends itself to application here. For Benjamin, when God created the earth and all things in it, giving each a name and calling it good in the book of Genesis, He made things ‘erkennbar’ in language and made language ‘magic’ because communication, of things and of language itself, can only take place in it, forming a total seal between sign and signified that Benjamin terms symbolic.⁸ Prior to the Fall, humans thus participated in a ‘reine Sprache’ by deriving their language from God’s ‘schöpferisch[es]’ system of names and words, which communicate directly (to Him) through the ‘Übersetzung der Sprache der Dinge in die des Menschen’: “Durch das Wort ist der Mensch mit der Sprache der Dinge verbunden” (*ÜSM*, pp. 124–5). Humans, as Sabine Müller notes, communicated *through* language.⁹

⁶ Benjamin, *UDT*, pp. 230–1.

⁷ Ibid., ‘Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen’, in *AW*, III: *Ansätze, Essays, Vorträge*, 114–131 (hereafter referred to as *ÜSM*).

⁸ Ibid., p. 122.

⁹ Sabine Müller, ‘Von der “Kunst ohne Führungszeichen zu zitieren”’. Benjamins anthropologischer Materialismus zwischen Methode und Utopie’, in *Walter Benjamins anthropologisches Denken*, ed. by Carolin Duttlinger, Ben Morgan & Anthony Phelan (Freiburg, Berlin & Vienna: Rombach, 2012), pp. 261–280 (p. 266).

The sudden decline in language refers to the imposition of *human* names on things after the Fall, which came to replace God's own word and provoke a rupture between name and object, sign and signified, as human language no longer merely communicated the 'Wesen' of an object, but rather imparted 'das richtende Wort' with it (*ÜSM*, p. 127). This shift marked a loss of symbolic humanity in language, replaced by the centrality of an 'Urteil' in human language – demoting the 'erkennend' or communicative function of language as secondary to the task of judging, and as a result rendering God's word a 'bloße[s] Zeichen'. Regina Kather offers a helpful explanation of this rupture in proposing human language as 'Ansprache', inasmuch as humans depend both on 'die Vermittlung von Zeichen und Inhalten' and on 'die Ansprache, um sich ihrer selbst bewusst zu werden', giving human language 'eine dialogische Dimension' as the means 'etwas über etwas auszusagen' (*ÜSM*, p. 127).¹⁰ The postlapsarian linguistic decline therefore neglected the 'geistiges Wesen' of individual objects despite, or because of, humans' effusive attempts to name (or even 'überbenennen') it, leaving behind an 'unmittelbar' reserve in these objects that becomes an important source of melancholy for the natural object (*ÜSM*, p. 129).¹¹ In other words, that symbolic 'Vergöttlichung [...] der Worte' dissipated after the Fall, meaning that language no longer offers a means to present ('darstellen') ideas and that humans, by contrast, communicate *in* language and no longer through it. The lost capacity of presentation – 'Darstellung' – remains a motif both in Benjamin's writings on philosophy and in my analysis from now on.

¹⁰ Regine Kather, "Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen" (W. Benjamin). Eine kleine Phänomenologie der Sprache', in *Philosophische Sprache zwischen Tradition und Innovation*, ed. by David Hommen & Dennis Sölch (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2018), pp. 189–210 (p. 203).

¹¹ Howard Caygill, 'Walter Benjamin's Concept of Allegory', in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. by Rita Copeland & Peter T. Struck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 241–253 (pp. 243–245).

Benjamin's early works are in many senses occupied with the effects of a rupture from the symbol, which he defined in aesthetics as a framework that can not only connote meaning, but even capture or signify all of reality. The postlapsarian symbol characteristically transcends its broken present and casts back to the kind of unity seen prior to the Fall in order to lay claim to a continued capacity for signification; more than that, it connotes a contiguity with Enlightenment values like beauty and truth as a model that, in Burkhardt Lindner's description, 'in der Totalität und Präsenz des Schönen die symbolische Anwesenheit des Transzendenten zu erreichen vermeint'.¹² Lindner identifies a transcendence in symbolism on the one hand because it surmounts the insurmountable – postlapsarian language as a communicative tool – and, on the other, because its aesthetic application avers the capacity of art to signify (something about) reality in its entirety.¹³ In John McCole's analysis, the symbol represents at once the whole of the world in its 'realist' image and a 'stable, material embodimen[t] of timeless, even transcendent, perfection', referring to its capacity for 'transfiguring appearances so as to lend them beauty, harmony, and totality'.¹⁴

In light of the contradiction between symbolism and postlapsarian reality as Benjamin sees it, one might affirm that the primary aim of the *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* as the disruption of the symbolic tradition, to which Benjamin posits allegory as an alternative response. The following analysis examines the subversion of symbolic logic in Benjamin's dialectical materialist approach to allegory, which I later apply to the early literature of the

¹² Burkhardt Lindner, 'Allegorie', in *Benjamins Begriffe*, ed. by Michael Opitz & Erdmut Wizisla, 2 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), I, pp. 50–94 (pp. 67–68). Note the connection between this reading of the symbol and several conceptions from German Enlightenment thinkers – Nicholas Halmi, 'Symbol and Allegory', in *Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era 1760–1850*, ed. by Christopher John Murray, 2 vols (New York & London: Dearborn, 2004), II: L–Z, pp. 1113–1114 (p. 1113); Bengt Algot Sörensen (ed.), *Allegorie und Symbol: Texte zur Theorie des dichterischen Bildes im 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt: Athenäum, 1972).

¹³ Lindner, pp. 67–68.

¹⁴ McCole, p. 136.

GDR and the method of socialist realism. In evaluating the concurrent rejection of the symbol and its appropriation for the task of philosophy in Benjamin's thought, I identify the challenge presented by allegory to this paradox and, therefore, how literature from the *Aufbau* read as allegorical offered a more viable aesthetic method and a more appropriate vehicle for political expression.

Benjaminian Theory of Allegory

In a way that was symptomatic of the constellative nature of his thought, Benjamin did not expound a theory of allegory in a single treatise, but rather spread its many facets across countless works, thus Harald Steinhagen's suggestion that Benjamin first writes about allegory, then subsequently devotes himself to working through it.¹⁵ The first treatment of allegory comes in a study about the baroque 'Trauerspiel' genre, which became popular on stages in the eighteenth century. It featured multiple heroes set against a general mood of 'restlessness within a looming and oppressive world', in which the monarch or prince grappled with 'pervasive melancholy', 'indecisiveness', and 'lack of resolution', as Kathleen Kerr-Koch describes – with Hamlet posited as the 'Trauerspiel' character *par excellence*.¹⁶ The genre seems to reflect the rupture at the core of postlapsarian language, as the plays are unable to feign any kind of 'unity' and instead orientate themselves towards the immanent reality of nature's decay, towards death. Following this and the abrogation of allegory in aesthetic and philosophical circles as a mere 'technique of illustration', the 'Trauerspiel' had by Benjamin's lifetime gone out of vogue as a 'Zerrbild der antiken Tragödie' (*UDT*, p. 244), thus his study focuses instead on the potential in the genre.¹⁷

¹⁵ Harald Steinhagen, 'Zu Walter Benjamins Begriff der Allegorie', in *Formen und Funktionen der Allegorie* ed. by Walter Haug (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1979), pp. 666–685 (p. 667).

¹⁶ Kathleen Kerr-Koch, *Romancing Fascism: Modernity and Allegory in Benjamin, de Man, Shelley* (London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 69.

¹⁷ Koepnick, p. 67.

A definition by Quintilian sees allegory take an object and ascribe a new meaning to it, using the specific to express something about the world – whereas the symbol pretends to represent the world in its totality.¹⁸ In that sense, a symbolic image echoes something else whole and coherent, whereas allegory – as Ernst Bloch wrote – ‘eine Art Reichtum aus Ungenauigkeit [besitzt]’:

[S]o eben steht ihre Gleichnisart hinter der unschwankenden, obzwar gleichfalls noch schwebenden des Symbols und des Einheitpunkts seiner Beziehung zurück.¹⁹

Benjamin understood allegory similarly, namely as taking an object and positing it as something else. He writes that, in the ‘Trauerspiel’: “[D]er Thronsaal [wird] in den Kerker, das Lustgemach in eine Totengruft, die Krone in den Kranz aus blutigen Zypressen



Figure 1

anschaulich, oder sprachlich nur, verwandelt” (UDT, pp. 418–419). Despite the chronological mismatch, Benjamin regards Albrecht Dürer’s engraving *Melencolia I* as the epitome or at least precursor of baroque allegory; the nails, plane, saw, and other items that lie ‘am Boden ungenutzt’ become the ‘Gerätschaften des tätigen Lebens’ (UDT, p. 333), collectively alluding to knowledge and learning, but in a fragmented form.

¹⁸ “*Allegory*, which is translated in Latin by *inversio*, either presents one thing in words and another in meaning, or else something absolutely opposed to the meaning of the words” – Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, ed. and trans. by Harold Edgeworth Butler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1920), VIII, chapter 6, section 44 (italics in original); Benjamin, *UDT*, p. 338.

¹⁹ Bloch also comments: “So ist keine Allegorie perfekt; wäre sie es, wäre ihr Fortbezug nicht einer, der kreuz und quer, aber auch in der gleichen Linie immer wieder zu anderem schickt, dann wäre diese Art Aussage nicht allegorisch, sondern symbolisch” – Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, 16 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1959), V, p. 200.

These images also connect allegory to the process of natural decay – to death; cast over by the forlorn gaze of the dog and two angelic figures, Dürer’s allegorical objects embody the link between allegory and melancholy, which in the Baroque found a home in the proclivity towards books and libraries when all of nature and humanity seemed mired in death and decay, hence a further connection between allegory and what Benjamin calls the ‘Tiefen des kreatürlichen Bereiches’ (*UDT*, p. 333). Allegories do not just allude to other things, therefore, but comprise individual fragments that have lost their original fullness, allowing their interpretation as something else.

Benjamin criticises the ‘dürftig[e] Dichtung’ of the ‘Trauerspiel’ in his study and notes that it ‘nichts als dauern [will] und klammert sich mit allen Organen ans Ewige’ (*UDT*, p. 370). But, as McCole writes, he ‘does not catalogue the content of individual allegories, nor does he offer reconstructions of individual works’ (what Terry Eagleton calls ‘content analysis’) in the *Ursprung*.²⁰ This approach makes it difficult to distil specific allegorical examples from Benjamin’s analysis, but, arguably, doing so would misinterpret his purpose in the *UDT* of recasting the Baroque as allegorical and exploring how allegory, in this example, can be applied to repurpose the fallout of postlapsarian language. That he diagnoses his object of study as flawed, therefore, has no material relevance for the purpose of Benjamin’s study. Numerous examples that are imperfect and lacunary do not achieve their full potential, but this does not preclude their significance for the wider political context. The same principle applies to this study.

²⁰ McCole, pp. 150–151; Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford & New York: Blackwell, 1983), p. 178.

Benjamin characterises baroque allegory according to its objects, which are ‘sundered from meanings, from spirit, from genuine human existence’ (Fredric Jameson) – in other words dead, fragmented, ruined, reflections of the historical context of war and suffering at the time, but also removed from their original contexts, of which only fragments remain.²¹ Allegory sources these objects ‘so that some meaning may be rescued from [their] parcelled fragments’, according to Eagleton, by assigning them new meaning, which at once liberates them from the melancholic falsehood of symbolic unity such that:

Jede Person, jedweddes Ding, jedes Verhältnis kann ein beliebiges anderes bedeuten.
Diese Möglichkeit spricht der profanen Welt ein vernichtendes doch gerechtes Urteil: sie wird gekennzeichnet als eine Welt, in der es aufs Detail so streng nicht ankommt.²²

This disruptive allegorisation renders the object an emblem, rebus, hieroglyph: a vehicle that takes the object over and, having voided its original meaning, represents it as something else.²³ The arbitrariness of meaning in the emblem characterises Benjamin’s version of allegory, since it replaces the notion that an allegory signifies or communicates a different object, which would revive a kind of symbolic unity. Instead, allegory holds as little and as much new meaning as possible in the language of the Fall – in fact deriving meaning, if at all, from its very lack of meaning.²⁴ Like its ‘Ursprung’, the emblem falls into the dialectical mode typical of Benjamin’s thought, since it undergoes a constant loss and restoration of meaning, a fragmentation followed by destruction, culminating in a dialectical spiral between

²¹ Fredric Jameson, ‘Versions of a Marxist Hermeneutic’, in *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 60–159 (p. 71); Benjamin, *UDT*, pp. 252, 260–261, 285.

²² Terry Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism* (London: New Left Books, 1981), p. 23; Benjamin, *UDT*, p. 364.

²³ Benjamin, *UDT*, p. 364; Michael Kahl, ‘Der Begriff der Allegorie in Benjamins Trauerspielbuch und im Werk Paul de Man’, in *Allegorie und Melancholie*, ed. by Willem van Reijen (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), pp. 292–317 (p. 299).

²⁴ Benjamin, *UDT*, pp. 368, 365. Though it foregoes any claim to symbolic unity or signification, allegory nonetheless retains a monadic structure in that its individual fragments remain meaningless, but their constellation provides a connection to the external, granting the structure its dialectical character and its immanent significance.

meaning and meaninglessness, which, as form alone, might indicate meaning.²⁵ If allegory therefore uncovers a reserve of meaning in its objects, it differs in Benjamin's conception from a classical notion of allegory as a version of metaphor and becomes a far more significant facet of his Marxist hermeneutic.

One implication of this theory lies in the radical interpretation of nature and history. Just as the Edenic symbol gives way to a postlapsarian language of lost signs and signifiers, Benjamin interprets history and nature not as realms of teleological development, fecundity, and progress, but as sites of decay and 'Vergängnis': "[Die Natur] erscheint [...] nicht in der Knospe und Blüte[,] sondern in Überreife und Verfall ihrer Geschöpfe. Natur schwebt [...] als ewige Vergängnis, in der allein der saturnische Blick jener Generationen die Geschichte erkannte" (*UDT*, p. 396). Such a reading chimed with the war-torn context of the 'Trauerspiel' but likely also had to do with Benjamin's own political milieu during and immediately after the First World War, in the Weimar Republic, and in the anticipated devastation of National Socialism. Benjamin metaphorically terms history 'Naturgeschichte' because of its baroque spiral toward natural decay and death, foregoing the sense of growth and anticipatory progress towards a better future. Likewise, he relays its dialectical structure of 'Vor- und Nachgeschichte', according to which the notion of 'origin' (discerned in the prologue to the *Ursprung*) denotes both 'Restauration' and 'Wiederherstellung' (*UDT*, p. 241), such that even the idea of a more primitive beginning fades into a sense of swirling destruction and chaos.²⁶

²⁵ Ibid., p. 370; Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism*, p. 23.

²⁶ Stéphane Mosès, 'Walter Benjamin: The Three Models of History', in *The Angel of History: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, trans. by Barbara Harshaw (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 65–126 (p. 75).

Philosopher Jürgen Habermas criticised the lack of some ‘übergreifenden Sinn’ in this model of history, but its deconstruction of the symbolic reading of the past carries ontological significance.²⁷ The structure of allegory, applied to the notion of history, appears in the *Ursprung* as a buffer to idealism, as Benjamin brands a teleological telling of history illusory and symbolic. More than this, Eagleton recognises that ‘Naturgeschichte’ leads Benjamin to the detection of some ‘apocalyptic point at which time stands still to receive the plenitude of hitherto dismembered meaning’; that is, the breakthrough of an allegorical historiography lies in its clarifying perspective generates a moment of clarity: “[J]etztzeit, die] in einer ungeheueren Abbeviatur die Geschichte der ganzen Menschheit zusammenfasst.”²⁸ Benjamin examines the implications of these disparate models of history across his work, meaning that the past of an allegory had as big a role to play as its present.

Applying an allegorical reading of history to selected texts of *Aufbau* literature in this study, I not only identify the GDR’s ideological foundation in them, but also make distinctions between – or recognise the parallel usage of – the ‘Jetztzeit’ of allegory and the symbolic tendencies of ‘Verklärung’ and ‘Erlösung’ in socialist realism. This study identifies just one application for Benjamin’s historiographical and allegorical frameworks, especially in systems that challenge the hegemony or precipitate the decline of imperialism and capitalism.

The Transcendental Turn and its Immanent Adversaries

The difficulty with the *Ursprung* lies in its layers of analysis, since Benjamin alludes to a theoretical form of allegory but entangles it within a critical analysis of the baroque

²⁷ See Samuel Weber, ‘Genealogy of Modernity: History, Myth and Allegory in Benjamin’s Origin of the German Mourning Play’, *MLN*, 106:3 (1991), 465–500 (p. 466).

²⁸ Walter Benjamin, ‘Über den Begriff der Geschichte’, in *AW*, I: *Abhandlungen*, 627–639 (p. 638) (hereafter referred to as *ÜBG*); Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism*, p. 10. Chapter Four examines the concept of ‘Jetztzeit’ further.

‘Trauerspiel’, which ultimately falters. That the primary example turns out to be faulty does little to disrupt the writer’s flow, however, since Benjamin wrestles significance from the material. Allegory subjects its fragmented objects to a destructive process that divests them of much of their original contextual meaning and makes them fragments anew in their constellation. Since their identity continues to be lost and restored, ‘gesetzt’ and taken away, however, the objects yield a new ‘Einsicht’ or ‘Ausdruck’, such that allegory retains a capacity of locating meaning, even if it cannot be compared to that of symbolism. The potential of the allegorical method lies in its dialectical or monadic immanence, since its path to meaning consists not in some miraculous transformation but in the iterative and dialectical recycling of its fragments, which unlocks their forgotten reserve. Whereas prelapsarian signification saw objects ‘speak’ and be transformed, allegory recycles the same objects ‘im Stillstand’, that is, it relies upon the constellation of its objects to produce something new.²⁹ For the allegorisation of an object to take place, that object must, therefore, retain the melancholic muteness that it had come to know since the Fall, as it would otherwise have no untouched reserve. Benjamin observes this with an invocation to: “[Den dialektische[n] Zug des Saturn, der] auf der einen Seite die Trägheit und den Stumpfsinn, auf der andern die Kraft der Intelligenz und Kontemplation [verleiht].”³⁰ In order for some ‘Einsicht’ or new knowledge to come about, a certain solipsism must prevail, for which a sudden signification would reap a damaging effect. Benjamin’s ‘Jetztzeit’, that moment of perspectival insight generated by the clash of fragments in their new image, thus relies upon the safeguarding but recontextualisation of each individual fragment for its potential and can be regarded as an immanent process.

²⁹ Benjamin, *UDT*, pp. 366, 396; Peter Bürger, ‘Der Allegoriebegriff Benjamins’, in *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp. 92–98 (p. 93); Ferruccio Masini, ‘Allegorie, Melancholie, Avantgarde: Zum “Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels”’, in *Walter Benjamin*, ed. by Heinz Ludwig Arnold, 2nd edn (Munich: text+kritik, 1979), pp. 94–102 (p. 100).

³⁰ Benjamin, *UDT*, p. 341, quoting Erwin Panofsky & Fritz Saxl, *Dürers ‘Melencolia I’: Eine quellen- und typengeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Leipzig & Berlin: Teubner, 1923), pp. 18–19.

Yet many studies have fallen into the trap of assigning the newness in allegory to a transcendence – what Eagleton calls a ‘second reification’ of the object.³¹ Benjamin critiques the symbolic ending seen in the ‘Trauerspiel’, however, as the emblem, the ‘Totenkopf’, comes full circle in the allegorised ‘Schädelstätte’ (Place of the Skull, Golgotha), in which finally the death of the Messiah, an allegory of the decay of ‘Naturgeschichte’, is answered by a transcendent resurrection that represents a salvific escape.³² That the ‘Trauerspiel’ ultimately turns to transcendence for resolution does not equate to a salvific quality in allegory, but rather the paradox of the genre and its appropriation of allegory. For Benjamin, this marks the ‘Grenze’ of baroque allegory, as the ‘Trauerspiel’ genre yields to the power of an ultimately symbolic transcendence in order to resolve its own meaninglessness:

Damit freilich geht der Allegorie alles verloren, was ihr als Eigenstes zugehörte: das geheime, privilegierte Wissen, die Willkürherrschaft im Bereich der toten Dinge, die vermeintliche Unendlichkeit der Hoffnungsleere.

(UDT, p. 420)

Benjamin thus concludes that allegory ‘nicht mehr spielerisch in erdhafter *Dingwelt*[,] sondern ernsthaft unterm *Himmel* sich wiederfindet[, ...] zur Auferstehung treulos überspringt” (UDT, *ibid*). Or: “Leer aus geht die Allegorie” (UDT, *ibid*).

To reduce this brief final critique of the ‘Trauerspiel’ as the crux of an entire theory of allegory would misunderstand Benjamin and disregard the dialectical structure inherent in the layers and foldings of his prose here and elsewhere. The *Ursprung* as a text lives, through the *Passagen-Werke* for example, by its dialectical relation to the failed allegory of the Baroque, thus allegory cannot undertake a resurrection of its object because that would bring it full

³¹ Terry Eagleton, ‘The Marxist Rabbi: Walter Benjamin’, in *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 326–339 (p. 326).

³² Benjamin, *UDT*, pp. 419–420.

circle to a symbolic whole. Such a gesture, like the sudden *deus ex machina* in the ‘Trauerspiel’, would impose meaning from without, whereas Benjamin emphatically understands any newness as deriving from an *internal* renegotiation of sustained and retained objects. He instead speaks of an allegorical ‘restitution’, which would retain the object’s fragmented state but imbue it with the potential to carry any meaning – but only that imposed by the allegorist in a wider constellation.³³ Indeed, this motif of ‘Rettung’ creates a theological anchor that – according to Jameson – should be read secularly, as a kind of language or linguistic code instead of an explicitly religious philosophy.³⁴ Whilst the restitution or redemption of an object unavoidably resounds with a kind of messianism, Benjamin writes of humanity’s own immanent ‘schwache messianische Kraft’ in the second thesis of ‘Über den Begriff der Geschichte’ (ÜBG, p. 629), which expressly nullifies the expectation of an external messiah figure and, again, precludes the external imposition of meaning. Arguably, however, any eschatological premise evokes a kind of nostalgia for the symbolism of religious doctrine and, more specifically, of the prelapsarian moment in the continued possibility of accessing that lost ‘reserve’ of objects tarnished and silenced by the Fall, which makes it an easily misunderstood descriptor. I avoid using it for this reason.

To avoid any allusion to a symbolic praxis and instead make the theory of allegory fruitful for this analysis, I propose that allegory consists in a formal displacement of its objects into a new context, through which those fragments collectively – and through their reception – undergo an immanent change that grants them access to newness. As Benjamin himself noted, this dialectical process draws from the monadic structure of the object, meaning that allegory is of necessity both an isolated form resistant to external influence and a kind of

³³ Caygill, ‘Walter Benjamin’s Concept of Allegory’, p. 249. See also Benjamin, *UDT*, e.g. p. 412.

³⁴ Jameson acknowledges Benjamin’s profound knowledge of sacred texts but argues for their secular inculcation – Fredric Jameson, *The Benjamin Files* (London & New York: Verso, 2020), p. 11–12.

conduit to the world beyond through its new constellation. Rather than describe this process using a religious lexicon of redemption and salvation, I argue that the ‘destructive impulse’ of the allegorical, through which it frees its object from the shackles of symbolic language, heralds an expression of newfound meaning.³⁵ As such, the emphasis is shifted from salvation to a concurrent destruction and reforming, highlighting that meaning does not stem from the act of restructuring in allegory but from the core of the object itself. Received by an audience, this newness provides a unique impetus for societal change in the present, which marks the potential of allegory for the purposes of this study. Instead of attempting, as it were, to resurrect what Benjamin himself had already banished from the postlapsarian realm, I argue that allegory alone provides the solution to its own problem as a monadically isolated model that refers, ‘auto-poetically, to its own referentiality’, in the words of Dominik Finkelde.³⁶ Fragments serve as the raw material for this process: “Was da in Trümmern abgeschlagen liegt, das hochbedeutende Fragment, das Bruchstück: es ist die edelste Materie der barocken Schöpfung” (*UDT*, p. 368).

The baroque ‘Trauerspiel’ emerged from a period of much suffering, in response to which the genre incorporates the ruinous material of its historical moment into its own structure. This reaction to a troubled recent history entails a reflection on the past, yet in allegory the wounds of conflict themselves do not count as meaningful, but the potential that they offer in concert with other fragments in the allegorical constellation does. Likewise, Benjamin recognised an allegorical intention in the work of poet Charles Baudelaire and his collection *Les fleurs du mal*, which figures a response to the growth of capitalism in nineteenth-century

³⁵ Caygill, ‘Walter Benjamin’s Concept of Allegory’, p. 249.

³⁶ Finkelde, p. 61.

Paris. Baudelaire's allegory thus concerns a period marked by the exponential proliferation of the commodity through mechanical reproduction.

Whereas war had torn through a landscape and littered it with 'Bruchstücke' or 'Trümmer', capitalism had privileged a system of production in which the commodity was replicated ad absurdum, with each copy merely an allusion to the original template or mould.³⁷ Both the *Ursprung* and *Passagen-Werk* confront these fragments and thus deal with objects that have already become allegories of the world that made them: any fragment, as it were, is an allegory of its original object because allegory takes the object as evoking something else. Benjamin did differentiate the baroque and Baudelairean contexts, especially as Baudelaire's poetry renders allegory 'no longer a stylistic choice but a predicament' because of the 'intrinsically allegorical' nature of the commodity itself.³⁸ The two examples demonstrate, however, that Benjamin's theory concerns a renegotiation of fragmented objects that already allude to a context from which they had long been torn, such that their literary allegorisation becomes a kind of repetitive echo: allegory becomes an allegory itself.³⁹

Moreover, Samuel Weber asserts that the 'Trauerspiel', for example, still enjoyed a 'theatricality', as the allegorical process entails the 'Vorstellung' of the object, whereby it appears before an audience in its own right and in its constellation, which the audience can – much like in the theatre – recognise.⁴⁰ According to the postlapsarian notion of language as imparting judgement through 'das richtende Wort', that presentation occurs without

³⁷ See also Walter Benjamin, 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit. Dritte Fassung', in *AW*, II: *Abhandlungen, Autobiographische Schriften, Aus dem Passagen-Werk*, 246–283. Henceforth referred to as *KZTR*; all references to the third version unless cited otherwise.

³⁸ Caygill, 'Walter Benjamin's Concept of Allegory', p. 251.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 249. See also Jameson, 'Versions of a Marxist Hermeneutic', p. 60; McCole, p. 142. Compare Finkelde's description of allegory's self-referentiality – Finkelde, p. 61.

⁴⁰ Weber, 'Genealogy of Modernity: History, Myth and Allegory in Benjamin's Origin of the German Mourning Play', p. 491.

capturing the 'geistiges Wesen' of the object. Instead, the 'Vorstellung' allows the newly collated fragments to resonate with each other and generate meaning in that novel form. Whether Benjamin means that form alone generates meaning or that the original reserve of meaning equates to the essence does not become clear; as I note earlier, however, the restitution of essential meaning has much in common with a symbolic apparatus. Here and throughout this study I thus prefer a reading of Benjaminian allegory as acceding to meaning through 'Vorstellung'. This means that, in the GDR context, the interaction of a work with the audience (both theoretically and, with reference to reception, practically) becomes relevant to literary analysis.

Allegory is therefore, in Weber's words, a 'spectacle' because it must in some way be received, like language, yet also a 'masquerade' in that its objects remain individual fragments but are allegorised in their new combination, consisting in an allegory of allegorical fragments. Since the performativity in allegory reminds one of the broken structure of human language – as opposed to pursuing a symbolic unity – it avoids rendering the allegorical image somehow whole and total in favour of presenting ('vorstellen') fragments to the spectator. The result is a polysemic perspective for the audience that avoids the linear presentation of a coherent image as practised by the symbol. The gives up the ghost before the sophist critic appears or 'das Werk [behauptet sich] als Ruine'.⁴¹

Modern Allegory and the German Democratic Republic

In this study, I apply the Benjaminian theory of allegory to a corpus from the twentieth century, something that Benjamin himself did not undertake, given that his most

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 372.

contemporary analysis appears in his examination of Baudelaire and the ‘Krise der Moderne’ in the expansion of the capitalist mode.⁴² The commodity echoes the baroque fragment insofar as it alludes to an original object of which only part remains, meaning that any allegorical treatment of the commodity equally deals with an already-allegorical object. In contrast to the *Ursprung*, however, Benjamin’s work on Baudelaire did not deal merely with a flawed object, but one also located in a particularly disruptive socio-political climate, in which the inexorable expansion of the commodity in a sense numbed the audience from recognising the allegorisation of an object because of the ubiquitous reproduction of objects in their own present. Baudelaire’s treatment of the commodity in *Les fleurs du mal* still exercised an allegorical intention in the alienated depiction of the French capital but had a limited shelf-life because the development of capitalism diminished the significance of allegory to its audience. Baroque ‘sensibility soon became not merely strange but completely unmeaning to a European culture saturated with the desire for *Erlebnis*’, as Bainard Cowan summarises, such that ‘Baudelaire ist als Allegoriker isoliert gewesen’.⁴³ If the iteration of the commodity could become so pervasive as to normalise, almost, the allegorical structure, then allegory as a form could lose its receptive potential entirely, according to Benjamin – hence his bleak prognosis of its future.

Benjamin’s negative outlook on the efficacy of the allegorical model meant that he did not expand it into a more comprehensive analytical method and thus dissuaded its application

⁴² Benjamin preferred to explore the potential of ‘philosophisch[e] Kontemplation’, a perspective through which objects ‘sich zu erneuern [haben]’ because they gain access to ‘eine offenkundige profane Bedeutung’ (Benjamin, *UDT*, p. 231). This restitution of symbolic unity represents one alternative to the impasse in allegory for Benjamin, but it risks resembling what he terms the ‘bürgerliche Auffassung’ of language, in which word and object, signifier and signified, supposedly retain their Edenic, symbolic unity despite the impossibility of such a notion – Benjamin, *ÜSM*, p. 118. Josef Fürnkäs, ‘Aura’, in *Benjamins Begriffe*, ed. by Opitz & Wizisla, I, pp. 95–146 (pp. 112, 118).

⁴³ Bainard Cowan, ‘Walter Benjamin’s Theory of Allegory’, *New German Critique*, 22 (1981), 109–122 (p. 122; italics in original); Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire. Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus*, in *AW*, I, 445–626 (p. 626; hereafter referred to as *CB*).

into the twentieth century as the death grip of the commodity risked obliterating the perception of the fragment as allegory at all. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh counters Benjamin's perspective in arguing that:

In the splintering of signifier and signified, the allegorist subjects the sign to the same division of functions that the object has undergone in its transformation into a commodity. The repetition of the original act of depletion and the new attribution of meaning redeems the object.⁴⁴

Though Benjaminian in its approach, Buchloh's self-affirming proposition is applied to a contemporary avantgarde community in the US seeking to establish allegory after the Dadaist photo montage, which does little to confute Benjamin's pessimism. Indeed, neither Benjamin's nor Buchloh's conclusions brooked or the potential of allegory for non-capitalist political systems, despite Benjamin's familiarity with the Soviet Union and the growth of global socialism. Even if not complete, the efforts to defetishise GDR society away from the raptures of the commodity meant that the Baudelairean impasse detected by Benjamin no longer held water, as allegory regained the ability to present and perform to an audience. In the Introduction, I already explore how intellectuals' status within the system of authority in the GDR stimulated their access to an audience; in the chapters that follow, I apply Benjamin's model to the early GDR on account of the historical similarities with the Baroque, for example, and the unique potential of the allegorical in the socialist context. In so doing, I appraise the suitability and potentiality of allegory in a non-capitalist system according to the proximity to a real audience.

⁴⁴ Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, 'Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art', *Artforum*, 9 (1982), 43–56 (p. 44).

Further similarities between the objects of Benjamin's allegory-focussed analyses and the GDR's *Aufbau* exist. Benjamin's examples both concern historical moments divided by allegorical and symbolic movements: having identified the Lutheran reform movement alongside allegory as a force for secularising society, Benjamin – in the *Ursprung* – also reinforces the pervasiveness of other Christian ideologies as a continued cradle for the symbolic tradition, to which the 'Trauerspiel' ultimately falls prey. Similarly, Baudelaire's take on industrial capitalist Paris entailed the adoption of an alienated perspective – that of the 'flâneur' – to tackle the diffusion and authority of the commodity, but this approach inadvertently reproduces the fetishistic obsession with self-renewal of the commodity itself, as the sixth chapter explores. Benjamin's own essay on the reproducibility of the commodity notes that the growing separation between the original and its copy detracted from a cult-like symbolism that had previously burdened aesthetics, for example. That said, Baudelaire's exploitation of this material upheaval occurred in the pursuit of a fetishistic nouveauté – a device of the commodity itself – and a confidence in aesthetics as transcending reality, evidencing the complexity of reappropriating an intrinsically allegorical structure for alternative political ends.

This conflict equally emerged at the centre of the GDR's culture politics. With a pervasive propagation of the cultural 'Erbe' and the proclamation of socialist realism as the Party's official aesthetic policy, SED discourse promoted a kind of symbolism as the only adequate artistic means of disseminating and constructing socialism in the young state, which was considered hitherto dogged by imperialist, formalist, anti-communist etc. tendencies.⁴⁵ Whereas socialist realism and its historical precursors championed the transformative and

⁴⁵ A more extensive interpretation of socialist realism as symbolic appears in Chapter Three.

transcendent facility of art, an artwork that foregrounded disunity and fragmentation potentially contradicted official policy, hence the frequent characterisation of such works and their artists as a risk to the success of the *Aufbau* project. Here, as in Benjamin's own chosen periods, two differing approaches and political worldviews, which respectively emphasised a ubiquitous ability to transcend reality and underscored the immanent acknowledgement of humanity's profane status in a world without meaning or teleological direction, pulled aesthetics in opposing directions.

Allegorical art in the early GDR (that is, art read as pertaining to allegorical attributes) constituted a challenge to the symbolist direction adopted by the SED but did not, like the 'Trauerspiel' or Baudelaire's poems, make this challenge overtly or exclusively destructive, since – as I argue in the subsequent chapters – it consistently underpinned the socialist project, whilst indicating a preferable aesthetic model suited to the structural changes in a socialist state. Indeed, many artworks that contain allegorical aspects in the Benjaminian sense also adhere in other respects to a symbolic mode, which complicates the distinction between the two and, crucially, implies the nuances in the GDR's cultural politics.

That tension in GDR aesthetics represents an important motif throughout this study, as the clash of symbolic and allegorical approaches to cultural policy contributed significantly to the contradictions and issues that characterise the *Aufbau* period. Benjamin identifies a symbolic tradition as one that seeks to reunify word and object, and he posits the 'opposition' to it through the baroque 'Trauerspiel', which he formulates into a theory of allegory. Likewise, in *The Communist Postscript* Boris Groys argues that communism was the first political system to grapple with the decline of symbolic structures – a movement that began with secularisation movements and mechanical reproduction – because it depended on

paradox, contradiction, and dialectics. Groys notes the motivation for this profile as ‘exposing, confirming and materializing the suspicion that behind the illusion of an open [capitalist] society are hidden the closed spaces of a manipulative and conspiratorial power located in obscure paradox’.⁴⁶ In other words, communism embodies the destructive, asymmetrical, and contradictory characteristics summarily encapsulated by Benjamin in his theory of allegory. The two structures adopt a method of fragmentation in opposition to the dominant alternative (capitalism or symbolism respectively) because they identify a means to use it productively. That the SED, however, opted to legitimise the adoption of socialist realism as the state-approved aesthetic method posed a severe challenge to the asymmetrical, interrupted method that characterises, for Groys, state socialism. Whereas socialism relies upon the recognition of and interaction with such contradictions in order to thrive, however, socialist realism offered a symbolic means of denying contradictions and polemics, which perverted the fragmentary structure theorised by Groys because of the preference for a unified and cohered totality, for denial instead of admission.

Benjamin’s theory responded, in a sense, to the centuries-long aesthetic nadir of allegory, in which it was dismissed as a dangerous or, paradoxically, powerless tool, or refused an identity separate from that of the symbol. The structural definition in the *Ursprung* imbues allegory with new potential, however, in the reformulation of its fragmented objects into a monadic constellation that exudes, with an audience, new meaning. Since the messianic redemption of death in the ‘Trauerspiel’ ultimately betrays the immanence of allegory, I build on and emphasise its performative aspect to establish how it locates meaning and, specifically, how that meaning bore relevance for the burgeoning socialist state. Given that the symbolic praxis

⁴⁶ Groys, *The Communist Postscript*, p. 29.

of socialist realism did not enjoy absolute application by the SED, allegorical works were able to play an essential role in establishing the foundations upon which the state was established vis-à-vis its predecessor. Beginning with a chapter focussing on the symbolic character of the GDR's official aesthetic policy – socialist realism – and its execution in two canonical works from the *Aufbau*, this study pursues a dynamic of increasing allegoricism in an analysis of numerous literary artefacts from the GDR so as to evaluate the effect and potential of an allegorical structure for this corpus. The objective of such an approach is to appraise the potential of these texts as alternatives to socialist realism to effect political change upon the nascent society for which they were written. The following study, therefore, explores the aptness of the allegorical as a structural tool in contexts unfamiliar to Benjamin, but in which its full potential had perhaps the greatest chance of realisation.

CHAPTER THREE

‘ALLES GROßE UND SCHÖNE’:

SOCIALIST REALISM AS SYMBOL

Es ist ein großes Unglück unserer Geschichte, dass wir den Aufbau des Neuen leisten müssen, ohne die Niederreißung des Alten geleistet zu haben. [...] Wahrscheinlich deshalb sehen wir jetzt den Aufbau so undialektisch an. Und dass wir dem täglichen Kampf gegen das Alte, den wir doch zu leisten haben, keinen genügenden Ausdruck verleihen. Wir suchen ständig das ‘Harmonische’, das ‘An-und-für-sich-Schöne’ zu gestalten, anstatt realistisch den Kampf für die Harmonie und die Schönheit.

(Bertolt Brecht)¹

From 1952, one specific artistic model dominated cultural policy, discourse, and production in the GDR. It was, as critic Günther Cwojdrak wrote in *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, ‘eine Methode [...], aber] keine Form, kein Stil, kein Rezept und kein Schema’.² Socialist realism came with no handbook and lacked tangible criteria, however. As a policy that neither de facto nor de jure comprised an absolute or concrete obligation, it was nourished by its own ambiguities, but also by the ambiguous ways in which GDR authorities enforced (or did not enforce) its application. In this chapter, I explore the socialist realist method through two quasi-canonical texts from the *Aufbau* period, Eduard Claudius’ *Menschen an unsrer Seite* and Hans Marchwitza’s *Robeisen*, which both subscribe to and expand on the basic precepts of socialist realism.

¹ Bertolt Brecht, *Werke: Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe [GBA]*, 32 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988–2000), XVII: *Prosa 2: Romanfragmente und Romanentwürfe* (1989), p. 1154.

² Günther Cwojdrak, ‘Über unsere Gegenwartsliteratur’, *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, 1 (1953), 157–165 (p. 158).

Peter Zimmermann emphasises the futility of appraising GDR literature solely according to official structures and frameworks such as the officially sanctioned method, since this approach only reproduces the SED's own ideological framework and distorts the field.³ This chapter should be read, therefore, neither in isolation nor according to what Zimmermann terms a 'Spannung zwischen "literarischer Autonomie und Staatsdienst"'.⁴ Indeed, the two novels examined here appear to violate as many formally described criteria as they fulfil, leaving the practical execution of socialist realism contradictory. Rather than inculcate the texts for simply failing to do justice to the policy, I suggest that this conflict arises from an inherent flaw at the core of the method, which I examine according to Walter Benjamin's description of the symbol – as opposed to allegory – because of the ambition for socialist realist works to achieve a totality that at once captures a 'typical' reality and imposes a transcendental apparatus onto them, through which they posit an idealist, ideologised version of socialism. As a result, GDR socialist realism presented a conundrum for artists whose fulfilment of one theoretical criterion entailed the violation of another or whose desire to incorporate the complexity of the historical present into their work meant expanding on or diverging from set characteristics. Rather than regard such characteristics and their lacunary realisation as an artistic failure, I explore how the authors navigated the mandated theory with the *Aufbau* reality in which they lived, and thereby read the SED's official policy acted as a kind of utopian distraction from an inherently disruptive present.

³ Peter Zimmermann, *Industrieliteratur in der DDR: Vom Helden der Arbeit zum Planer und Leiter* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1984), p. 2. See also Frank Trommler, 'Ideologische und ästhetische Aspekte beim Interpretieren von DDR-Literatur', *Der Deutschunterricht*, 2 (1978), 5–17 (p. 13).

⁴ Zimmermann, p. 2.

Canonisation and Politicisation: Soviet Socialist Realism and its Adherents

To begin, I outline the roots of socialist realism in the USSR and GDR, and interrogate the process by which it emerged. At a meeting in author Maxim Gorki's apartment in 1932, where he incidentally also made his infamous comments about writers as 'engineers of the human soul', Joseph Stalin remarked:

Der Künstler muss in erster Linie das Leben *wahrhaftig* zeigen, und wenn er wahrhaftig unser Leben zeigen wird, dann kann er nicht umhin, in ihm das zu bemerken, das zu zeigen, was es zum Sozialismus führt. Das wird dann *sozialistische* Kunst sein. Das wird sozialistischer Realismus sein.⁵

Stalin did not conjure up the socialist realist method during this meeting, however, nor did he initiate its creation forthwith. The exposition of socialist realism was gradual over the first decades of the twentieth century as part of an ideological agenda that envisaged art as having a central role in a society no longer governed by the 'medium of money', as Boris Groys writes.⁶ After years of planning, Andrei Zhdanov, responsible for cultural policy in the upper echelons of Stalin's CPSU, declared in 1934 the central attributes of what he called 'the basic method of Soviet belles lettres and literary criticism', which included a 'truthful, historically concrete depiction of reality in its revolutionary development' and the 'task of the ideological molding and education of the working people in the spirit of socialism'.⁷ The principles of socialist realism were thereafter agreed and inserted into the statutes of the newly formed Union of Soviet Writers, by which members had to swear.⁸

⁵ Hans Günther, *Die Verstaatlichung der Literatur. Entstehung und Funktionsweise des sozialistisch-realistischen Kanons in der sowjetischen Literatur der 30er Jahre* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1984), pp. 11–12.

⁶ Groys, *The Communist Postscript*, pp. xvi, 72.

⁷ Piotr Fast, *Ideology, Aesthetics, Literary History: Socialist Realism and its Others* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999), pp. 32–33; Andrei Zhdanov, 'Soviet Literature - The Richest in Ideas, the Most Advanced Literature', in *Marxists Internet Archive* <https://www.marxists.org/subject/art/lit_crit/sovietwritercongress/> [accessed 20 May 2020]; quoted in Thomas Lahusen, 'Socialist Realism (Soviet)', in *Literature and Politics Today: The Political Nature of Modern Fiction, Poetry, and Drama*, ed. by M. Keith Booker (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2015), pp. 302–310 (p. 302)

⁸ The statutes of the Union of Soviet Writers dictated the expectation of writers' participation, 'by means of their artistic writing, in building socialism, [the] defence of the interests of the working class and securing the rule of Soviets through

The CPSU, moreover, sought a historical anchor with which to justify the new policy, thus functionaries began to associate socialist realism with sparse comments made by Vladimir Lenin on aesthetics: “[D]ass unsere Literatur nicht apolitisch ist, nicht ‘Kunst um der Kunst willen’ sein darf, sondern dass sie eine wichtige, führende Rolle im gesellschaftlichen Leben zu spielen hat.”⁹ At the same time, a canonisation of works from the 1920s, such as Maxim Gorki’s *The Mother* (1906), Feodor Gladkov’s *Cement* (1925), and Alexander Fadejew’s *The Nineteen/The Rout* (1925/6), occurred that established a body of socialist realist literature retroactively.¹⁰ Any canonisation process occurs with the benefit of hindsight, but the external attribution of specific artistic (and ideological) mettle to works that lacked such ambitions at the time remains a particular characteristic of Soviet socialist realism.

Socialist realist art in the USSR could take any form, genre, or style so long as it was realist, meaning that it could not dissolve into abstraction or theory, but rather should retain a fidelity to mimetic representation.¹¹ Its ‘reflection’ of reality should capture the human subject as emancipated from modes of enslavement or exploitation so as to embody the ideal of the liberated labourer.¹² The work should even have a positive dynamism, such as a developmental plot or character, that moves towards and anticipates a better future, a trait described by Piotr Fast as ‘becoming’.¹³ This future focus links socialist realism to ‘revolutionary Romanticism’, which Zhdanov uses to denote the touch point of an idealistic ambition associated with the Romantics and the urgency of revolution described by Zhdanov

true representation of the class struggle and socialist construction in our country, and through [the] education of the working class in the spirit of socialism’ – Fast, pp. 32–33.

⁹ Andrei Zhdanov, ‘Referat über die Zeitschriften “Swesda” und “Leningrad”, 1946’, in *Beiträge zum sozialistischen Realismus: Grundsätzliches über Kunst und Literatur*, ed. by Wilhelm Girnus (Berlin: Kultur & Fortschritt, 1953), pp. 20–42 (p. 6; 33).

¹⁰ Hans Günther, ‘Die Lebensphasen eines Kanons – am Beispiel des sozialistischen Realismus’, in *Kanon und Zensur: Beiträge zur Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation II*, ed. by Aleida Assmann & Jan Assmann (Munich: Fink, 1987), pp. 138–148 (pp. 141, 143). For contents of the statutes see also Alexander Myasnikov, ‘Über die wichtigsten Grundzüge des sozialistischen Realismus’, in *Beiträge zum sozialistischen Realismus*, ed. by Girnus, pp. 191–212 (pp. 191–192).

¹¹ Fast, p. 35. Cf. Günther, *Die Verstaatlichung der Literatur*, p. 17.

¹² Günther, *Die Verstaatlichung der Literatur*, p. 25.

¹³ Fast, pp. 32–33, 39.

in 1934 as the ‘connection between the hardest, most sobering manual work with absolute heroism and grandiose perspectives’.¹⁴ In M. Vitenson’s words, this aspect entailed ‘[d]ie Idealisierung der Wirklichkeit im Namen des Ideals, das die progressive Bewegung der Welt widerspiegelt’.¹⁵

Beyond its realism, socialist realism involves the ideological manipulation of reality through a heroicising or ‘romanticising’ lens that allows the banal reality to become something ‘grandiose’. Authors should not just aggrandise, however, rather acknowledge their historicity and position in class struggle, taking care to communicate ‘typical’ aspects of reality, though the ‘typical’ referred to aspects considered ideologically preferable but realistically normative – in other words subjectively ‘good’ and still anticipatory.¹⁶ High-ranking CPSU functionary Georgy Malenkov summarised this dynamic as ‘die wesentliche Sphäre, in der die Parteilichkeit in der realistischen Kunst in Erscheinung tritt’.¹⁷ Because of the ideologisation of the work, the CPSU considered its potential as a didactic or pedagogical tool for the readership, thus insisting on the presence of a positive hero role model who effectuates a kind of victory to represent the individual ‘[nicht] wie er ist, sondern auch so, wie er sein soll – und morgen sein wird’.¹⁸ Their ideal characteristics, Hans Günter continues, were:

¹⁴ Zhdanov, ‘Referat über die Zeitschriften “Swesda” und “Leningrad”, 1946’, p. 17.

¹⁵ Günther, *Die Verstaatlichung der Literatur*, p. 36, citing M. Vitenson in *Literaturnyj sovremennik*, 1 (1933), p. 128.

¹⁶ Günther, *Die Verstaatlichung der Literatur*, p. 28, 33; Fast, pp. 35–36.

¹⁷ Georgy Malenkov, ‘Aus dem Rechenschaftsbericht des Zentralkomitees der KPdSU(B) an den XIX. Parteitag über Literatur und Kunst’, in *Beiträge zum sozialistischen Realismus*, ed. by Girmus, pp. 79–80 (p. 80); Lothar von Balluseck, *Dichter im Dienst: Der sozialistische Realismus in der deutschen Literatur* (Wiesbaden: Limes, 1963), p. 22; Fast, p. 38.

¹⁸ Günther, *Die Verstaatlichung der Literatur*, pp. 41, 43.

Vertrauen in die organisierende Macht des Verstandes; das Gefühl, Schöpfer der neuen Welt zu sein; nicht nur biologische, sondern historische Jugendlichkeit; Ablehnung des bürgerlichen zoologischen Individualismus; Ganzheitlichkeit der Individualität, die mit dem Kollektiv verbunden ist.¹⁹

According to ‘partiinost’ (‘партийность’; partisanship), socialist realist works should, moreover, underpin the central role of the Party as a guiding force, cementing the Party’s own role in ideological transformation.²⁰

Finally, ‘народность’ (‘narodnost’), rendered ‘popularity’ in English though better linked to folklore (in German ‘Volkstum’, ‘Volkstümlichkeit’), did not appear in the initial definition but became politically and aesthetically important in Party efforts to maintain some cultural continuity after the upheaval of revolution.²¹ Günther captures its essence in three aspects: that it described a turn back to the cultural legacy of the past (‘Erbe’); that it meant orientating contemporary literature specifically towards ‘Motive, Themen und Gattungen der mündlichen Volksdichtung’ (whence folklore); and that it emphasised artists’ relation to the masses (whence popularity; in Günther ‘Volksverbundenheit’).²² Beyond this, Soviet socialist realism often included the following themes and techniques: class struggle; the (ironically stunted) development of a ‘New Man’; stock characters such as the positive hero; work; technology; collectivisation; the clash of Old versus New (including in characters); ideology

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 43.

²⁰ This centrality stemmed from Lenin’s notion of the Party’s ‘globalen Anspruch’: “[Das Literaturwesen] muss zu einem Teil der allgemeinen proletarischen Sache, zu einem ‘Rädchen und Schraubchen’ des einen einheitlichen, großen sozialdemokratischen Mechanismus werden, der von dem ganzen politisch bewussten Vortrupp der ganzen Arbeiterklasse in Bewegung gesetzt wird. [Das Literaturwesen] muss ein Bestandteil der organisierten, planmäßigen, vereinigten sozialdemokratischen Parteiarbeit werden” – quoted in Günther, *Die Verstaatlichung der Literatur*, p. 19.

²¹ Ibid., p. 47.

²² Ibid., pp. 52–53.

(specifically Marxism-Leninism); linear development (e.g. of plot and characters); an omnipotent, third-person narrator; and a pedagogical or didactic purpose.²³

The crystallisation of clear principles took several years, however, thus even until the 1940s many were still asking what socialist realism really entailed.²⁴ Likewise, the Second World War saw a brief relaxation in cultural policy, in which socialist realism was less stringently applied, after which a gradual but much more significant liberalisation following Stalin's death in 1953, termed the 'Tauwetter' period, took hold. Some previously banished writers thus had their status rehabilitated as early as the second writers' congress in 1954, whilst the pedagogical requirement was dropped in 1956.²⁵ Similarly, alterations were made to the basic description of socialist realism in the statutes of the Soviet Writers Union, for example the removal of the second clause concerning the synthesis of 'truthfulness and historical concreteness' with 'ideological molding and [the] education of the working people in the spirit of socialism', signalling a newfound distance from the Stalinist 'idealization of Soviet reality', as Thomas Lahusen writes.²⁶ Socialist realism in the Soviet Union was, therefore, anything but stable or rigid; attempts to adumbrate the method using absolute tenets run the risk of overlooking the changes to, ambiguities in, and factors of influence on the official definition, particularly from the 1930s onwards.²⁷

²³ Fast, pp. 34–35; Günther, *Die Verstaatlichung der Literatur*, pp. 107–109.

²⁴ See also Dennis Tate, "'Breadth and Diversity": Socialist Realism in the GDR', in *European Socialist Realism*, ed. by Michael Scriven & Dennis Tate (Oxford: Berg, 1988), pp. 60–78. 'Narodnost', for example, first appeared in 1935 as the CPSU became more repressive in its governance, leading to the demise of many writers who did not comply – Günther, 'Die Lebensphasen eines Kanons – am Beispiel des sozialistischen Realismus', p. 144.

²⁵ Thomas Lahusen, 'Socialist Realism in Search of Its Shores: Some Historical Remarks on the "Historically Open Aesthetic System of the Truthful Representation of Life"', in *Socialist Realism Without Shores*, ed. by Thomas Lahusen & Evgeny Dobrenko (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 5–26 (p. 9); Günther, 'Die Lebensphasen eines Kanons – am Beispiel des sozialistischen Realismus', pp. 144–145.

²⁶ Lahusen, 'Socialist Realism (Soviet)', p. 303.

²⁷ Tate, "'Breadth and Diversity": Socialist Realism in the GDR', p. 61.

One participant in Soviet debates at the time was Georg Lukács, a prominent Hungarian communist and intellectual who spent most of his time during the 1930s and Second World War in the Soviet Union.²⁸ In his own work, Lukács conceived of socialist realism through several nuanced departures or shifted emphases from the Soviet model, particularly his historical location of the method within the realist tradition of authors such as Honoré de Balzac and Thomas Mann, and his engagement for the continued relevance of cultural heritage to socialist politics.²⁹ In his defence of such bourgeois or ‘critical’ realists against what he denoted the ‘sektiererisch-bürokratisch’ exclusivity of the Stalinist method, Lukács broke from Soviet policy in favour of a different historical anchor, meaning that he conceived of realism not as a radical ideological tool but instead as a means of clinging to and building on a universal and timeless cultural ‘Geist’, the benefits of which were twofold.³⁰ Firstly, Lukács could salvage a ‘utopische[s] Demokratieideal’, as Günther Erbe notes, from what he called ‘critical’ realisms in order to guarantee their survival under socialism; secondly, Lukács believed that, in so doing, one could protect society from the threat of modernist authors such as Franz Kafka or James Joyce.³¹ In short, Lukács looked to maintain bourgeois aesthetic tradition and apply it to a ‘revolutionär[e] Demokratie’ that would unite proletarian with bourgeois interests through a dialectic of historical continuity and discontinuity.³²

Like the Soviets, Lukács also turned to Lenin to legitimise his approach, whom he cites in his 1938 essay ‘Es geht um den Realismus’:

²⁸ Śliwińska, pp. 47, 210.

²⁹ Werner Mittenzwei, ‘Die Brecht-Lukács-Debatte’, *Sinn und Form*, 19 (1967), 235–271 (p. 243).

³⁰ Despite the perceived distancing from official policy that this enacted, Lukács furthered such an argument in his 1958 work *Wider den missverstandenen Realismus*, despite his admission therein that socialist realism in fact better depicted the new socialist consciousness and its optimistic outlook for the future, which allowed it to portray characters ‘von innen’ through their psychology and ethical compass – Georg Lukács, *Wider den missverstandenen Realismus* (Hamburg: Claassen, 1958), pp. 100, 105–107; Günther Erbe, *Die verfeimte Moderne: Die Auseinandersetzung mit dem ‘Modernismus’ in Kulturpolitik, Literaturwissenschaft und Literatur in der DDR* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1993), p. 47.

³¹ Lukács, *Wider den missverstandenen Realismus*, p. 239

³² Mittenzwei, ‘Die Brecht-Lukács-Debatte’, pp. 242–243.

Der Marxismus erlangte seine weltgeschichtliche Bedeutung als Ideologie des revolutionären Proletariats dadurch, dass er die wertvollsten Errungenschaften des bürgerlichen Zeitalters durchaus nicht ablehnte, sondern, im Gegenteil, *sich alles Wertvolle der [...] Entwicklung des menschlichen Denkens und der menschlichen Kultur aneignete und verarbeitete.*³³

Whether ‘alles Wertvolle’ also referred to bourgeois artistic heritage was a question of interpretation, however; nevertheless, anchoring his theory in historical precedent allowed Lukács to legitimise his break from Soviet policy and to cement what he perceived to be a continuum between bourgeois socialist realisms.

Alongside the emphasis that he placed on the cultural ‘Erbe’, Lukács expressly understood the ‘realism’ in socialist realism through his own ‘Marxist’ theory elucidated in his 1938 essay. He argues that realism necessarily reproduces reality in full – as a ‘totality’ – such that at any given moment the work always refers to the ‘Gesamtzusammenhang’ and, at the same time, to the non-reified subject, i.e. one saved from capitalist objectification in a world that they no longer directly control. In this case, the work either shows its subject liberated into subjecthood or at least grants them a dialectical subject-object unity unaffected by the author’s historical contingency.³⁴ Lukács structures this theory of realism according to a dialectic of ‘Erscheinung’ – surface reality as it ‘unmittelbar erscheint’ – and ‘Wesen’, that is:

³³ Lukács, ‘Es geht um den Realismus’, pp. 129, 135 (my italics), citing Vladimir I. Lenin, ‘Über proletarische Kultur’.

³⁴ Bernhard Spies, ‘Georg Lukács und der Sozialistische Realismus in der DDR’, in *Literatur in der DDR: Rückblicke*, ed. by Heinz-Ludwig Arnold & Frauke Meyer-Gosau (Munich: Text + Kritik, 1991), pp. 34–44 (pp. 37–38).

[Der] wirklich[e] Zusammenhang [der] Erlebnisse mit dem wirklichen Leben der Gesellschaft, [... die] verborgenen Ursachen, die diese Erlebnisse objektiv hervorbringen, [... die] *Vermittlungen*, die diese Erlebnisse mit der objektiven Wirklichkeit der Gesellschaft verbinden.³⁵

Because of the artificial creation of ‘Zusammenhänge’, Lukács’ theory would allow the writer to conceal their tracks and make what has been ‘abstrahiert erarbeitet’ (mediated or ‘vermittelt’) appear normal or real(ist) – what he terms the ‘Aufheben des Abstrahierens’.³⁶ He admits that the final product becomes ‘eine neue, gestaltet *vermittelte* Unmittelbarkeit, eine *gestaltete* Oberfläche des Lebens’ that reminds one of the static ‘Unmittelbarkeit’ in naturalistic as in modernist aesthetics, but legitimises his own theory because its dialecticism nullifies the artifice in mimetic representation.³⁷ Positing a process as dialectical does not render it any less artificial, however, nor does a ‘deabstracted’ guise make Lukács’ realism any more tolerant of the revolutionary changes in society and the individual. These theoretical interventions into Marxist aesthetic theory were not uncontroversial, therefore, even if Lukács asserted that a dialectically produced ‘totality’ would avoid the reification of the subject otherwise entailed by the ‘Krisenhaftigkeit der kapitalistischen Entwicklung’.³⁸

In addition to his unique affinity for authors considered part of the bourgeois canon, Lukács posited a further break from the Soviet method in his preference for a ‘revolutionary optimism’ over Zhdanov’s revolutionary Romanticism, which:

³⁵ Lukács, ‘Es geht um den Realismus’, pp. 117, 119–120 (italics in original).

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 120–121.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 116, 121 (my italics).

³⁸ Lukács, ‘Es geht um den Realismus’, p. 129. Terry Eagleton recognises here a Marxist-inflected bourgeois aesthetics because the individual components work within, but also against, the whole as they ‘dance together in consort according to some self-effacing principle of unity’ that thereby blurs their actual origin – Terry Eagleton, ‘The Marxist Rabbi: Walter Benjamin’, p. 325.

[D]azu [dient], solchen unwahren, untypischen Widerspiegelungen der Wirklichkeit die Weihe einer höheren, echteren Realität zu verleihen. Die brüchige Theorie kann aber nur künstlerisch Vorbeigelungenes kritisch apologetisieren, nicht ihm eine künstlerische Überzeugungskraft einhauchen.³⁹

Per se Lukács' conjecture did not question the necessity of that sense of 'becoming' or anticipation in socialist realism, but he problematised the reading of an abstract object as 'typical' that forced it into the narrative as a 'Verkörperung' or 'Illustration' of reality, so as to pretend that: "[D]er Übergang in den Kommunismus die unmittelbare Perspektive unseres Alltags ist."⁴⁰ As such, Lukács reappraised the Soviet notion of the 'typical' – read as 'keine durchschnittliche [Gestalt]' – in favour of concrete examples from the 'bedeutsam[e] Entwicklungstendenz der Gesellschaft'. The resultant realism contained a greater focus on individual characters and, therefore, a lesser focus on the collectivity and solidarity theorised in Soviet socialist realism because in a work the 'höchst allgemeine soziale Objektivität aus den echtsten Tiefen [der] *Persönlichkeit* herauswächst'.⁴¹ This shift opened Lukács to criticism not just for rendering a Marxist theory the source of an individualistic art, but for even making the connection between that emphasis and its role in the bourgeois canon.

In all, his realism was based on an anti-modernist renaissance in the synthesis of elements from the European bourgeois canon – an omniscient narrator and the form of a 'Bildungsroman' – and from Soviet socialist realism – a positive hero and partisanship.⁴² Lukács thereby sought not only to diversify the Soviet method, but explicitly to steer it away

³⁹ Greiner, *Von der Allegorie zur Idylle*, pp. 70–71, 77; Lukács, *Wider den missverstandenen Realismus*, p. 146.

⁴⁰ Lukács, *Wider den missverstandenen Realismus*, p. 146.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 137 (my italics).

⁴² GDR critic Werner Mittenzwei takes as an example for this Lukács' proclivity for Aristotelian and, in turn, bourgeois catharsis, in which he again recognised a timeless value because it offers the reader the opportunity 'sein Leben zu verändern' – Mittenzwei, 'Die Brecht-Lukács-Debatte', pp. 260–261.

from what he diagnosed as a depersonalised ‘rein gesellschaftliche[n] Inhalt’.⁴³ This controversial regression did not just rupture the Soviet precedent but also disregarded recent aesthetic developments in favour of a retrospective and bourgeois-inspired idealism, leaving Lukács ideologically close to socialism but, in his theoretical work, on far less solid ground.⁴⁴

Anti-formalism, ‘Erbe’, and Socialist Realism in the GDR

Many of those exploring the potential in aesthetics for effecting an *Umerziehung* after the Second World War through a kind of socialist realism looked upon Lukács’ work favourably, however. This group included German communists who had, like Lukács, observed and participated in discussions about cultural policy during the 1930s in the USSR, and who, like the Hungarian philosopher, did not immediately regard socialist realism as the sole option when devising their own cultural policy. On the contrary, some considered the method so narrow as to constitute ‘Linksextremismus’ and even a ‘Fetischisierung’ of proletarian heritage, despite their generic support for art’s antagonistic role in anti-fascism.⁴⁵ During a visit of German intellectuals to the Soviet Union in 1948, for example, writer Stephan Hermlin boldly asked his counterparts:

⁴³ Rodney Livingstone, ‘Georg Lukács and Socialist Realism’, in *European Socialist Realism*, ed. by Michael Scriven & Dennis Tate (Oxford: Berg, 1988), pp. 13–30 (pp. 14–16); Georg Lukács, ‘Reportage oder Gestaltung?’, in *Werke*, 17 vols (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1962–1986), IV: *Probleme des Realismus I*, 35–68 (p. 38); Tate, “‘Breadth and Diversity’: Socialist Realism in the GDR”, pp. 62–63.

⁴⁴ See for example Lukács, *Wider den missverstandenen Realismus*, 13–48; Erwin Pracht & Werner Neubert (eds.), *Sozialistischer Realismus: Positionen, Probleme, Perspektiven. Eine Einführung* (Berlin: Dietz, 1970), p. 94.

⁴⁵ Artists, for their part, also viewed socialist realism with a degree of scepticism, which to some extent can be explained by the affinity to a democratic and unified political direction rather than a specifically ideologised programme. Doubts did not vanish in the years that followed either, as examples from the Introduction of a rift between intellectuals as such and Party officials illustrate. See also Śliwińska, pp. 38–39, 47, 60; Tate, “‘Breadth and Diversity’: Socialist Realism in the GDR”, p. 64.

Die sowjetischen Künstler bekleiden [nackte Menschen] gewöhnlich mit Badehosen. Das ist weit entfernt von der Offenheit und Wahrhaftigkeit, mit der die Griechen den menschlichen Körper darstellten. Weshalb diese Verschleierung? Passen Feigenblätter zum Realismus?⁴⁶

The KPD instead developed a cultural policy that adhered to broader principles like anti-decadence and pro-realism, and placed an emphasis on the “Pfleger” des klassischen Erbes’ as a ‘Maßstab und Korrektiv “wahrer Kultur” gegen den “Kulturfall” des deutschen Faschismus’, as Katarzyna Śliwińska explains.⁴⁷ Though Lukács had already formulated a synthesis of his own, this new policy fused the Lukácsian and Soviet perspectives by instigating a duality around the ‘Erbe’ akin to ‘narodnost’ as a source of cultural continuity and a precedent for a pedagogical aesthetics.

As more serious conversations began to take place about socialist realism, it became clear that the SBZ had a more complex political makeup than the CPSU in the early 1930s because of its comparatively more liberal culture and democratic orientation, which prevented the kind of homogenisation of culture already witnessed in the Soviet direction of socialist realism and which left the SED with the task of capturing these interests as part of an *Umerziehung*.⁴⁸ The CPSU seems not to have been inclined to force this process, moreover, as their culture officers in the SMAD, according to Ulrike Goeschen, received an ‘ideologische Vorbereitung’ but no instruction to enforce socialist realism in the SBZ.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Stephan Hermlin et al., ‘Zum Thema “Sozialer Realismus”’, *Anfbau*, 4:6 (1948), 536–539 (p. 536). See also Tate, “‘Breadth and Diversity’: Socialist Realism in the GDR”, p. 65.

⁴⁷ Śliwińska, p. 60.

⁴⁸ Heider, *Politik-Kultur-Kulturbund*, p. 117. See for example [n.a.], ‘Die Bedeutung der revolutionären Romantik in der Literatur’, *Neues Deutschland*, 9 November 1952, 1.

⁴⁹ Goeschen, pp. 36–37.

Indeed, German communists were already attuned to the method because of their own experiences in the Soviet Union.⁵⁰

After the foundation of the GDR in 1949, the SED began to emphasise the ‘Erbe’ (both Weimar and Soviet) increasingly, thereby responding to what it perceived as ‘Schwankungen im ideologischen Kampf um die demokratische Erneuerung unserer nationalen Kultur und ein immer stärker spürbares Zurückbleiben des künstlerischen und literarischen Schaffens’, as high-ranking functionary Alexander Abusch summarised.⁵¹ Even before its proclamation of a new aesthetic model, the Party hoped to instrumentalise the power of cultural tradition in the bourgeois-canonical literary ‘Geist’ to convince artists of its Soviet-inspired approach to cultural production in the state. The ‘Erbe’ played a larger role in this process than it had done in the CPSU; for that, the SED had Lukács to thank.⁵²

In his speech at the ‘Parteitag’ in 1950, the newly-elected *Zentralkomitee* member Hans Lauter presented the Party’s aggressive stance towards works that broke from the ‘Erbe’ because they, according to Heider, were considered to be late bourgeois (‘spätbürgerlich’) and in contradiction to the historical optimism in Marxism-Leninism (‘Geschichtsoptimismus des Marxismus-Leninismus’).⁵³ Indeed, naturalist and Romantic works had already been conspicuously omitted from the national canon by this time, setting a precedent for the selective approach to state-approved aesthetics that developed in the years thereafter.⁵⁴ In

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 38.

⁵¹ Heider, *Politik-Kultur-Kulturbund*, p. 117; Alexander Abusch, ‘Aktuelle Fragen unserer Kulturpolitik’, *Neues Deutschland*, 14 June 1950, 3.

⁵² Heider, *Politik-Kultur-Kulturbund*, p. 122.

⁵³ Lauter, pp. 13–14, 20–21.

⁵⁴ This practice intensified following a meeting in July 1951, when the ZK established the *Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen* (ALV) and the *Staatliche Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten* (StaKoKu) to oversee the eradication of formalism in dialogue with politicians and artists – Erbe, pp. 35, 58; Heider, *Politik-Kultur-Kulturbund*, p. 129; Carsten Gansel, *Parlament des Geistes: Literatur zwischen Hoffnung und Repression 1945-1961* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1996), p. 143.

1952, Ulbricht's declaration of the *Aufbau des Sozialismus* confirmed this stance by replacing the more sensitive attitude towards a liberal cultural sphere with a rather single understanding of art and its role within the growing socialist state.⁵⁵

Nonetheless, examples of what now appear as severe interventions into a 'democratic' cultural sphere occurred even prior to the GDR's existence, as a summary of the 1949 'Kulturverordnung' from the *Deutsche Wirtschaftskommission* suggests in the lines:

“[D]er deutsche Imperialismus [hat] die deutsche Wissenschaft, Kultur und Kunst auf den Weg des Verfalls geführt und sie an den Rand des Abgrundes gebracht [...] [D]ie Rettung, Erhaltung und Entwicklung der fortschrittlichen Kultur, der Wissenschaft und Kunst [ist] eine der Grundaufgaben der neuen demokratischen Ordnung geworden.”⁵⁶

More than just establishing the need for a 'socialist' culture in the GDR, such efforts extracted remnants of the fascist period from cultural artefacts and new production to justify both the exclusion of unwanted persons or tendencies from public discourse and the increasingly severe approach to ideological correctness in cultural production.

Although the SED overtly hoped to impose its wishes by persuasion in these initial years, socialist realism was proclaimed as the GDR's exclusive aesthetic policy at the second Party conference in 1952.⁵⁷ The Party had, by this time, already settled on a stable definition of

⁵⁵ This unavoidably shifted the tone: respectful debate or difference of opinion at times gave way to personal attacks, as the differences between the second and third writers' congresses in 1950 and 1952 exemplify. Kuba (Kurt Barthel), for instance, quipped to Günter Kunert: “Du hast es nicht überwinden können, unter die einfachen Menschen zu gehen. Du hast eine Abscheu davor.” Later: “[Es wäre] für Brecht und seine Schüler nicht schlecht, ab und zu einmal an die Luft zu kommen. Immer bei geschlossenem Fenster in der Stube, da wird man blass” – cited in Gansel, *Erinnerung als Aufgabe?*, pp. 451–452.

⁵⁶ Orlow, 5. This article, perhaps penned by Vladimir S. Semjonov, a senior advisor in the SMAD, played a key role in the anti-formalism campaign, as its direct attacks and explicit confrontation of individuals and groups marked a shift in tone.

⁵⁷ E.g. Johannes R. Becher's speech: “Der sozialistische Realismus [...] ist die einzige Möglichkeit, die einzige schöpferische Methode, welche zum Wiederaufstieg einer großen deutschen nationalen Kunst führen kann” – BArch SAPMO DY 30/40454, p. 60; Śliwińska, p. 90

socialist realism in dialogue with the Soviet model, which Achim Wolter – director of the *Haus der Kultur der Sowjetischen Union* – detailed for *Neues Deutschland* readers in 1950, with partisanship or ‘Parteilichkeit’ at its core.⁵⁸ Second to this came the importance of form, which should not take precedent over content, but rather ‘[ihn] zur Wirkung bringt’ in an ‘Einheit von Form und Inhalt’.⁵⁹ Though abstract in formulation, this merely echoed the Party’s brewing sensitivity toward ‘formalism’ and thus privileged works with at least equal emphasis on content and formal characteristics. Wolter continues that a work should offer a realist(ic) image, but also communicate a revolutionary and historicist perspective in a processual development from Old to New as per revolutionary Romanticism, so as to perform a didactic function to the audience. It should also focus on the theme of work and the worker (particularly the *Held der Arbeit*), and reflect the leading role played by the Soviet Union. Abusch, moreover, specified that conflict and contradiction belonged to the method if located within a revolutionary development and a focus on the present, something that also limited the use of retrospection if it outweighed the proportion of a work set in the present or future.⁶⁰ These characteristics offer few surprises compared with those posited by Zhdanov back in 1934, but the Party did not simply adopt the tried and tested Soviet model in toto, but rather incorporated aspects of its choosing including the emphasis on the ‘Erbe’ and the anti-formalism campaign that gave GDR socialist realism a distinct character.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Wolter, 4. See also Hans Lauter at the third SED ‘Parteitag’ in 1950, *Der Kampf gegen den Formalismus in Kunst und Literatur*, pp. 30–31, 159.

⁵⁹ Wolter, p. 4. For a more extensive but highly ideological exposition of GDR socialist realism, see [n.a.], ‘Aussprache über den sozialistischen Realismus. Bericht über das Kolloquium zu den Problemen des sozialistischen Realismus am 4./5. April 1967’, *Weimarer Beiträge*, 4 (1967), 532–620; Hans Koch, *Unsere Literaturgesellschaft: Kritik und Polemik* (Berlin: Dietz, 1965).

⁶⁰ Abusch, ‘Aktuelle Fragen unserer Kulturpolitik’, 3; Alexander Abusch, ‘Das Goethe-Jahr und die Aufgaben der SED’, *Neues Deutschland*, 16 March 1949, 4; Alexander Abusch, ‘Die Diskussion in der Sowjetliteratur und bei uns: Einige Bemerkungen anlässlich des Schriftstellerkongresses’, *Neues Deutschland*, 4 July 1950, 3. This aspect in particular gains greater relevance in Chapter Four.

⁶¹ Orlow, 5 (second part).

The death of Stalin in 1953 and ensuing ‘Tauwetter’ disrupted the path of both Soviet and GDR aesthetic policies as they had reached a period, even if only recent, of stability. Following the revelations emerging from the Soviet Union about Stalin’s crimes, the peak of which came in CPSU first secretary Nikita Chruschtschow’s speech at the twentieth congress of the CPSU in 1956, the steady expansion and intensification of socialist (realist) policy in the GDR were disrupted.⁶² The SED responded to this with a turn to ‘anti-revisionism’, a campaign that it used to justify an increasingly authoritarian praxis (for example in the show trials of the ‘Harich-Gruppe’), rather than self-critically examine the impact of Stalinism on its own conduct. This resistance to reform was an attempt to keep hold of the reins and protect the Party’s wide-reaching policies, including cultural, from the substantial reappraisal ongoing in the Soviet Union and, to a revolutionary extent, in Hungary.⁶³ It appears therefore highly questionable, in the context of the Party’s show trials and aversion to polysemic debate, that socialist realism was adopted as the exclusive aesthetic method of the DSV without pressure from the SED at the fourth writers’ congress in 1956, especially in light of Party-critical speeches by Anna Seghers and Stefan Heym, among others.⁶⁴

Despite dampening the impact of events in the Soviet Union on its own ‘Realpolitik’ during the ‘Tauwetter’ period, the SED did retreat from its unique position straddling Soviet and Lukácsian models and, in response to its critics, established a working group to interrogate socialist realism anew, distancing itself from Lukács to the extent that his works were removed from sale in bookshops.⁶⁵ As the authors of a Party-sanctioned volume from 1986 entitled *Die SED und das kulturelle Erbe* retrospectively claim, the new position on Lukács at

⁶² Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, p. 126; Günther, *Die Verstaatlichung der Literatur*, p. 45.

⁶³ Śliwińska, p. 175.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 97. See Deutscher Schriftstellerverband (ed.), *IV. Deutscher Schriftstellerkongress, Januar 1956: Protokoll*, 2 vols (Potsdam: Märkische Volksstimme, 1956).

⁶⁵ Deutscher Schriftstellerverband (ed.), p. 177.

this time as *persona non grata* had more to do with his participation in the post-uprising Hungarian government than anything else, though he faced accusations of his pro-realist aesthetics being ‘einseitig’, ‘mechanistisch’, and littered with conceptual ‘Mängel’.⁶⁶ It proved unworkable that Lukács endorsed an integrative ‘Demokraticideal’ embedded in the bourgeois-canonical tradition, whilst the SED led a campaign against ‘reactionary’, ‘formalist’, and ‘decadent’ aesthetics to which its own culture minister, Johannes R. Becher, fell victim.

According to Isabelle Lehn et al., the socialist realist method also became increasingly ambiguous as a result of these internal discussions, although this does not mean that the Party weakened its support for the policy.⁶⁷ The uncertainty in the GDR’s cultural-political sphere in fact led the SED to double down on the exclusivity of the method with, for example, a series of conferences and articles that resulted in a comprehensive 1962 volume produced by the AdK.⁶⁸ *Zur Tradition der sozialistischen Literatur in Deutschland* served to finalise specific aesthetic questions in order to advance the propagation of socialist realism, concluding on: the superiority of content (developed dialectically from ‘das Allgemeine’ and ‘das Besondere’) over form (the linguistic, rhythmic, stylistic etc. ‘Ausdruck’ of content); a realist, true reflection of reality; a focus on people and their relations to the world; a Marxist-Leninist, proletarian outlook; the importance of ‘Parteilichkeit’; and a pedagogical function, which had been dropped in the Soviet Union in 1956.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Horst Haase et al., *Die SED und das kulturelle Erbe: Orientierungen, Errungenschaften, Probleme* (Berlin: Dietz, 1986), pp. 74, 231.

⁶⁷ Isabelle Lehn, Sascha Macht & Katja Stopka, *Schreiben lernen im Sozialismus: Das Institut für Literatur Johannes R. Becher* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2018), p. 112; Werner Mittenzwei, *Die Intellektuellen*, pp. 156–159.

⁶⁸ Lehn, Macht & Stopka, p. 112.

⁶⁹ Deutsche Akademie der Künste (ed.), *Zur Tradition der sozialistischen Literatur in Deutschland* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1962), pp. 396–397; Lahusen, ‘Socialist Realism in Search of Its Shores: Some Historical Remarks on the “Historically Open Aesthetic System of the Truthful Representation of Life”’, p. 9. Following its cultural conference in 1957, the SED reappraised its stance and sought to bring artists and workers closer together, to which end it organised the first ‘Bitterfelder Weg’ conference in 1959 (and a second in 1964) with the aim of discussing, with artists themselves, how to assuage the ‘Trennung von Kunst und Leben’. The Party intended for artists to become workers by working in factories, building sites etc. in order

The changes to the definition of GDR socialist realism into the 1960s notwithstanding, from the outset the model proved both obscure and problematic. No detailed aesthetic guidelines emerged to accompany the artist in the creation of a socialist realist work that fulfilled the given criteria, which led to a degree of guesswork. That works in turn faced the appraisal of the SED through organs such as the *Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen* and the *Staatliche Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten* increased the pressure on artists to find workable solutions, such that, if socialist realism nonetheless bears all the hallmarks of an aesthetic model in its own right, its application in these early years equated to a delegated expansion of the method in practice.⁷⁰ This challenge for artists not only created a divide between the Party and the GDR's cultural elite (including the academics and critics that filled the spreads of state-mandated journals such as *Neue Deutsche Literatur*); it also left artists alienated from a sanctioned model that they did not easily understand, regardless of their political affinity. GDR writers, like their Soviet counterparts, thus found themselves with the daunting task of extending and imagining aspects of the new policy themselves.

Early Socialist Realism: Eduard Claudius and Hans Marchwitza

Yet the ambiguities in the theory of socialist realism and the substantial challenge in conceptualising its practical application do not immediately preclude the existence of a demonstrable socialist realist canon. In the *Aufbau*, numerous works came to embody the method, according to critical and Party sources, and in the decades that followed acted as

to gather knowledge and sometimes material that might inform their work. Whilst not a new ambition – in the 1950s artists such as Claudius and Heiner Müller had already opted to spend time as labourers – the identification of GDR culture within a historical legacy cemented the Party's cultural policy firmly into the state's history – see Pracht & Neubert, pp. 113–115; Dietrich, *Kulturgeschichte der DDR*, II: 1958–1976, p. 954; Śliwińska, p. 68.

⁷⁰ In fact, an assessment by the MfK's *Sektor Theater* in the early 1960s explained with reference to Peter Hacks' *Die Sorgen und die Macht* that: "Die ideologischen Unklarheiten des Autors haben sich auf die Konzeption des Werkes und die Gestaltung der Partei ausgewirkt. Sie beeinträchtigen den künstlerischen Wert" – [n.a.], 'Einschätzung "Die Sorgen und die Macht" v. Peter Hacks', BArch DR 1/17089, p. 5.

benchmarks for other works.⁷¹ Two such examples are *Menschen an unsrer Seite* by Eduard Claudius and *Robeisen* by Hans Marchwitza, both of which earned a reputation as exemplary works of socialist realism.⁷² As part of this initial literary analysis, I compare the texts to the core theoretical criteria of the GDR model and outline not just how their fidelity to these precepts characterises the novels as socialist realism, but also how this evidence substantiates an understanding of the method as a complete and discernible aesthetic framework.

Menschen an unsrer Seite (1951) was written by former bricklayer Eduard Claudius and fictionalises the story of Hans Garbe, who earned the *Held der Arbeit* accolade for repairing a ring furnace without first extinguishing it at the VEB Siemens – making the character Hans Aehre the first literary example of a labourer changed by socialist policy, according to critic and academic Eberhard Röhrer.⁷³ It was announced in *Neues Deutschland* that Claudius won the ‘Nationalpreis der DDR III. Klasse für Kunst und Literatur’ in 1951 because his work had illustrated the hurdles that emerged as part of the *Aufbau*.⁷⁴ That a proletarian worker penned the work (unlike former journalist Stephan Hermlin, for example) marked a further significant development, since the Party had long complained of the disproportionately high number of bourgeois artists and of lacking depictions of proletarian life. Claudius spent two months working in Garbe’s brigade in Berlin-Lichtenberg as he began to occupy himself, like numerous other authors including Bertolt Brecht, with Garbe’s story.⁷⁵

⁷¹ See for example Kurt Böttcher, Hans Jürgen Geerds, et al., *Kurze Geschichte der deutschen Literatur* (Berlin: Volk und Wissen, 1983), pp. 748–749.

⁷² Interestingly, the two novels were written and/or published prior to the model’s proclamation in 1952, which serves as testimony to the years of negotiation of and interaction with the method before it became official policy.

⁷³ Eduard Claudius, *Menschen an unsrer Seite* (Berlin: Volk & Welt, 1952) – further references to this and other literary works are given after quotations in the text. E.g. Cwojdrak, p. 159; Georgina Paul, ‘Gender in GDR Literature’, *Rereading East Germany: The Literature and Film of the GDR*, ed. by Karen Leeder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 106–125 (p. 108). See Eberhard Röhrer, *Arbeiter in der Gegenwartsliteratur* (Berlin: Dietz, 1967), p. 33: “[D]ie erste literarische Gestalt, in der die Wandlungen sichtbar wurden, die sich in der sozialistischen Arbeit vollzogen.”

⁷⁴ [n.a.], ‘Nationalpreis III. Klasse’, *Neues Deutschland*, 9 October 1951, 4: “[E]rfolgreich den Weg der künstlerischen Gestaltung von Problemen des demokratischen Aufbaus und des Kampfes für den Frieden beschritten.”

⁷⁵ See Eduard Claudius, *Ruhelose Jahre* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1968), pp. 358–360.

The novel primarily revolves around the repair of a furnace upon which factory production desperately relies; having already raised the productivity norm for bricklayers, cut the building time for a furnace lid from fifty to thirteen hours, and designed new, pre-formed bricks for the furnace to save time in construction (pp. 16, 74–76, 170), Aehre spearheads this work and inspires others along the way. Further major characters and plotlines, such as Aehre’s wife Katrin and workmate Andrytzki, provide additional material to expand the main plotline into a broader narrative of socialist development.

Menschen an unsrer Seite focalises the experience of labour, specifically its transformation in parallel with the emancipation of the worker as part of the socialist *Aufbau*.⁷⁶ Although all main characters enjoy a hasty development during the work, Aehre’s rising status as ‘Aktivist’ and later ‘Meister’ (pp. 382, 386) guarantees his centrality to the narrative, paired with the workplace as the focal setting of the novel. He leads by example to improve the nature of work and others’ orientation towards it, playing for instance a crucial role in inciting Katrin’s development into a respected and ambitious laboratory assistant and in guiding the ‘haut-bourgeois’ research head Dr. von Wassermann toward a reformed consciousness, as he finds purpose in the factory’s workers: “Abschied hatte ich genommen. [...] Und jetzt habe ich Wiedersehn gefeiert” (p. 147).⁷⁷ As the masculine topos of the positive hero, Aehre remains central to the image of the *Aufbau* in the novel and to its forward direction, but also connects the hero figure to the sphere of labour: “Aehre, ein Arbeiter wie wir, er hat diese Veränderung bewirkt, er war die entscheidende Kraft” (p. 396). This thematic focus not only sets a

⁷⁶ Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, pp. 138–9. Matthias Aumüller suggests that ‘Aufbauroman’ might best function as an umbrella term here to describe this and any novel ‘wenn er in normativer Hinsicht Monovalenz herstellt (etwa in der Weise, dass die im Roman ausgedrückte sozialistische Ideologie und die Handlungen der Parteirepräsentanten am Schluss eine Einheit bilden) und thematischer Hinsicht das Aufbausystem und nur dieses realisiert’ – Aumüller, *Minimalistische Poetik*, p. 144. For a broader discussion of the ‘Aufbauroman’, as well as other subgenres including the ‘Betriebsroman’, ‘Industrialisierungsroman’, and ‘Produktionsroman’, see Aumüller, *Minimalistische Poetik*, pp. 136–144.

⁷⁷ Paul, p. 108.

precedent for the significance of the workplace in the early GDR, but also highlights one of many sites of considerable change in the socialist state, thereby offering an example of expectant positive development.

Notwithstanding this optimism, Aehre battles with external obstacles from the very beginning, such as other workers' resistance to new methods or aims (e.g. in sabotage or attack), and with the initial lack of help from senior firm and Party officials. But the protagonist also has his own flaws, which the reader might recognise from Garbe's biography; he wrestles with his engrained conservatism – attributable to bourgeois masculinities within the GDR in Georgina Paul's analysis – poor communication skills, and a short temper, which render his relationship to Katrin and others difficult because, among other things, he fails to control frequent irate outbursts.⁷⁸ As the story progresses, however, he resolves these hindrances: "Und wie [Aehre] die Tür zur Halle öffnete, glaubte er fest, die Geschichte mit Katrin, nun, auch die würde sich in Ordnung bringen lassen" (p. 351). Similarly, the reader learns that the main character's inability to express himself effectively has been resolved: "Vor Wochen noch war dieser Mann unsicher, er brachte kaum den Mund auf, verstand keinen klaren Satz zu formulieren, aber nun, hör sich das einer an!" (p. 326). This resolution of Aehre's flaws suggests him as some kind of role model, even *Held der Arbeit*, in concert with the precepts of the hero topos and a manifest forward dynamic. Even despite his flaws, moreover, Aehre's characterisation still coheres with these criteria, which evidences the GDR-specific acceptance within socialist realism of contradictions so long as they are resolved intradiegetically and as part of a positive development.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 108–109. For example *Menschen an unsrer Seite*, pp. 10, 48, 52–53, 293, 309–310, 315, 346.

⁷⁹ See fn. 60.

A further central motif in *Menschen an unsrer Seite* is the radical contrast of Old and New, which in socialist realism sets an ideological example to the reader. Both the central role of the Party and the didactic ('erzieherisch') function of other characters encourage and disseminate ideological learning so that historical behaviours give way to a socialist understanding of, for example, the nature of work. The Party has a hand in the development of Katrin, Andrytzki, and Wassermann, whom labour and community also accompany on the path to improvement. As per the expectation of 'Parteilichkeit' at the core of GDR socialist realism, the Party exerts a pedagogical influence on the characters (who affiliate themselves with the Party), thus the development of SED work within the factory inspires individuals when they err in their ways. With reference to Soviet friendship, Party secretary Wende explains: "Aber heute, da wir den Sozialismus aufbauen, jetzt... Mein Gott! [...] [W]ieviel habe ich von der Gesellschaft bekommen, und da muss ich auch etwas zurück geben, denn wer will ewig nur nehmen?" (p. 291).⁸⁰ The Party here provides direct insight into the ideological rhetoric of the real-existing socialist present but also enables character progression in the novel, removing technocratic or bureaucratic individuals such as Party secretary Bock from within its own ranks if they cloud the SED's purpose in the workplace (pp. 198, 234–235). Not even this central criterion needed absolute adherence in GDR socialist realism for the model to function, therefore, as the reader can discern the partisan character of Claudius' novel and its didacticism regardless of individual contradictions of the broader ideological messaging.

⁸⁰ References to the Soviet Union, such as the free exchange of new working methods from the Soviet Union (pp. 264–265) and the criticism of US and UK occupying forces, which implicitly contradicts the more positive experience of the SBZ (pp. 193, 258), were equally expected under the state aesthetic model. They work hand in hand with 'Parteilichkeit' by highlighting the strong bond between the SED and CPSU, and therefore the validity of the joint socialist project.

In aesthetic terms, *Menschen an unsrer Seite* relies on a well-rehearsed realism that utilises reference to weather (i.e. pathetic fallacy), home-life scenes, and a breadth of character perspectives to capture the pace of development. One frequent location in the novel is the Aehres' kitchen, a domestic space in which the banal routines of a proletarian family play out in parallel with both substantial changes at the workplace and considerable shifts in their relationships to each other. This one setting sees the tensions emerge as traditional, familiar, and even conservative elements play out and clash with radical changes incurred by the *Aufbau des Sozialismus*. As Katrin emerges from her husband's shadow, her teleological development both more convincingly illustrates the personal opportunities offered by the *Aufbau* and is expressed through her own thoughts, which the narrator conveys directly. At the beginning of the novel, she reflects on Aehre's coercive behaviour: "Während Katrin über die glitschige Straße ging, dachte sie: Was kann ich machen? Es ist wie immer! Wenn ihn etwas quält, klemmt's ihn den Hals zu [...]" (pp. 13–15).⁸¹ In this way, the reader swiftly becomes familiar with Katrin's character and her individual experience, which both expands on the well-known Garbe storyline and – in her more reliable and linear transformation – even allows Katrin to become a better example to the reader of the socialist realist protagonist.⁸²

Faced with the challenge of translating his 'Reportageerzählung' *Vom schweren Anfang* (1950) about Aehre into a complete novel, Claudius predominantly drew upon subplots, such as that of the SED group in the factory, and secondary characters such as Wassermann to expand the Garbe storyline. The subplots bring diversity to the novel as they complicate

⁸¹ See A. R. Wightman, "The 'Positive Heroine': A New Reading of Claudius: 'Menschen an unserer Seite'", *German Monitor*, 15 (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 1986), 37–53; Aumüller, *Minimalistische Poetik*, p. 243.

⁸² That, on the surface and in critical reception, this does not become immediately apparent says much about the ingrained masculinity in socialist realism and, in Georgina Paul's analysis, the *Aufbau* as a whole – Paul, pp. 106–125; Wightman, p. 49.

Aehre's linear characterisation to demonstrate the impact of role models on less successful characters. 'Meister' Matschat's repeated acts of sabotage or the burden of Bock's ineffective Party representation count as some examples of challenging behaviour, but their presence in the novel also suggests that its socialist realism is capable of sustaining negative behaviour alongside the overarching rhetorical coherence of an ideological message.

Shifting away from the 'Reportage' genre, moreover, meant that Claudius placed greater emphasis on the national *Aufbau* movement and less on the Garbe plotline, thereby replacing the weight of documentary evidence with a Lukácsian dialectic that would unite the 'Erscheinung' of the factory microcosm with the 'Wesen' of the broader ideological leaning in the GDR.⁸³ Claudius' approach in the novel thus underpins a key principle in Lukács' realism and one adopted by the SED in its conception of socialist realism, namely:

Wenn die Literatur tatsächlich eine besondere Form der Widerspiegelung der objektiven Wirklichkeit ist, so kommt es für sie sehr darauf an, diese Wirklichkeit so zu erfassen, wie sie tatsächlich *beschaffen* ist, und sich nicht darauf zu beschränken, das wiederzugeben, was und wie es unmittelbar *erscheint*.⁸⁴

An internal 'Gutachten' for the publisher, *Volk und Welt*, demonstrates the coherence of the novel with Party expectations: "[D]er mitreißende Schwung seines [Claudius] realistischen Optimismus überträgt sich zwangsläufig auf den Leser – [was] [...] diesem Buch seinen Wert und seine Wirkung [sichert]." ⁸⁵ Indeed, that optimism perhaps appears most clearly in the integration of challenges and interruptions to the storyline, such that *Menschen an unsrer Seite* represents the tolerance and, crucially, flexibility in GDR socialist realism.

⁸³ Lukács, 'Es geht um den Realismus', p. 119.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 116 (italics in original).

⁸⁵ Bräuning, 'Gutachten' for *Menschen an unsrer Seite*, Archiv der Akademie der Künste (AdK), Berlin, Volk und Welt, 1297.

Published in 1955 but set in 1950, Hans Marchwitza's *Robeisen* equally counts amongst the most popular and praised works of 1950s GDR literature, earning the author the 'Nationalpreis für Kunst und Literatur'.⁸⁶ Marchwitza had worked as a miner before trying his hand at journalism in communist publications such as the *Rubr-Echo*, leading to his emigration from Nazi Germany and subsequent voluntary enlistment in one of the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War – like Claudius. Having spent the wartime years in the US, he relocated to the GDR and soon set to work on the keenly awaited *Robeisen*, in which he 'versucht[e] als erster, den Aufbau eines ganzen industriellen Komplexes im sozialistischen Staat als kollektiven schöpferischen Prozess zu erfassen'.⁸⁷

Robeisen, compared with Claudius' novel, steers far closer to a 'Reportage' style in its narrative about the construction of the *Eisenhüttenkombinat Ost* in Brandenburg (today a private site known as EKO Stahl) as well as the neighbouring town Stalinstadt (renamed Eisenhüttenstadt in 1961), after the faithfully depicted proclamation by minister Fritz Selbmann in the summer of 1950.⁸⁸ Marchwitza takes a Party-political project and fictionalises the worker reality of it, though detailed descriptions of building progress and SED propaganda abound, thus Carola Hähnel-Mesnard reads the work as a 'Betriebsroman', as it 'besaß einen hohen Grad an Wirklichkeitsbezug und nahm oft Züge der Reportage an. Er sollte Arbeitsfreude und Optimismus vermitteln sowie Sinn und Bedeutung der gesellschaftlichen Veränderungen und des Plans begreiflich machen'.⁸⁹ The novel focuses on

⁸⁶ Hans Marchwitza, *Robeisen* (Berlin: Tribüne, [1958?]); Marcel Reich-Ranicki, *Ohne Rabatt* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1991), p. 22.

⁸⁷ Dieter Schiller, 'Alltag und Geschichte. Zur Gestaltung revolutionärer Haltungen in unserer Literatur', in *Revolution und Literatur: Zum Verhältnis von Erbe, Revolution und Literatur*, ed. by Werner Mittenzwei & Reinhard Weisbach (Leipzig: Reclam, 1971), pp. 259–326 (pp. 300–302); Reich-Ranicki, pp. 21–22. Note the similarity between these two works: if Claudius' Aehre was the first socialist hero, Marchwitza's work illustrated the first successful construction in the socialist state.

⁸⁸ [n.a.], 'Chronik: 1950', *ArcelorMittal Eisenhüttenstadt* <<https://eisenhuettenstadt.arcelormittal.com/icc/arcelor-ehst-de/broker.jsp?uMen=d13152c2-2d9e-d51d-b2a9-147d7b2f25d3&uCon=ea3022ba-1fff-a51e-8fe1-a327d7b2f25d&uTem=aaaaaaaa-aaaa-aaaa-000000000011>> [accessed 4 June 2020].

⁸⁹ Carola Hähnel-Mesnard, 'Formen des Trivialen im Aufbau- und Betriebsroman der DDR in den 1950er Jahren. Aporien der Kunstdoktrin des Sozialistischen Realismus', in *Das Populäre: Untersuchungen zu Interaktionen und Differenzierungsstrategien in*

a circle of workers around and including the Hoff family, as well as leadership figures in building, engineering, and the Party. Despite setbacks incurred by acts of sabotage, a lack of expert knowledge, insufficient preparedness, missing supplies, and misguided leadership, workers ultimately complete the construction of blast furnaces for pig iron production ahead of time.

More so than in Claudius' novel, the Party has a prominent role in *Robeisen* as a source of motivation and belonging for the workers, to whom it offered mass employment:

Margret [Hoff] fühlte mit schnell erwachendem Bewusstsein ihre Zugehörigkeit zu den Genossen, die um das Werk wie um ihr Leben rangen. [...] [D]a saßen Willner, Martha und alle anderen – die Familie der Partei.

(Marchwitza, p. 469)

Whilst the two Party representatives at the plant in the beginning, Preißler and Grube, prove themselves unworthy and incapable of the task at hand (p. 247), regional and national Party leaders – including the minister and Ulbricht himself – support them and their employees by acting as a source of motivation with prizes (p. 393), the offer of expert help from home and abroad (pp. 300, 486), and advice to those in need, such that gradually the SED becomes central to the construction project and the builders' morale. The Party remains present throughout Claudius' novel, yet the positive development of Party work in Marchwitza's text rather epitomises the notion of partisanship as at the forefront of GDR socialist realism. As the physical and political surroundings change dramatically throughout the novel, ideology remains the anchor, emphasised by the omniscient third-person narrator with quasi-

Literatur, Kultur und Sprache, ed. by Olivier Agard, Chrisitan Helmreich & Hélène Vinckel-Roisin (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2011), pp. 297–312 (p. 302). Unlike *Menschen an unsrer Seite*, *Robeisen* follows the construction of a factory rather than the production in it and might more faithfully constitute an 'Aufbauroman' in the purest sense.

fantastical injections of SED discourse and even Party leaders into the narrative. The minister, for example, visits the site and gives a rousing speech to the workers:

Das Eisenhüttenkombinat ist nicht mehr Traum und nicht mehr nur Plan... es steht da! Tausendfältig meldet sich sein Leben bereits, und es wird noch größer und großartiger, es wird in wenigen Jahren ganz dastehen, weil wir an die Kraft und den Friedenswillen unserer Arbeiter glauben.⁹⁰

(Marchwitza, p. 337)

This encroachment of Party discourse into the narratological voice and the workers' dialogue evidences the pervasiveness of SED influence into every aspect of life – even into the aesthetic, as *Robeisen* proves – and holds a much greater rhetorical weight than in Claudius' work, as it forms a bridge between the intradiegetic reality and that lived by readers in the GDR.

In its rapid pace of change, the novel also provides a succinct example of the substantial development of infrastructure and ideology in the GDR's *Aufbau*. While the EKO offers an infrastructural stimulus, the Hoff family (comprising the father Christian, the overlooked mother, Martin the elder brother, Stefan the younger brother, and the daughter Margret) demonstrates a change in ideological consciousness.⁹¹ Martin is open to the proposed plans at the very start, yet his brother and father resist what they perceive as 'Russenpläne' and 'Sklavenarbeit' (p. 8). Margret, meanwhile, merely 'saß schweigsam, mit scheuem, fast mürrischem Gesicht' in the background of their conversations (p. 18). As building progresses, however, Marchwitza alleviates these generational boundaries to allow Christian,

⁹⁰ See also pp. 466–468, 491, 546–550.

⁹¹ The figure of the 'Mutter' receives little attention other than to cook meals, appear emotional, or serve as a sounding board for relatives, and is not subjected to the same yardstick of transformation as, for example, her husband Christian. This either suggests her incapacity for change or, more likely, a base disregard for the aged mother figure, casting her as irrelevant to the socialist experience.

for example, to become an ‘Aktivist’ and respected bricklayer (p. 338), and Margret likewise to be liberated into a Party member, crane operator, and singing, dancing, and prize-winning ‘Aktivist[in]’ (pp. 431–432, 551). Other women such as Martha Karge, a refugee who initially lodges with the Hoffs, undergo a similar political development in the novel to epitomise the rapid transitions experienced by individuals across GDR society.

These examples of characterisation are not absolute, however, as interruptions to development do occur at times, for example in Christian’s repeated lapses in judgement or hesitation about the project altogether (pp. 21, 87, 306, 347, 350–351, 540–542). Crucially, such subtle plot twists generate a tension that, later, allows the ultimate success to be read as an even greater achievement and, ultimately, substantiate the minister’s initial bold promises:

[V]on einem phantastischen Eisenwerk mit Bahn- und Hafenanlagen und einer neuen Stadt, die innerhalb von fünf Jahren hier in diesem von allem großen abgelegenen Landwinkel gebaut werden sollten.

(Marchwitza, p. 6)

Likewise, the acts of sabotage (pp. 232–234, 268, 432) and dissenting voices (e.g. pp. 13, 32, 47, 166, 285, 304, 322, 398, 423) create an atmosphere of insecurity, even opposition, around the project, but the reader’s knowledge that the EKO had already been completed in 1955 counteracts their dramatic weight. In *Robeisen*, the rhetorical impact of contradictions comes to the fore, as both plot and ideological premise through the Party pull the frequently unstable and uncertain path of revolutionary development forwards, culminating in an example of how socialist realism tolerates conflict because of its location within a broader optimistic framework.

Like Claudius' work, *Robeisen* also romanticises socialist labour and contrasts it with capitalist work in the West (p. 384) to celebrate the emancipation of workers in the GDR and even confer the higher state of personhood enabled by revolutionary development:

Erich Kraft war ein Künstler an seinem Niethammer. Konnte ein guter Geiger oder ein Pianist mit seinen Händen und auf seinem Instrument besser und geschickter spielen als der Nieter Erich Kraft mit seinem Niethammer? Und was für eine großartige Musik ertönte auf dem ganzen Werkplatz und hier oben! Hatte nicht dieser Gorki [...] von dieser Arbeitsmusik geschrieben, von der Größe und Schönheit der Arbeit, die früher von den Herren als Geldquelle ausgenutzt und von Dummköpfen verachtet wurde? In der Vergangenheit war der Arbeiter der Sklave seiner Unwissenheit und das durfte nicht noch einmal wiederkehren.

(Marchwitza, p. 390)

To indicate the heightened discursive privileging of labour in the GDR, Marchwitza's narrator waxes lyrical about the 'beauty' of socialist work to such an extent that the narrative voice at times seems to be an external political commentator: if labour has become a source of transcendence – the narrator no longer hears the rivet hammer but a musical instrument – then the narrator too appears above their own narrative, that is, liberated from the fetters of diegetic reference. Whilst perhaps not entirely 'typical', this romanticisation of labour fulfils the expected thematic emphasis on the world of work, particularly as a source for personal development and liberation.

Elsewhere, a plethora of everyday scenes in the Hoff household, principally at the kitchen table, testify to the normalcy of the characters' daily lives and also to their radical

transformation.⁹² Since the ‘hero’ figures of Christian, Martin, and Margret appear to have normal lives and their own flaws, their transformation gains an authenticity that counteracts the more idealistic heroism and other moments of hope (pp. 98, 108, 180–181, 425, 444–445 etc.). Marianne Lange, in a review for *Neues Deutschland*, intimated that: “[Marchwitza führt] keine eigentlichen Haupthelden ein[...], sondern eine Vielzahl von Gestalten, die an den einzelnen Etappen teilhaben. *Der Held ist die Arbeiterklasse als Ganzes.*”⁹³ The hero in *Robeisen* thus becomes plural – a novum itself – and far from perfect, suggesting a revision of the socialist realist hero at least in its Soviet guise by allowing for a complication of the existing topos into a more dynamic and, arguably, authentic image. Rather than undermining it, the collective hero in *Robeisen* embodies the flexibility of the GDR’s sanctioned method so long as the work served the broader ideological ambitions of the state.

Written in a realist style, *Robeisen* represents a novel based on documentary source material (from the actual building site), which Marchwitza supplements with a broader range of perspectives from the mouths of workers and a good measure of obstacles along the way, making the novel at least in part an example of the ‘Reportage’ genre. As part of this, the characters’ immediate responses to external stimuli serve to anchor the prose in emotional perception throughout: “Dieser erste Abstich war nicht nur für Schindel, sondern noch viel mehr für die Schmelzer eine Enttäuschung. Sie waren mit großem Enthusiasmus gekommen und dachten sofort an gewaltige Tonnenzahlen” (p. 401). Though this technique often works more to uncover hesitation, scepticism, or discomfort than joy and motivation, it provides the reader with a clearer insight into the ‘real’ events than pure narratological commentary,

⁹² *Robeisen*, pp. 19, 45, 106–111, 229, 296, 335, 367, 417, 447, 470, 529–530, 557–559.

⁹³ Marianne Lange, ‘Vom neuen Leben’, *Neues Deutschland*, 3 July 1955, 7 (my italics).

in a sense personifying the experience that would otherwise be dominated by the reportage style.

Moreover, insight into characters' thoughts, even if referenced collectively, recalls Lukács' preference for a more individualistic understanding of the 'typical' that would bring the reader closer to the 'Rädchen und Schraubchen' of workers' reality. In practice, the personalisation of Marchwitza's reportage becomes a source of conflict and contradiction, as individual responses do not unanimously cohere with the 'official' position on the state of affairs. Yet, despite this apparent negativity, *Roheisen* still corresponds perfectly with Abusch's comments in 1950: "Es müssen nicht erst vorher alle gesellschaftlichen Veränderungen in der materiellen Basis vollzogen sein, wie Georg Luk[á]cs irrtümlich meinte. Der Schriftsteller kann und muss im Sinne Lenins auch vorausseilen."⁹⁴

Uncovering Ambiguities: Critical Reception

Despite the apparent coherence of the two texts to key precepts of GDR socialist realism, textual and critical evidence points to greater ambiguity in their execution of the method. This ambiguity does not negate the identifiable characteristics in the state method, though, rather evinces the complexity of realising them in practice. Even prior to its publication, Claudius' novel encountered controversy, as the publisher concluded:

Jeder, der das Buch liest, meint doch, alle Parteisekretäre seien schlecht, taugten nichts, und das wirkt sich doch auf die Partei aus. Ja, wir glauben..., nein, wir sind sicher, dein Buch ist ein parteifeindliches Buch.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Abusch, 'Die Diskussion in der Sowjetliteratur und bei uns: Einige Bemerkungen anlässlich des Schriftstellerkongresses', p. 3. Note, however, that this quotation is not indicative of the SED's reception of Lukács work at the time, which remained positive.

⁹⁵ Claudius, *Rahelose Jahre*, p. 375; Eduard Claudius, 'Macht, Verantwortung und Mut des Schriftstellers', *Beiträge zur deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur*, 6 (1955), 13–18 (p. 17). Similar comments are recalled by Karl-Heinz Jakobs, 'Das Wort des Schriftstellers – Über den Arbeiter in der Literatur', *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, 10 (1972), 152–158 (p. 155).

The portrayal of the SED in *Menschen an unsrer Seite* became a particular focus of critics' attention because of its representatives' inefficiency and incompetency. Secretary Bock exhibits the Party's faults in the factory early on, but even his replacement Wende fails to gain the approval of all workers by the end: following his speech extolling Aehre, '[k]einer klatschte; sie blickten ihn an, wie gebannt' (p. 396). Marc Silberman identifies Schadow, an instructor from the regional Party administration, as a kind of *deus ex machina*, whose advent marks the only substantial change to SED work in the factory as he dismantles the ineffective leadership.⁹⁶ Given that Claudius introduces Schadow as early as page 88 and voices his thoughts directly (reserved, as in Katrin's case, for only the few; see e.g. p. 104), though, his role seems larger than Silberman suggests, especially as the classical *deus ex machina* habitually came at the end of the play.

Although evidence is provided for the novel's 'Parteilichkeit', other examples disrupt the political and aesthetic unity of the work. Susanne Schaffrath asserts that the characters' development exemplifies the development of consciousness instigated by the *Aufbau*: "[Der Aufbau kann] nur gelingen, so der Roman, wenn sich der Einzelne lernend weiterentwickelt."⁹⁷ But others, such as GDR academic Eberhard Röhner, accused Claudius of having crafted characters who exist only in or for their work and thereby of having failed to depict the breadth and fullness of the 'Neuer Mensch': "Die Darstellung des Werkbaus drängt sich so stark in den Vordergrund, dass die menschlichen Schicksale hinter dem Bauvorhaben verschwinden."⁹⁸ This fate also befalls Aehre, whose home-life becomes

⁹⁶ Silberman, *Literature of the Working World*, p. 40.

⁹⁷ Susanne Schaffrath, "'- und es liegen bessere in mancher Schublade...'" Aufbauliteratur versus unveröffentlichtes Romanfragment: Eduard Claudius' "Menschen an unsrer Seite" und Brigitte Reimanns "Joe und das Mädchen auf der Lotosblume", *Deutsche Bücher*, 39 (2009), 87–102 (p. 93).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 93; Röhner, p. 37; Wightman, pp. 41, 46.

increasingly dominated by the topic of the factory, and for the workers, who feature only at the workplace and often sacrifice their spare time and own wellbeing for Aehre's project:

Aus der Kammer aufblickend, erkannten sie nur undeutlich das Gesicht Kerbels. Er sprang zu ihnen hinunter, nahm Käthe die Schaufel aus der Hand und fuhr sie an: "Was schläfst du nicht? Hol dich der Satan!" [...]

Er sah unausgeschlafen und müde aus, das ausgelaugte Gesicht zuckte vor Nervosität, die Augen blinzelten geblendet in das scharfe Licht des Scheinwerfers. Bissig warf er hin: "Es gibt bei uns bald nur noch zwei Möglichkeiten: entweder den Ofen nach Hause ans Bett nehmen, oder das Bett hierher."

(Claudius, *Menschen an unsrer Seite*, p. 355)

This exemplary passage depicts an unsustainable situation as typical of the extraordinary efforts by dealienated workers, but in such instances veers close to an abusive form of labour in which the characters remain alienated within the socialist system. Claudius' narrative of exhaustive labour – the completion of the furnace notwithstanding – in this sense takes a more critical line and, arguably, one not formally tolerated in the aesthetic method.

Even the most fruitful characters in terms of developing a socialist consciousness – Andrytzki or Suse – are not spared, as Barbara Einhorn finds grounds for criticising them as '[s]chematisch und unbefriedigend darin, dass [deren Wandel] ungenügend motiviert wird'.⁹⁹ Yet the prevalence of unmaintainable work patterns suggests that the path to change was anything but secured, and also severs the possibility of a wider context because the characters figure only in their worker guise, rendering them partial, deindividualised, and plastic. Greiner calls their speech the 'Sich-Bestätigen Gleichdenkender' because the narrowed scope

⁹⁹ Barbara Einhorn, *Der Roman in der DDR 1949–1969: Die Gestaltung des Verhältnisses von Individuum und Gesellschaft. Eine Analyse der Erzählstruktur* (Kronberg: Scriptor, 1978), pp. 227–228.

both limits the characters' capacity for development and produces a fetishised image of labourers whose purpose concerns only the higher economic objectives of the *Aufbau*.¹⁰⁰ Whilst manifestly centred on the theme of labour and 'volkstümlich' in the attention to workers' daily lives, *Menschen an unsrer Seite* at once reveals the banality and hyperbole of such a focus, which results in an ultimately negative depiction of socialist work and in an uninspiring typecasting of the socialist worker.

In critical reception, Aehre often receives the title of *Held der Arbeit* in a gesture that imposes Hans Garbe's biography onto Claudius' character.¹⁰¹ Yet further inspection of secondary material reveals an alternative identity as 'eigennützig', a 'Tüftler', 'unruhiger Geist', and 'Haustyrann' for his countless flaws.¹⁰² Hunter Bivens questions the fluidity of the protagonist's development, characterising Aehre as 'increasingly paranoid and frantic'.¹⁰³ In one exchange with Wende, Aehre hopes to forego due process in decision-making, exemplifying his less than inspirational behaviour:

“Wenn mein Vorschlag erst in die Bürokratenmühle gerät, wird's so lange dauern, dass ich in der Zwischenzeit drei Öfen bauen kann. [...] Gibst du die Bewilligung, ist alles in Ordnung.”

“Es wäre schon einfach,” gab Wende zu, “ja, sehr einfach.” Spöttisch dann: “Eigentlich brauchten wir gar keine Direktion. Der Parteisekretär kann die Produktion leiten, und wir sparen das Geld für die Direktion. Nicht schlecht.”

(Claudius, *Menschen an unsrer Seite*, pp. 292–293)

¹⁰⁰ Greiner, p. 75; Hähnel-Mesnard speaks of 'klischeehafte stereotype Charaktere' – Hähnel-Mesnard, 'Formen des Trivialen', p. 307.

¹⁰¹ For example Werner Ilberg, 'Eduard Claudius: Menschen an unserer Seite', *Neues Deutschland*, 13 November 1968, 4.

¹⁰² Irmfried Hiebel, 'Über Helden, Heldentum und Heroismus. Anmerkungen zum Menschenbild in zwei Romanen von Eduard Claudius', *Weimarer Beiträge*, 32:7 (1986), 1144–1155 (p. 1154).

¹⁰³ Bivens, p. 559.

Aehre's depiction arguably goes further than the socialist realist topos tolerated here, indeed he frequently resists change or remains aloof from his own brigade, suggesting a limited capacity for development: "Warum arbeitest du auch nicht", rief Kerbel, "läufst den ganzen Tag rum, und wir schinden uns hier ab" (p. 257). Claudius' autobiography *Ruhelose Jahre* might explain this behaviour, as the author claims not to have regarded Garbe as a true hero, but rather as a semi-hero or even 'Antiheld': "Es gab keine 'strahlenden Helden'; gewöhnliche Menschen waren es, die 'gehandelt' hatten."¹⁰⁴ Garbe himself intervened, however, to protest that his fictional counterpart seemed to err far more than he himself had, as if to insinuate that Claudius intentionally shifted from the positive hero model to a less impressive and more realist(ic) topos.¹⁰⁵

In this instance, the emphatic criterion of positivity around the socialist realist hero encounters serious problems, as the theoretical expectation of unified behaviour necessarily veers away from an authentic realism, or – as here – the hero himself appears far from exemplary. Even when supposedly epitomised, socialist realism therefore fails to come to fruition. That not all of Aehre's flaws derive from biographical input, as Garbe suggests, complicates this further, since Claudius seemingly deemed it necessary to introduce further flaws to emphasise Aehre's overall capacity for change. Whilst conceived as a role model whose transformation inspires the reader to participate in the socialist movement, the 'hero', surrounded by plastic or fetishised characters, is much unlike the transcendent source of potential of the 'Neuer Mensch' foreseen in socialist realism. In the case of Claudius' hero,

¹⁰⁴ Claudius, *Ruhelose Jahre*, p. 356. One might conject that Claudius speaks in this quotation to the normalisation of emancipated labour under socialism such that Garbe's feats were merely habitual in the GDR; in light of Aehre's broader characterisation, the line might be read as a critique of the idealised hero topos in socialist realism, which the narratively does not fulfil. Hähnel-Mesnard goes as far as calling Aehre an 'Antiheld' – Hähnel-Mesnard, 'Formen des Trivialen', p. 306.

¹⁰⁵ Jakobs, p. 155.

Bivens concludes: “Aehre’s name itself is now an open signifier, a question rather than an answer.”¹⁰⁶

Roheisen also suffers from the poor execution of its revolutionary development because Marchwitza too often resorts to reporting character development second-hand instead of depicting it organically. In one reader’s analysis printed in *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, the plethora of setbacks, acts of sabotage, or accidents – for example the intentionally dumped cement bags (p. 232–234), stolen railway points (p. 268), or crane collapse (pp. 239–240) – merely ‘flatter[n] vorbei’ as they have little to no lasting impact on the narrative’s progress, making them feel like gratuitous authorial flourishes to inject artificial ‘drama’ into the novel.¹⁰⁷ Contingent on the linear direction of its narrative as revolutionary development, socialist realism dictates the resolution of contradiction intradiegetically; in practice, this expectation seems to have forced Marchwitza to decide between a plastic and predictable development or charges of negativity and ‘Parteifeindlichkeit’, summarised by GDR literary scholar Hans Mayer in 1956:

Gewiss wurde im vorigen Jahr der Roman ‘Roheisen’ [...] mit dem Nationalpreis ausgezeichnet; aber ebenso gewiss ist doch wohl auch, dass diese Auszeichnung keineswegs auf allseitige Zustim[m]ung der Leser und Kritik stieß. [...] [Man kann] den Roman wohl kaum als geglückte künstlerische Leistung bezeichnen.¹⁰⁸

Interestingly, Mayer’s review does not per se critique the fulfilment of ideological criteria in the novel but does question whether the final product offers much aesthetic value, suggesting that satisfying the goals of GDR cultural policy did not merely consist in ticking ideological

¹⁰⁶ Bivens, p. 559.

¹⁰⁷ Christian Grunert, Fritz Welsch, et al., ‘Diskussion zu Hans Marchwitzas Roman “Roheisen”’, *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, 6 (1953), 92–110 (p. 94).

¹⁰⁸ Hans Mayer, ‘Zur Gegenwartslage unserer Literatur’ (radio programme), cited in Martin Straub, ‘Hans Marchwitzas “Roheisen”’, *Weimarer Beiträge*, 31:6 (1985), 983–992 (fn. p. 987).

boxes. Marchwitza was not alone in facing this problem, yet *Roheisen* shows how the mere inability to satisfy socialist realist criteria did not represent the only problem for artists; the overarching desire to illustrate the *Aufbau*, warts and all, became a key battleground between socialist realist aesthetics and its deviants, as critical attention prior to and after publication consisted in attacks, reproaches, and rejections of texts.

Anna Seghers reports how '[m]an [...] manchmal urteilen [hört], [Marchwitza] häufe viele Konflikte an; aus der Zusammenballung so vieler Schicksale trete kein einzelner Held hervor'.¹⁰⁹ In Silberman's and Lange's analysis, that 'Held' appears collectively in the Hoff's or in the construction workers; however, such a reconception of the single positive hero led to accusations in GDR journals of a too narrow depiction of socialist labour: "Die Darstellung des Werkbaus drängt sich so stark in den Vordergrund, dass die menschlichen Schicksale hinter dem Bauvorhaben verschwinden" (Röhner).¹¹⁰ If Marchwitza's collective hero offers a positive model of development away from flawed personalities and artificial paths of development, the deviation from the *Held der Arbeit* norm that it presents weakened the pronounced didacticism of a single role model, thus clashing with socialist realist theory.

After consideration of readers' feedback, the editors of *Neue Deutsche Literatur* insisted that the novel failed to represent the 'typical' and even posited a 'Missverhältnis' in the failure to offer a broad picture of working life: "Gerade der sozialistische Realismus als Schaffensmethode strebt danach, die Menschen in ihrer ganzen Vielseitigkeit, in dem Reichtum ihres seelischen und geistigen Lebens, ihrer individuellen Beziehungen zu

¹⁰⁹ Anna Seghers, 'Der Anteil der Literatur an der Bewusstseinsbildung des Volkes. Hauptreferat auf dem IV. Deutschen Schriftstellerkongress 10. Januar 1956', in *IV. Deutscher Schriftstellerkongress*, ed. by Deutscher Schriftstellerverband, I, pp. 43–70 (p. 56).

¹¹⁰ Silberman, pp. 67–68; Lange, p. 7; Röhner, p. 38; Straub, p. 986. See also Heinz H. Schmidt, 'Sprödes Roheisen', *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, 4:1 (1956), 135–139.

zeigen.”¹¹¹ Thus, whilst Marchwitza productively sought to reform the hero topos in *Robeisen* to what becomes a more dialectical conceptualisation, the sheer number of characters dominates the narrative, indicating the limited facility in socialist realism to capture those lives – of labourers, for example – that it was conceived to represent. The nexus of both Marchwitza’s and Claudius’ problems lies in the paradox of socialist realist theory: if complex, the characters were deemed atypical and unsocialist; if one-sided, they fetishised the multiplicity and breadth of the ‘Neuer Mensch’. Such an irrevocable contradiction in the method contributes to a wider picture of countless internal conflicts and suggests that a major flaw in a model based on unity but whose theoretical conditions were impossible to satisfy.

Questioning Idealism: Walter Benjamin and the Cult of the Symbol

Although the examples from the novels and their critical reception illustrate the flexibility of socialist realism as a practical method, the fundamental idealism of socialist realist theory enabled or even necessitated deviation from and experimentation with the basic socialist realist model. Since any ‘socialist realist’ work simultaneously conflicted with the precepts of that model, the theory of the model is itself arguably to blame. By applying Walter Benjamin’s notion of the symbol to the two texts, I explore whether their similarities to a symbolic aesthetics explain the uncrossable divide between theory and praxis in socialist realism, given that the symbol – unlike allegory – entails a claim to total signification that, in Benjamin’s reading, can no longer occur. The Benjaminian symbol therefore serves as a lens through which to comprehend the textual failures in these two novels as the necessary product of an aesthetic method that promised the unachievable. In turn, the texts become spirited attempts

¹¹¹ Grunert et al., pp. 109–110.

to embody a theoretical framework upon which they unavoidably expand, but which they contradict at the same time.

In his analysis of the baroque ‘Trauerspiel’, which I elucidated in the previous chapter, Benjamin identifies the symbol as a kind of antagonist in the history of allegory that represents a real-life object in its totality, rather than figure it as fragment in a similarly disintegrated constellation. Insofar as a symbolic aesthetics can therefore unify real and aesthetic phenomena, it undertakes a signification of the kind described by Benjamin in the prelapsarian realm and in postlapsarian philosophy. In the prologue of the *UDT*, Benjamin, with reference to his essay ‘Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen’, raises the ‘paradiesischen Stand’ of language, in which the symbolism of the word cohered perfectly with its ‘profane Bedeutung’, rendering signification possible.¹¹² When this connection degrades in the postlapsarian realm, Benjamin suggests that: “[Es ist] Sache des Philosophen [...], den symbolischen Charakter des Wortes, in welchem die Idee zur Selbstverständigung kommt, [...] durch Darstellung in seinen Primat wieder einzusetzen” (*UDT*, p. 231). This characterisation exemplifies Benjamin’s messianic-inspired belief in the continued possibility of attaining a unity between sign and signified through the symbol, despite his own maxim that any imposition of symbolic unity on postlapsarian language would construct only a ‘falschen Schein einer realen Weseneinheit’ (*UDT*, p. 234).¹¹³

Inasmuch as Benjamin posits an allegorical reading as a counterbalance to symbolism in the *Ursprung*, deriving some ontological value from the ‘Trauerspiel’ despite its eschatological

¹¹² Benjamin, *UDT*, pp. 230–231.

¹¹³ Benjamin also variously both demonstrates and argues for the principle of working with the albeit poor and flawed material that one has instead of seeking to replace it; applying this very principle to the postlapsarian era would mean embracing the inherent lack of symbolic unity rather than try to reforge it.

turn, he identifies the fallacious character of symbolic aesthetics on account of its transcendental purpose: the assertion of a unified and meaningful art that, through its own coherent mimesis, accedes to a truth higher than reality itself. Through that truth, symbolic art does what since the Fall had been inconceivable: signify. Allegory, by contrast, pertains to an immanence whose value is found only in the change and exchange that produces it. In Benjamin's words:

Während im Symbol mit der Verklärung des Unterganges das transfigurierte Antlitz der Natur im Lichte der Erlösung flüchtig sich offenbart, liegt in der Allegorie die *facies hippocratica* der Geschichte als erstarrte Urlandschaft dem Betrachter vor Augen.

(*UDT*, p. 357)

Symbolic art, therefore, contains the apothecic claim to an essence higher than that of reality itself, one in which the reader can, even if temporarily, enter to derive some knowledge, truth, or experience of beauty – all of which functioned as aesthetic goals and criteria for centuries. Benjamin's allegory interrupted this tradition and what he considered its delusion, presenting to the reader not a glorification of reality but the 'facies hippocratica' or image of impending demise.

Comparing GDR socialist realism to Benjamin's symbol, in the following I consider how the criteria outlined by Party sources served to construct an intradiegetic totality that captured a both mimetic and ideologically preferable reality, combining a 'typical' depiction and one that reflected a progressive dynamic towards a fully established socialism. Since the Party envisaged socialist realism as a primal component of the *Umerziehung*, its ideological message had to depend on a self-conception as a model of absolute coherence. In Benjamin's analyses, however, no coherence can exist in the postlapsarian world, hence his preference for an

allegorical aesthetics that applies fragmentation to already disjointed objects in order to allow their commonality to resonate in new collages that, as form alone, could unlock some hint of hitherto concealed meaning. That the Party regardless mandated a method that necessitated semantic coherence in order to convey a distinct ideological message suggests a parallel between socialist realism and the Benjaminian symbol. Similarly, the reliance on an 'Erbe' that, in Lukács' writings, is praised for the timeless and universal truths that it promotes further complicates the matter, as the subscription to an aesthetics of coherent meaning and enduring values rests on a symbolic ritualism undermined by Benjamin's theory.

A reading of the GDR's official aesthetic policy through Benjamin already has some precedent. In a study on the early years of GDR literature, Germanist Bernhard Greiner interprets the GDR's official aesthetic mode as allegorical, not symbolic, on account of its imposition of arbitrary meaning on its object through anticipatory dynamism and a socialist consciousness, such that the work ends without 'Eigenwert' except for what the model lends it.¹¹⁴ To some extent, Greiner's reading of the 'Willkürlich-Werden der Beziehung zwischen Besonderem und Allgemeinem' in GDR socialist realism coheres with Benjamin's notion that: "[A]n Bedeutung [...] ihm [dem allegorischen Gegenstand] das zu[kommt], was der Allegoriker ihm verleiht."¹¹⁵ But Greiner's line of argument focuses rather on a 'Wirklichkeitsarmut' in the GDR model, which he identifies in *Menschen an unsrer Seite* and its 'Realitätsverlust'.¹¹⁶ Whilst his analysis highlights some deficits of socialist realist texts, Greiner confounds political system with aesthetic policy, arguing that the establishment of an ideological framework within socialism to recast a state through collectivity and solidarity suffices to render all art created within it vacuous and abstract. Positing socialism as an

¹¹⁴ Greiner, pp. 59–60.

¹¹⁵ Benjamin, *UDT*, p. 373.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 62, 70, 82.

unquestionable and absolute value system imposed on all cultural production in Greiner's case means attributing a symbolic authority to it that clashes with the immanent meaninglessness of allegory per se and overlooks the symptomatic ambiguity of GDR socialist realism. Moreover, Greiner's comparison between the 'Trümmerfeld' excused in the *UDT* and the idealised, rounded, total criteria of socialist realist theory seems mismatched in light of the affinity in GDR cultural policy to a continuity with the bourgeois canon and 'critical' realists such as Flaubert and Mann. That GDR socialist realism constituted a heavily stylised method designed for total coherence in order to convey its message, not a fragmented and broken internal structure, already indicates the difficulty of applying an allegorical over a symbolic lens.

By contrast, Georg Lukács explicitly rejects an allegorical interpretation of socialist realism by negating the allegorical process altogether. He argues that, when allegory gives its objects new meaning in the retention of their fragmented form but constellation in a new image, it abstracts 'von seinem transzendenten Nihil zur Nichtigkeit entwertet[e] Momente des Alltagslebens'.¹¹⁷ Lukács therefore reads allegory as *transcendent* in that its 'abstraction' of objects changes them from 'das konkret Typische' to 'eine abstrakte Partikularität' – precisely the opposite of Benjamin's insistence both on the historical concreteness and the emphasis on the banality of fragments in allegory.¹¹⁸ The resulting perspective leads Lukács to decry authors such as James Joyce and Franz Kafka for what he regards as their decadence and abstraction, and allegoricism, but to apportion to (socialist) realism instead an immanence and 'jede[n] möglichen diesseitigen, der Welt selbst innewohnenden Sin[n] im Leben des Menschen, in seiner Wirklichkeit'.¹¹⁹ Whilst Greiner asserts that socialist realism derives from

¹¹⁷ Lukács, *Wider den missverstandenen Realismus*, p. 47.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 42–43.

a meaningless and banal ideological system and calls it allegorical, Lukács instead praises its (anticipated) socialist reality as concrete and immanent, despite his own admission that the writerly process includes a concealment of abstraction.

Just as Greiner mischaracterises allegory as a technique capable of capturing the kind of reverent meaning creation effected by socialist realism, leading to a biased hypothesis about GDR literature, Lukács overlooks the repeated signposting in Benjamin's conceptualisation of allegory to cast the method as a source of meaning and signification. Reading a new constellation of fragments in Benjamin's allegory as a transcendent structure disregards the kind of nihilistic spiral towards emptiness and decay described in the *Ursprung*, a dynamic that directly contradicts the positive surge towards a better future represented in socialist realism. Greiner's and Lukács' analyses differ in their readings of Benjamin and of socialist realism, yet neither offers a functional lens with which to comprehend the distance between the principles of socialist realist theory and its execution. By dint of its monadic and profane character, Benjaminian allegory is neither unequivocally isolated from or transcendent of the external, nor does it have the capacity to endow meaning on reality, as Lukács appears to suggest. I appraise socialist realism, therefore, not as an allegorical method, but as symbolic in the sense theorised by Benjamin in the *Ursprung*. Applying this reading as a yardstick to Claudius and Marchwitza, I explore how the ambiguities and flaws identified above in the theoretical criteria outlined by Party sources characterise precisely the contradictions and ambiguities in any symbolism, which in turn calls its practical application into question.

The GDR Canon as Symbolic Idol

Considering *Menschen an unsrer Seite*, a broader conflict between the 'typical' and the expectation of realism emerges that challenge the stability of the socialist realist method.

GDR socialist realist theory contained an expectation of a unified image cast through a dialectic of the specific and the general, thus authors should with regard to the Party detail functionaries' engagement at the workplace, for example, but also ground this portrayal in the ideological context of Marxism-Leninism. No reality – let alone that in the early stages of a considerable systemic upheaval – could appear unified without some omission, however, thus Claudius opts to diverge from a cohesive image of Party leadership by insinuating that the SED group in the factory is populated, among others, by former NSDAP members and other problematic individuals such as Bock, who simply disregards Aehre's ambitions to repair the furnace without extinguishing it:

Nun ja, ich muss doch die heutige Zeitung gesehen haben, bevor ich etwas anderes anfangen kann. [...] Ihr könnt doch nicht einfach hier hereingeschneit kommen und sagen: Ich will mit dir sprechen. Das geht doch nicht!

(Claudius, *Menschen an unsrer Seite*, pp. 100–1)¹²⁰

The workers do little to conceal their disparagement: “Ihr von der Partei, ihr seid so trocken, so...” (p. 102). Just the example of the Party in *Menschen an unsrer Seite* provides sufficient evidence to highlight the distance between the expectation of aesthetic and ideological unity, and the lived reality in the early GDR. That Claudius broke from the theoretical criteria of socialist realism by avoiding absolute partisanship means nothing other than that he decided against fetishising the material from the Garbe story – a conundrum that would have displeased reviewers either way.

The pursuit of perfection thus proves unworkable and unachievable, much like the symbolic claim to signification that Benjamin disproves as belated and erroneous. Since GDR (and

¹²⁰ See also pp. 50, 114.

Soviet) socialist realism called for a subjective manipulation of reality through a revolutionary development and didactic illustration of socialist growth, a ‘typical’ depiction, albeit one inflected with a Party perspective, could never be achieved. Not only does this paradox highlight the schism between theory and praxis, it equally confines socialist realism to the esoteric realm of a symbolic system founded on a desire to signify in a world devoid of semantic possibility. The *Aufbau*, a contested landscape in its own right, is a particularly relevant example. For *Menschen an unsrer Seite*, the impossible task of adhering to criteria that could not practically be fulfilled ultimately heaped so much pressure on Claudius from reviewers that he parted ways with the publishing house.¹²¹

Claudius’ style, moreover, reflects some of the difficulties in the socialist realist method. As if overwhelmed by the tempo of the construction project, Claudius often neglects an authentic depiction of revolutionary development and instead has characters simply report it second-hand, as with the bathetic completion of the furnace: “Ende Februar wurde der Ringofen fertig. Es war Freitag, und sie waren alle aufgereggt” (p. 385). Likewise, the Aehres’ long-running marital tension comes to an abrupt, dry end when, on the final page, Hans redresses his opposition to Katrin’s going to work: “Er blickte ihr in die Augen und sah wieder, was all die Jahre ausgemacht hatten: das Vertrauen zu ihm” (p. 398). The two instances have an anti-climactic effect that nullifies the supposedly organic nature of development and, in the case of the marital conflict, reads like an after-thought.¹²² As in *Robeisen*, problems that arise, for example Matschat’s acts of sabotage (e.g. pp. 143–144, 164, 180, 266, 380), moreover often incongruously legitimise the ultimate completion of the narrative by suggesting it as an even greater achievement in light of the obstacles along the

¹²¹ Claudius, *Rubelose Jahre*, p. 375.

¹²² Wightman, p. 52.

way, such that the portrayal of negativity feels superfluous and plastic, and the reader grows accustomed to the diminution of dramatic tension.

Development in *Menschen an unsrer Seite* paradoxically feels static, to the extent that its characters change in a predictable manner, albeit one that appears artificial and untypical, rendering them mechanical and even ‘abstract’.¹²³ Burdened by the ambition of exemplifying a development both in social conditions and in individual characters’ consciousness (particularly that of the hero), Claudius appears to have struggled to combine the demands of socialist realism with techniques such as tension that complicate the narrative and retain the reader’s interest. As the characters demonstrate, the socialist realist precepts alone yield one-dimensional and predictable figures who fulfil their ideological obligations but do little to make them read as anything but propagandistic material. The insistence on the didactic demonstration of a change in the reader therefore meant yoking the author to a framework that would fail either way. Even where the text toes the theoretically coherent line, therefore, the result is an ideologically and aesthetically unconvincing image that fails to live up to the political ambitions of its socialist realist framework.

Read as symbolic, that framework appears unable to signify, since the subject in the novel – the *Aufbau* workplace – neither coheres nor provides the kind of linear and objective material required in order to be manipulated into an ideologically favourable narrative. Describing the symbol, Terry Eagleton writes that concrete phenomena, ‘while posing as no more than themselves, are surreptitiously recreated in the image of their universal truth’, whereby they undergo a process of abstraction only to conceal that very process afterwards, which

¹²³ Ibid., p. 52.

Eagleton terms ‘trompe l’œil’.¹²⁴ But the flaws of the GDR’s official aesthetic method begin to appear as the contradictions in this exemplary socialist realist novel emerge; rather than some genuine realist or immanent model, socialist realism bears all the hallmarks of a subjective idealism in the symbolic mode that elevates the ‘typical’ to an anticipatory prophecy with a socialist consciousness and thereby comes close to a transcendence *par excellence*. Whereas allegory perpetually emphasises the impossibility of aesthetic transcendence, socialist realism bets on this very capacity of art to elevate its object and enable the audience access to higher meaning.¹²⁵ In reality, *Menschen an unsrer Seite* exhibits the critical flaw in socialist realism – its parallel mimesis and subjectivity – and undermines the notion of the ‘typical’, showing it to be stylised and highly ideological.

Without a didactic model in Aehre and the Party, the simple resolution of conflict, and the depiction of change, *Menschen an unsrer Seite* reads rather as a predictable work whose interaction with the socialist realist model results in a repetition of what Silberman calls the ‘closed form of classical drama’, which makes no pretence about the undialectical manner of its development.¹²⁶ Peter Zimmermann notes, for example, that internal conflict between characters is solved through their simple replacement, as in Marchwitza, which prevents any substantial or institutional changes that might effect a material improvement to the *Aufbau* present: “Statt die Arbeiter zu befähigen, selbst die Staatsgeschäfte zu übernehmen, sollen sie zu der Einsicht gebracht werden, dass die Staatsführung nur ihr Bestes will.”¹²⁷ Though Claudius succeeds in portraying the working reality of the dereified worker in Suse and Andrytzki, such ‘success’ is negated through other examples to the contrary, with the effect

¹²⁴ Eagleton, ‘The Marxist Rabbi: Walter Benjamin’, p. 324. This, ironically, is precisely Lukács’ charge against allegory in *Wider den missverstandenen Realismus*.

¹²⁵ Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 170.

¹²⁶ Silberman, p. 55.

¹²⁷ Zimmermann, p. 96.

that the novel eventually and necessarily transcends conflict so as to remain faithful to the socialist realist framework. Claudius' vision of literature, as he related in an interview in 1973, reads socialist realism as a means of transcending the difficult *Aufbau* present by utilising the aesthetic mode to escape conflict and chaos: as a 'Fegefeuer, in dem gereinigt wird'.¹²⁸ The result, however, was a novel whose plotline suffered under the burden of applying socialist realism to Garbe's story, provoking the publisher's chief editor to remark to Claudius: "Also dein Buch ist kein Betriebsroman. [...] Einmal spielt dein Roman in der Küche, ein andermal [...] im Schlafzimmer, und dann geht es wieder nach Westdeutschland."¹²⁹ Even if it disappointed the publisher's expectation of a socialist realist work, the narrative still retains its integrity, contrary to Matthias Aumüller's attribution of its theoretical failure to a weak plot.¹³⁰

In *Robeisen*, Marchwitza depicts the Party more as a hindrance than a source of encouragement to workers. Characterised by the initial representative Grube, the Party group struggles to work cohesively on site, such that after Grube's and Preißler's dismissal, the Party groups in the construction and production sections are merged (p. 408). Two Soviet engineers then come to break the stalemate that had been caused by excessive haste, a lack of expert knowledge, and poor Party work in the third and final parts (pp. 466–468), making them more genuine *dei ex machina* than Claudius' Schadow. Despite the external intervention to correct mistakes, the resultant empowerment and motivation of the workers does little to improve the Party's characterisation. Characters such as Magret Hoff follow a continued

¹²⁸ Erika Pick, 'Gespräch mit Eduard Claudius', *Sinn und Form*, 25:2 (1973), 387–396 (p. 391).

¹²⁹ Claudius, 'Macht, Verantwortung und Mut des Schriftstellers', p. 17.

¹³⁰ Matthias Aumüller specifically blames the novel's focus on 'Reparatur' rather than 'Aufbau' for this, as well as the fact that Lehre works on a whim rather than according to a 'Parteiauftrag' – Matthias Aumüller, 'Aufbauroman und literarische Moderne. Das Aufbausystem in der sozialistisch-realistischen Erzählliteratur am Beispiel von J. C. Schwarz' *Irrwege* (1961)', in *Tendenzen und Perspektiven in der gegenwärtigen DDR-Literatur-Forschung*, ed. by Katrin Max (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2016), pp. 37–54 (p. 41).

path of development, indeed by the close an SED flag flies outside the family's home, but further evidence of sabotage (p. 542) and of ideological insecurities on the part of individual workers prevents the reader from understanding *Robeisen* as a closed story. Unlike Abusch's comments that conflict belonged in the socialist realist method if contextualised and resolved, Marchwitza's text seems overwhelmed by the *Eigen-Sinn* of the labourers and their frequent reticence to participate in a new ideological system. Whilst the narrator more broadly suggests a resolution to some individuals' issues and counteracts others with transformations (such as the Hoff family), the sheer number of challenges to the physical and ideological constructions in *Robeisen* is difficult to marry with a convincing revolutionary development, with the implication either that the method mischaracterised a complex reality or that that reality proved the wrong fit for the method.

Reviewing the book for *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, Heinz Schmidt complains that Marchwitza reduces the SED to 'zum Teil wörtliche eingefügt[e] Reden [des] Generalsekretärs und des Ministerpräsidenten', as in the three appearances that Ulbricht makes in the novel and the abrupt transition into SED discourse:

Unsere Feinde, die amerikanischen und britischen Imperialisten und die deutsche Herrenkaste, haben geglaubt, dass wir ohne Hilfe versagen [...]. Aber heute können wir ihnen wieder sagen, unsere Arbeiter werden allein fertig [...]!

(Marchwitza, p. 550)¹³¹

Superficially serving to concretise the ideological impetus behind the construction, these strange interruptions to narrative voice complement the narrator's own Party-supportive interjections, but in actuality translate as dry, textbook quotations, whose positive effect on

¹³¹ Schmidt, p. 138.

workers (e.g. p. 471) reads as implausible. This approach implies that Marchwitza understood the affinity to Marxism-Leninism embedded in socialist realism as obligating him to incorporate political discourse verbatim into the work in a stroke of ideological mimesis, but his good intentions do little to improve the aloof and counterproductive Party image in *Robeisen*, a far cry from the idealist ‘führende Rolle’ expected.

A similar approach emerges, moreover, both in the references to literary works from the Soviet Union, such as *Fern von Moskau* by Vasily Azhayev and *Zement* by Feodor Gladkov (p. 498), and in the narrator’s frequent role as a motivator for the reader: “Es war ihr Frieden, die Hilfe der Freunde. – ‘Baut auf! Ihr wollt doch leben!’” (p. 204). Whilst these examples testify to Marchwitza’s emphasis on a proximity between GDR ideology and fictional reality, Marchwitza equally seems to have conflated ideology with reality itself, turning *Robeisen* into a novel that repeatedly veers away from fiction and could simply be read as reported fact. On reflection, however, the verbatim quotations and similar references to the *Aufbau* present rupture the symbolic mirage of mimetic realism in the novel to uncover the ideological stylisation expected in socialist realism and cast it as an irresolvable paradox.

One might read these real-life citations in *Robeisen* as evidence of the ‘Reportage’ genre represented in the construction of the *Eisenhüttenkombinat Ost*. In his essay ‘Reportage oder Gestaltung’, Georg Lukács outlines the drawbacks to the genre as he recognised that reportage can only identify ‘isolierte Tatsachen (oder am besten Tatsachenkomplexe)’ that remain distant from the ‘Einheit des Gesamtprozesses’, and that:

[Bei der Darstellung der objektiven Tatbestände eines solchen Entlarvungskomplexes die dabei beteiligten Menschen, ihre individuellen Erlebnisse, Schicksale usw. nur eine untergeordnete Rolle spielen konnten].¹³²

Such a conclusion would suggest that reportage inevitably violates the dialectic of essence and appearance, and renders characters immaterial to the dominant economic plans of the SED. The sheer mass of material in *Robeisen* could, in this sense, act as a distraction from the broader context of the work because individual details about characters, labour processes, and interpersonal conflicts overwhelm the cradle of ideological progress at the core of the socialist realist method. Such a reading would, moreover, explain why the narrator resorts to the plastic reproduction of current political discourse, as if from newspapers and other print material. As the two Soviet engineers successfully complete their work and bid the workforce farewell, the narrator summarises:

Michailowitsch und Schulgin [...] erklärten, dass auch sie erst alle Irrwege hätten durchlaufen und jedes Körnchen Erfahrung suchen müssen, bis sie anderen hätten helfen können. Und sie hätten einen beharrlichen Lehrmeister, Stalin, der ihnen allen so viel Neues eröffnet habe...

(Marchwitza, p. 337)

Unlike his writings on (socialist) realism, Lukács' comments on reportage offer a coherent lens with which to understand how Marchwitza neglects the breadth and harmony of socialist realism in its 'fetischistische Auseinanderreißung der Wirklichkeit' and its 'Unfähigkeit, in den "Dingen" des gesellschaftlichen Lebens Beziehungen von Menschen (Klassenbeziehungen) zu erblicken'.¹³³ In contrast to the expectation in socialist realism of depicting the individual and their transition to a socialist consciousness 'von innen', the

¹³² Lukács, 'Reportage oder Gestaltung?', pp. 38–39.

¹³³ Ibid.

reported content from the EKO site, complemented by SED discourse, blurs instances of romanticised success or teleological breakthrough. The unmediated directness of ‘Reportage’ and its documentary material, in short, inevitably jars with the mediated (even if concealed) process of the socialist realist method, which could not tolerate the reality that it hoped to embody and to improve, leaving the style somewhat muddled.

The countless contradictions and impossible paradoxes notwithstanding, the guidelines stipulated by Party sources should not be dismissed altogether, nor should one be tempted to cast socialist realism as ‘a more or less empty shell whose content was to be provided by the writers themselves’, as Geoffrey Hosking does, given that its precepts help to collate socialist realist works into a basic corpus founded, in the words of Hans Günther, on ‘ein abgestuftes Modell [...], das von unterschiedlichen Graden der Erfüllung des sozialistisch-realistischen Normensystems durch konkrete Werke ausgeht’.¹³⁴ Such a reading renders the model an interactive platform upon which artists more or less had to experiment. The two novels are indeed socialist realist, but the ambiguities of the theoretical model mean that literary products appear ambiguous, as countless examples in the texts illustrate. As a result, this analysis evidences the vast divide between theory and praxis in socialist realism – at once a comprehensive aesthetic theory and a dynamic, interpretative, and contradictory politico-cultural praxis. Reading the theory as symbolic suggests a means of understanding why this corpus of socialist realist texts necessarily disappointed critics at the time, as the matter of translating theory into reality proved to be the greatest challenge.

¹³⁴ Günther, *Die Verstaatlichung der Literatur*, pp. 110–111; Geoffrey Hosking, *Beyond Socialist Realism: Soviet Fiction since Ivan Denisovich* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1980), p. 6. Consider articles in *Neues Deutschland* and *Neue Deutsche Literatur* (see bibliography).

Conclusion

Despite their canonisation, neither *Menschen an unsrer Seite* nor *Roheisen* was uncontroversial, in part because they appear at once to meet and break the criteria of socialist realism. A close reading of the two texts has revealed the impossibility of practising socialist realism because of the paradoxical demands on literary works to be timeless and contingent at the same time. If even the pinnacles of the state-approved aesthetic method in the GDR fray into disagreement and dissatisfaction because its tenets yielded contradictory results, then the writer's success within the cultural sphere was anything but secure. In the case of 'Parteilichkeit', for instance, the diegetic reality in the two novels is inflected with specific ideological criteria, which can only ever subjectivise and fetishise the lived reality of GDR workers. The texts illustrate how the theorised 'realism' in the model gives way to a politicised notion of the 'typical' that mischaracterises the actual object for the sake of an ideologically coherent and transcendent totality. Socialist realism, therefore, cannot generate the unity between the real-life subject and its aesthetic symbol, resulting in a chasm between its portrayal as a source of ideological enlightenment and its distance from actual reality. The kind of signification required for the model to inspire its audiences falls victim to the ambiguity in any applications of its tenets, which might cohere theoretically but which in practice prevent authors from marrying a harmonious idealism with the reality of a society undergoing considerable and systemic change.

Insofar as socialist realism purportedly inherits principles from the 'kulturelles Erbe', it not only fetishises and generalises the objects that it depicts; it also propagates a fallacious aesthetic practice by which virtues such as beauty and truth become objectively realisable and perceptible, whereas the intradiegetic conflicts and tensions, as well as the divided but far from uncritical reception, tell a different story. The biggest flaw in the Party's preferred

method, therefore, lies in the attempted combination of an already incoherent theory based on universality and total coherence with a highly subjective and stylised ideology that had to bend and shape that totality to achieve a given goal. So long as the symbol obfuscates its material basis, claiming to capture reality in its totality but thereby concealing its ideologised mediation of this material as part of a transcendence, it must attempt to conceal its internal paradox in order to survive.

Alfred Kurella, an author and head of the *Politbüro's Kulturkommission*, expressed the SED's perspective in describing socialist art as the 'Weiterbildung alles Großen und Schönen, das die Menschheit bisher in allen Künsten geschaffen hat'.¹³⁵ In hindsight, the SED's hope in socialist realism of fabricating the socialist future and having a transformational, transcendental effect upon the audience for the benefit of the *Aufbau* moment failed to reckon with the complexity of the historical present. It was cast both as the successor of a rehearsed realism based on timeless criteria and as the flagbearer of a radical contemporaneous ideology, resulting in a contradiction between the attempt to promote 'alles Groß[e] und Schön[e]' and the ideologised representation of real life under socialism.

Any symbolic theory deprives the audience of an active role because the work theoretically produces the same outcome time and again because of the symbolic unity between subjects (the sign and signified across the aesthetic border). That this kind of postlapsarian unity cannot exist, in Benjamin's reading, since it relies on and promotes non-contingent values to communicate some coherent meaning to the reader each and every time, renders the symbol a masquerade. Thus, this analysis of Claudius and Marchwitza substantiates the interpretation

¹³⁵ Alfred Kurella, 'Erfahrungen und Probleme sozialistischer Kulturarbeit', *Neues Deutschland*, 29 April 1960, 4.

of GDR socialist realism and of the symbol as an ‘impossible aesthetic’.¹³⁶ The two novels patently echo the central aspects of the state aesthetic method in similar ways, verifying their status even now as key texts in the GDR’s early socialist realist canon. However, that the texts work within a flawed model means that they necessarily question its legitimacy because of the impossibility of realising all of its precepts, for which reason the reading of *Menschen an unsrer Seite* and *Robeisen* as socialist realism *par excellence* should be discarded.

These two works responded to the apparent needs of their social present using pre-formed answers provided by the state, but they failed to do so comprehensively because the aesthetic model could not fulfil the task of addressing the complexities of the *Aufbau* present. Insofar as the two novels masquerade as socialist realism without achieving it, they demonstrate the unavoidable contradiction in the core of symbolism: its claim to encompass a perfect totality without ever achieving it. The aesthetic performance of socialist realism must therefore always be a performance of its failure, uncloaking it as the symbol masquerading as the symbol that it cannot ever be.

The flawed pursuit of totality not just identifies socialist realism as a symbolic method, but also indicates the transcendent motivation behind SED cultural discourse, in which ‘das Schöne’ served as a benchmark when countering formalism and revisionism:¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

¹³⁷ Orlow, 5.

Das Schöne, unabhängig vom menschlichen Subjekt den Dingen innewohnend, losgerissen von dem jeweils objektiv erreichten und erreichbaren historischen Status der Subjekt-Objekt-Dialektik, herausgelöst aus dem geschichtlichen Prozess der Selbstverwirklichung des Menschen als Subjekt, wird in dieser Absolutheit selbst zum Fetisch.¹³⁸

This overlap would suggest an affinity in SED policy to what GDR academic and functionary Wilhelm Girnus identifies as a kind of bourgeois cult of beauty, which – despite Girnus’ actual intention of praising socialist realism – also explains the highly subjective nature of the state method and the Party’s rationale in mandating it. More than simply echoing an idealistic aesthetic founded on eternal values and truths – a model criticised so heavily by Girnus – GDR socialist realism even fetishises the symbol because of the naïve claim in its theory both to capturing reality coherently and recasting it ideologically according to concrete guidelines and characteristics. The state method does not just echo symbolic praxes of the past, therefore, but selectively amalgamates aspects of them together with a radical political programme into products that critics, in turn, condemned for failing to adhere to the method fully.

That canonical texts of socialist realist literature prove incoherent and politically ineffective does not, nevertheless, mean that the broader literary sphere in the *Aufbau* succumbed entirely to a monosemic praxis, despite the political foundation for such an approach. Instead, manifold aesthetic methods emerged in the early GDR to expand upon and challenge the sovereignty of socialist realism. Some of these methods, moreover, emerged from within the ambiguous socialist realism framework, such that a reading of the Party-

¹³⁸ Wilhelm Girnus, *Zukunftslinien: Überlegungen zur Theorie des sozialistischen Realismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Marxistische Blätter, 1974), p. 30.

preferred template as either absolute or defunct overlooked works that expand and develop it from within, as do the novels analysed in the following chapter. Having established the symbolic guise of the state method here, in the following chapters I examine other praxes that deviated from or experimented with socialist realism through the lens of Benjaminian allegory so as to locate a common theoretical apparatus with which to measure their effectiveness at communicating political content and responding to their historical moment collectively. As a starting point, Chapter Four considers works that retain a degree of affiliation to the state model, but whose dialectical expression of the complex temporal consciousness in the *Aufbau* – centred on the experience of flight and expulsion at the close of the Second World War – provides a fruitful allegorical alternative.

CHAPTER FOUR
‘AUFERSTANDEN AUS RUINEN UND DER ZUKUNFT
ZUGEWANDT’: ALLEGORY AND TEMPORALITY IN NOVELS
BY REINHARD, VOELKNER, RAUCHFUSS, AND MÜLLER-
BEECK

Jede Erinnerung trägt, sie eignet sich nicht sehr
zum objektiven Zeugnis.
(Christa Wolf)¹

und in den tausend und abertausend Tonnen
Vergangenheit...darin ist etwas, das noch nicht
gelernt hat zu schweigen.
(Wolfgang Hilbig)²

This chapter applies Walter Benjamin’s conception of history to a corpus of novels by and about refugees and expellees from the German-speaking diaspora of Central and Eastern Europe in order to measure their temporal consciousness as a marker for allegory. Following the examination in the previous chapter of socialist realism as a symbolic method using two exemplary texts, here four novels that retrospectively depict the experience and/or aftermath of flight serve as examples for authors’ experimentation with the Party-sanctioned method and the potential of an allegorical hermeneutic for the *Aufbau* context. In light of the conclusion that the theoretical tenets of socialist realism offered artists a difficult, lacunary method with which they necessarily experimented but were critically unsuccessful, experimentation did not equal dissidence, but rather occurred even in canonical examples of the GDR’s state aesthetic. This corpus of novels falls on a spectrum of affiliation to, and

¹ Christa Wolf, *Der geteilte Himmel* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008), p. 135.

² Wolfgang Hilbig, *Die Kunde von den Bäumen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1994), p. 101.

autonomy from, a theoretical form of socialist realism but also veers, in my reading, towards allegoricism. I therefore dispense with any binaries either of socialist realism and dissidence or of allegory and symbol because of the challenge in differentiating what, in practice, were interconnected models. Instead, I investigate how a historical materialist reading of the four novels explains their productive experimentation with politico-aesthetic norms through their varied chronologies and explicit retrospection, which I liken to an allegorical structure, but that other symbolic elements prevail. I argue, moreover, that this introduction of temporal diversity in fact helped the texts to provide a more apt response to the *Aufbau* present through the generation of 'Jetztzeit' in that present, which allowed for the acknowledgement of urgent questions about the recent past and for a moderation of the SED's utopian stance on the *Aufbau des Sozialismus*.

The significance of temporality in allegory stems from Benjamin's regard for the Baroque itself as an allegorical period because it saw, in the ruins of war, the rubble collected as fragments and transformed into aesthetic material, which resulted in a supposed decadence or insufficiency according to the standards of symbolic coherence.³ The *Aufbau* found itself in a very similar position historically, and much of its literature has faced a comparable practice of critical dismissal. Whilst Benjamin, although ultimately critical of the transcendental turn in the 'Trauerspiel', recognises allegorical aesthetics as a valid response to the period, I argue that the same applies to literary works in the *Aufbau* and argue that an allegorical reading helps to discern their potential contributions to cultural policy. That all four novels simultaneously demonstrate symbolic tendencies limits their potential, however;

³ Benjamin, *UDT*, pp. 244–245, 252–254, 272.

thus, I turn later to Benjamin's analyses of the *Angelus Novus* to ascertain the consequences of this ambiguity.

Locating novels with a particular historical emphasis on the wartime and postwar flight and expulsion of Germans did not prove simple, however, despite the significance of these events. In all, of the between ten and fifteen million people who were forced to flee their homes, two million diasporic Germans lost their lives because of attack or illness, manifesting the inhuman material conditions and staggering proportions of these movements of people, especially when compared with the approximately two and a quarter million overall deaths of German civilian casualties otherwise in the War.⁴ Whilst examples of refugees and expellees from Germany's former eastern territories abound in GDR literature, including Martha Karge in *Robeisen* and Aehre himself in *Menschen an unsrer Seite*, the works in this corpus only thematise expulsion, flight, and integration through minor characters or as a subplot, which confines the actual temporal focus of the work, beyond superficial mention of the past, to a future orientation.⁵ I found little archival evidence of such texts and, as I explore below, located only scant references in secondary literature.

The product of this research is a corpus of four novels depicting flight and its aftermath from East Prussia and Silesia: Annemarie Reinhard's *Treibgut* (1949); Edith Müller-Beeck's *Westfälische Ernte* (1953); Benno Voelkner's *Die Tage werden heller* (1952); and Hildegard Maria Rauchfuss' *Wem die Steine Antwort geben* (1953). Axel Dornemann defines literary flight and expulsion in texts 'die thematisch vom Kriegserlebnis unmittelbar vor der Flucht bis zur

⁴ Manfred Wille, 'Die Zentralverwaltung für deutsche Umsiedler – Möglichkeiten und Grenzen ihres Wirkens (1945–1948)', in *Sie hatten alles verloren: Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands*, ed. by Manfred Wille, Johannes Hoffmann & Wolfgang Meinicke (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1993), pp. 25–54 (p. 35).

⁵ Carola Hähnel-Mesnard, 'Narrative der Flucht, Vertreibung und Integration in der DDR-Literatur der 1950er Jahre', *Treibhaus: Jahrbuch für die Literatur der fünfziger Jahre* (Munich: text + kritik, 2009), pp. 121–43 (p. 137).

Wiederbegegnung mit den verlorenen Heimaten lange nach der Vertreibung reichen’;⁶ however I additionally distinguish between *experienced* or *autofictional* (i.e. first-hand but fictionalised) and *thematized* (i.e. not derived from first-hand experience) narratives. Although space does not suffice here to analyse the differences that this distinction might entail, the novels by Reinhard and Müller-Beeck are incidentally *thematized* narratives, whereas both Voelkner’s and Rauchfuss’ novels are *experienced* or *autofictional*. In this chapter, I build on Dornemann’s conception by distinguishing fiction by former ‘resettlers’ and by foregoing the expectation of a reunion with the lost ‘Heimat’, since this circular gesture would serve to resolve the initial displacement through a return and does not suit the state-supporting perspective exhibited by the novels.⁷

Flight and Expulsion in the Third Reich and Allied Zones

Some context is required in order to examine the historical emphasis in these novels. The forced migration of Germans under Hitler followed the earlier redrawing of the national borders in the Treaty of Versailles after World War I in 1919, which National Socialists considered an offence to national sovereignty. In response, Hitler set out to annex foreign territories, then expel and/or exterminate the local populations there in order to repopulate what his movement perceived as rightfully German land with German-speaking groups from across the continental diaspora under what he called the ‘Volk ohne Raum’ policy.⁸ In parallel, the National Socialist government signed non-aggression pacts with Latvia and

⁶ Axel Dornemann, *Flucht und Vertreibung aus den ehemaligen deutschen Ostgebieten in Prosaliteratur und Erlebnisbericht seit 1945: eine annotierte Bibliographie* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2005), p. xiv; Louis Ferdinand Helbig, *Der ungeheure Verlust: Flucht und Vertreibung in der deutschsprachigen Belletristik der Nachkriegszeit*, 3rd edn (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), p. xi.

⁷ I use the terms refugees and expellees in parallel to describe those from the German diaspora who fled or were forced from their homes in East Prussia, Silesia, the Sudetenland, Pomerania, Mark, and areas of Brandenburg, Mecklenburg, and Saxony, as well as from minority communities in other European states. ‘Refugee’ and ‘expellee’ became particularly prevalent in West Germany, whereas ‘Umsiedler:in’ or ‘resettler’ dominated GDR state discourse. Due to the contested nature of the latter term, I cite it only within inverted commas.

⁸ Alexander von Plato & Wolfgang Meinicke, *Alte Heimat – neue Zeit: Flüchtlinge, Umgesiedelte, Vertriebene in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und in der DDR* (Berlin: Union, 1991), pp. 12–14; Alfred Maurice de Zayas, *Anmerkungen zur Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten*, 3rd edn (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1993), p. 55.

Estonia in June 1939, Poland in 1941, and Lithuania in 1941, with the aim of receiving a commitment from those states not to intervene in conflict in exchange for ordering the exit – if not expulsion – of Germans from those states, giving way to the slogan ‘heim ins Reich’.⁹ The pact signed with Stalin’s USSR in August 1939 demonstrates the double purpose at work here, since the simultaneous provision for the division of Poland in the pact entailed both the theoretical protection of the Third Reich from direct Soviet conflict and also the settlement of recently expelled Germans (from Lithuania, for example) in the newly partitioned Poland, meaning that the policies served both defensive and racial-ideological ends.¹⁰

After leaving countries that they had, as part of German-speaking minorities, called their homes, expellees took up residence in places in which local populations had only just fallen victim to Hitler’s racial ideology (‘Rassenideologie’), leaving their domestic status problematic and uncertain. This resettlement constitutes what I refer to as the first exodus of Germans in the 1940s, which paves the way for the repeated movements of expulsion that befell the German-speaking diaspora up until and beyond 1945. Subsequently, but before the War had ended, the fear of attack by Allied or German troops and the impending arrival of the Soviet army drove many inhabitants of conflict zones to take flight towards the eastern German border.¹¹ Unlike the ‘organised’ expulsions (or resettlement) of diasporic Germans at the behest of the Nazi government, here flight befell those frightened for their lives and who had little other choice but to leave their homes. This movement constitutes a second exodus. Von Plato estimates that, by the end of the Second World War, four million

⁹ Hans Werner Rautenberg, ‘Flucht und Vertreibung – 40 Jahre danach’, in *Vertrieben... Literarische Zeugnisse von Flucht und Vertreibung. Eine Auswahl aus Romanen, Erzählungen, Gedichten, Tagebüchern und Zeichnungen der Jahre 1945–1985*, ed. by Ernst-Edmund Keil (Bonn: Kulturstiftung der deutschen Vertriebenen, 1985), 321–336 (p. 328–329).

¹⁰ Von Plato & Meinicke, pp. 12–14.

¹¹ Manfred Wille, *Die Vertriebenen in der SBZ, DDR: Dokumente* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), I: *Ankunft und Aufnahme 1945*, p. 7.

Germans had already left their homes, some in response to Hitler's expansionist strategy and others as a direct consequence of war.¹²

In concord with the geographical reckoning concluded in Versailles twenty-five years earlier, the US, UK, and Soviet conferences in Tehran in 1943 and Yalta in 1945 resulted in the shift of the Polish border to the West in response to the Soviet Union's annexation of the country's eastern regions in 1939, thereby reducing German land mass.¹³ As part of these negotiations, leaders additionally considered a 'Bevölkerungstransfer' of diasporic Germans from eastern Central Europe, with Winston Churchill specifically urging against any resulting 'mixture of populations' because it would 'cause endless trouble', proclaiming instead: "A clean sweep will be made."¹⁴ Many expellees had also already begun to leave German territories east of the Oder and Neisse rivers in accordance with a Soviet proclamation that predated the Allies' Potsdam Conference of August 1945, but this forced, third exodus concerned millions more.

At first, the 'Allierter Kontrollrat', representing the administrative states of the occupying zones in Germany, held responsibility for determining how quickly and when this resettlement should take place, and that it '*in ordnungsgemäßer und humaner Weise* erfolg[te]'.¹⁵ However, Manfred Wille notes that Polish and Czechoslovakian authorities soon disregarded this command in favour of independently organised expulsions, which led to a sudden surge in the number of people on the road.¹⁶ Those affected here fell victim to political decision-

¹² Von Plato & Meinicke, p. 10.

¹³ Dornemann, *Flucht und Vertreibung*, p. xviii.

¹⁴ Quoted in Philipp Ther, 'Vertriebenenpolitik in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und der DDR 1945 bis 1953', in *Vertreibung, Neuanfang, Integration. Erfahrungen in Brandenburg*, ed. by Christoph Kleßmann, Burghard Ciesla & Hans-Hermann Hertle (Potsdam: Brandenburgische Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 2001), pp. 89–111 (p. 91).

¹⁵ 'Protocol of the Potsdam Conference', cited in de Zayas, p. 125 (my italics).

¹⁶ Wille, *Die Vertriebenen in der SBZ, DDR*, p. 121.

making at the end of the War, although this third exodus did not end in 1945, but rather evictions from Czechoslovakia, Silesia, Romania, Hungary, and northern areas of East Prussia continued into 1947.¹⁷ The reason for fleeing was, finally, not always discernible or succinct, since both the order to leave and a (traumatised) fear of attack may have contributed to the ‘decision’.

Most refugees, in particular those from the former territories east of the Oder-Neiße Line, first arrived at the borders of the SBZ, due to its geography, at which authorities had to arrange their basic provisions (food, shelter, medical attention) and further transfer.¹⁸ Due to a lack of administrative oversight and – or because of – the sheer number of people concerned, precise figures of arrivals in the SBZ per year do not exist; nonetheless, estimates from a census suggest that ten million refugees and expellees had arrived by 1946, whilst during the course of the following four years between twelve and sixteen million people left their homes in total.¹⁹ Most refugees soon moved on to the other occupying zones, but circa

¹⁷ Peter-Heinz Seraphim, *Die Heimatvertriebenen in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone* (Bonn: Bundes-Verlag, 1955), p. 8. Approximately one million Germans were, additionally, deported to the Soviet Union during the second and third exoduses, often as forced labourers. Whilst their fate does not reflect that of refugees and expellees that resettled in Germany, it has clear relevance to the history of forced migration at the time – see Volker Ackermann, ‘Integration von Aussiedlern und Flüchtlingen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der DDR in der Nachkriegszeit. Ein Überblick’, in *Integration von Aussiedlern: eine Herausforderung für die Weiterbildung*, ed. by Hans-Peter Baumeister (Weinheim: Studien, 1991), pp. 78–90 (p. 79); Jochen Oltmer, ‘Zwangswanderung nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg’, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 15 March 2005 <<https://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/migration/dossier-migration-ALT/56359/nach-dem-2-weltkrieg>> [accessed 21 September 2020].

¹⁸ Dierk Hoffmann, ‘Binnenwanderung und Arbeitsmarkt. Beschäftigungspolitik unter dem Eindruck der Bevölkerungsverschiebung in Deutschland nach 1945’, in *Vertriebene in Deutschland: Interdisziplinäre Ergebnisse und Forschungsperspektiven*, ed. by Dierk Hoffmann, Marita Krauss & Michael Schwartz (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2000), pp. 219–236 (p. 227); Philipp Ther, ‘Expellee Policy in the Soviet-occupied Zone and the GDR: 1945–1953’, in *Coming Home to Germany? The Integration of Ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern Europe in the Federal Republic*, ed. by David Rock & Stefan Wolff (New York: Berghahn, 2002), pp. 56–76. Manfred Wille explains how further challenges hampered the response to the crisis in the SBZ: the Zone contained or was located near to Vorpommern, Mark Brandenburg, and Ostachsen, amongst the worst destroyed regions in the final months of conflict, which doubtless forced even more from their homes; secondly, the responsibility for the transfer of refugees to other occupied zones fell squarely on the SMAD; thirdly, the simultaneous deconstruction of industry and infrastructure qua Soviet reparations stretched the provision of food and medical attention, itself already strained because of the war-torn landscape and the requirement to offer sustenance to the occupying army – Manfred Wille, ‘Zu einigen Fragen der Aufnahme und Integration der Vertriebenen in der SBZ/DDR’, in *50 Jahre Flucht und Vertreibung: Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede bei der Aufnahme und Integration der Vertriebenen in die Gesellschaften der Westzonen/Bundesrepublik und der SBZ/DDR*, ed. by Manfred Wille (Magdeburg: Block, 1997), pp. 29–54 (pp. 30–31).

¹⁹ Wille, *Die Vertriebenen in der SBZ, DDR*, pp. 200–202, 226–228; Ackermann, p. 79; Katja Hartleb, *Flucht und Vertreibung: ein Tabuthema in der DDR-Literatur?* (Marburg: Tectum, 2011), p. 19.

three and a half million remained in the SBZ in 1949, such that, of a relatively small population of 17.9 million total inhabitants, 24.1% (or 4.32 million) had resettled there from elsewhere.²⁰ According to higher estimates, thirteen million expellees and refugees were in the western zones by 1966, equalling 18% of the population, which includes the one to one a half million people who subsequently emigrated from the SBZ/GDR before the building of the Berlin Wall.²¹

Aside from the enormous strain on SBZ authorities and their resources, the ideological and cartographical separation of Germany into zones incurred shortages of supplies for refugees, particularly in the Soviet Zone, since certain raw materials could only be sourced in other zones whose authorities could or, for political reasons, would no longer make these available. In response, the SMAD conceived a series of measures that would alleviate the burden on local authorities, including the localisation of responsibility to mayors or 'Landräte', the establishment of a Zone-wide *Abteilung für Umsiedlerfragen*, and material aid, such as a one-off payment of 300 Deutsche Mark (DM) to adults and 100 DM to children.²²

The Soviet-initiated but German-run *Zentralverwaltung für Flüchtlingswesen und Heimkehrer*, rapidly renamed *Zentralverwaltung für Umsiedler* (ZVU), primarily administrated the affairs of expellees from September 1945, with KPD member Josef Schlaffer serving as first president. Aside from seeing to material questions, the ZVU also considered its task party-political and

²⁰ [n.a.], 'Die Bevölkerungsstruktur Deutschlands und der sowjetischen Besatzungszone', BArch SAPMO DY 30/71755, vol. 3, p. 1; Hoffmann, p. 237; Wille, 'Zu einigen Fragen der Aufnahme und Integration der Vertriebenen in der SBZ/DDR', p. 33.

²¹ Michael Schwartz, 'Tabu und Erinnerung: Zur Vertriebenen-Problematik in Politik und literarischer Öffentlichkeit der DDR', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 51:1 (2003), 85–101 (p. 85); Wille, *Die Vertriebenen in der SBZ, DDR*, p. 37.

²² Hartleb, p. 20; von Plato & Meinicke, p. 37; Seraphim, p. 9. The AFU was integrated into the SED's *Abteilung für Zivilangelegenheiten* in May 1946 – Wille, 'Zu einigen Fragen der Aufnahme und Integration der Vertriebenen in der SBZ/DDR', pp. 91–93. Note that unaccompanied persons or those fit for work did not qualify for one-off payments.

assessed the resettlement programme accordingly, which meant for example permitting entry only to self-professed anti-fascists out of a fear of unrest amongst refugees:

Wir wollen nur Antifaschisten siedeln. Es ist klar, dass wir uns auch auf andere Organe einrichten müssen. In den Hauptlagern wollen wir gleich unterscheiden, damit wir sofort wissen, wen wir vor uns haben.²³

To this end, the ZVU foresaw placing ‘politisch Unzuverlässige’, the infirm and weak, the elderly, lone persons, and former Nazis in permanent camps – a programme, nonetheless, that found little to no traction on the ground.²⁴ The heightened politicisation of the matter in the SBZ and GDR hints at a shift from pure provision to careful steering as part of developing Party ambitions, although aid efforts for expellees and refugees did continue.²⁵ Whilst the ZVU’s incorporation into the interior ministry in mid-1948 and its resultant reduction in size testify to a shift in focus away from targeted aid,²⁶ the GDR’s *Volkskammer* propagated in 1950 – the first year of its existence – the ‘Gesetz zur weiteren Verbesserung der Lage der ehemaligen Umsiedler in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik’ with provisions for refugees.²⁷ The continued attention paid to the acute issues of expellees should, therefore, dispel any doubt around the serious engagement of authorities with the fate of their newest citizens vis-à-vis the *Aufbau* project, even if the Party’s stance by this

²³ See for example the October 1945 report about material conditions, quoted in von Plato & Meinicke, p. 30; Wille, *Die Vertriebenen in der SBZ, DDR*, p. 243.

²⁴ Manfred Wille, ‘Die Vertriebenen und das politisch-staatliche System der SBZ/DDR’, in *Vertriebene in Deutschland*, ed. by Hoffmann, Krauss & Schwartz, pp. 203–218 (p. 203–204).

²⁵ Consider, for example, the SMAD’s localised assistance in Görlitz and Chemnitz, which respectively opened a ‘Wohlfahrtsamt’ in May and June 1945, through which authorities arranged emergency accommodation, established lost persons offices, and organised further supplies – Regine Lust, ‘Zur Lösung des Umsiedlerproblems auf dem Gebiet der DDR 1945 bis Anfang der fünfziger Jahre’, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* (DDR), 35:11 (1987), 971–984 (p. 975).

²⁶ Wille, ‘Zu einigen Fragen der Aufnahme und Integration der Vertriebenen in der SBZ/DDR’, pp. 192–193.

²⁷ Measures included: that local authorities should finish building accommodation for refugees by 1952; interest-free loans of 5,000 DM to this end; 10,000 milk cows purchasable with interest-free loans; the potential to reduce the ‘Ablieferungssoll’ for so-called ‘Umsiedlerneubauern’ by up to 50%; loans for craftspeople with favourable rates of 5,000 DM; priority for accommodation; particular support for children who missed school because of resettlement; preference for teaching posts and scholarships for further study; and interest-free loans of 1,000 DM for furniture – [n.a.], ‘Gesetz über die weitere Verbesserung der Lage der ehemaligen Umsiedler in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik’ (1950), BArch DY 34/27737/70–74; Lust, p. 983. Approximately half of those eligible for furniture and homebuilding loans applied, whilst 3551 craftspeople took out loans available to them – [n.a.], ‘Erläuterungen des Innenministeriums der DDR zur Lage der ehemaligen Umsiedler (20. Oktober 1953)’, in *Deutsche Geschichte in Dokumenten und Bildern* <http://ghdi.ghd-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=4551&language=german> [accessed 22 September 2020].

time appeared somewhat ambiguous. Indeed, Philipp Ther notes that pecuniary limitations did prevent the SED from fulfilling its ideological ambition in the case of all requested loans, but that: “[D]ie DDR den Rahmen ihrer bescheidenen finanziellen Möglichkeiten für die ‘Umsiedler’ voll ausschöpfte und bis an die Grenzen der Leistungsfähigkeit ging.”²⁸

Naming and Sustaining the GDR’s ‘Umsiedler:innen’

Whilst the western zones opted for the terms ‘Flüchtlinge’ and ‘Vertriebene’, the Soviets in the SBZ devised the term ‘Umsiedler’ via the Russian ‘pereselenjetz’ (Переселенец). ‘Umsiedler’ had been applied to previous deportations in the USSR and was, unlike refugee or expellee, deemed neutral because it would not infringe upon the sensibility of Central and Eastern European states nor of the CPSU, which had agreed to and implemented the forced migration.²⁹ The term described ‘diejenigen Personen deutscher Nationalität [...], die ihren ständigen Wohnsitz außerhalb der in Potsdam fixierten Grenzen Deutschlands gehabt hatten und nun angesiedelt werden mussten’.³⁰ A similar definition appears in the transcript from a meeting of officials in the SBZ from September 1945:

In der Bezeichnung ‘Umsiedler’ soll einmal vermieden werden der harte Ausdruck, der heißt, dass wir nur Flüchtlinge und Heimkehrer zu betreuen haben, sondern wir wollen die Menschen, die aus dem Osten und später aus Ungarn, Jugoslawien usw. kommen, hier umsiedeln.³¹

²⁸ Ther, ‘Vertriebenenpolitik in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und der DDR 1945 bis 1953’, p. 107.

²⁹ Heike Amos, *Die Vertriebenenpolitik der SED 1949 bis 1990* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009), p. 17.

³⁰ Lust, p. 976.

³¹ See ‘Protokoll der ersten Beratung der Zentralverwaltung für deutsche Umsiedler mit den Leitern der Umsiedlerämter der Landes- und Provinzialverwaltungen (Auszüge)’, 25 September 1945, quoted in Wille, *Die Vertriebenen in der SBZ, DDR*, pp. 241–242. The vice-president of the ZVU, Michael Tschesnow, further concretised the decision in favour of the term, noting how its use ‘verpflichtet, sowohl den Umsiedler als auch denjenigen, zu dem er umsiedelt. Er verpflichtet auch im weiteren Sinne, nämlich alles zu tun, damit der Umsiedler recht bald aufhört, Umsiedler zu sein und sich als solcher zu fühlen’ – Michael Tschesnow, ‘Mit Herz und Kopf’, BArch DY 34/27737/24, p. 1.

Whilst these definitions appear straightforward, the challenge and politics of translinguistic nomenclature become clear in the Soviets' ignorance that the term 'Umsiedler' had previously been used as part of Hitler's 'Volk ohne Raum' policy.³² According to Peter N. Gengler, the Soviet aspiration to break away from western expressions (refugee, expellee) and to propagate solidarity with people across the USSR, moreover, 'relativi[sed] allusions to violence or injustice implied in the terms "refugee" (*Flüchtlinge*) and "expellee" (*Vertriebene*)'.³³

But the term 'Umsiedler' soon lost ground as local authorities gradually opted for 'Neubürger', for example, and as the SED proposed 'Umgesiedelter' in 1949/50 to emphasise the perceived conclusion of integration efforts – but neither term caught on, especially as many continued, informally, to employ the terms favoured in the West.³⁴ The 1950 law became an opportunity to determine and dictate state vocabulary, thus it was no mistake that the title specified 'ehemalige Umsiedler', which indicated unequivocally that the chaos and hardship of the late 1940s had come to an end with the expellees' arrival in the SBZ/GDR.³⁵ However, the term 'ehemalige Umsiedler' aggravated German-German relations, as the claim of successful integration waded into cross-border debates around the superiority of West or East German policy towards the so-called 'Umsiedlerproblem'. Schwartz asserts that some of the SED's contentions may not have been baseless, as the SBZ/GDR immediately aimed at full integration unlike the FRG's division between 'Integrationshilfe' and 'Integrationsvorbehalt', constituting 'frühzeitige und weitreichende

³² An 'Aufruf zur Umsiedlung' from 1940 proclaims: "Wir rufen alle Deutschstämmigen auf, sich beim deutschen Bevollmächtigten an den angegebenen Orten zu melden und den Wunsch zur *Umsiedlung* zu äußern!" – de Zayas, p. 53 (my italics). See also Michael Schwartz, "Vom Umsiedler zum Staatsbürger". Totalitäres und Subversives in der Sprachpolitik der SBZ/DDR', in *Vertriebene in Deutschland*, ed. by Hoffmann, Krauss & Schwartz, pp. 135–166 (p. 137).

³³ Peter N. Gengler, "New Citizens" or "Community of Fate"? Early Discourses and Policies on "Flight and Expulsion" in the Two Postwar Germanys', *Central European History*, 53 (2020), 314–334 (p. 321).

³⁴ E.g. in [n.a.], 'Die Einbürgerung der Umsiedler in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik', SAPMO DY 30/71755, vol. 3; Schwartz, "Vom Umsiedler zum Staatsbürger". Totalitäres und Subversives in der Sprachpolitik der SBZ/DDR', pp. 149–150.

³⁵ Schwartz, "Vom Umsiedler zum Staatsbürger". Totalitäres und Subversives in der Sprachpolitik der SBZ/DDR', p. 158.

soziale Integrationsangebote – vielleicht in größerem Ausmaß als die frühe westdeutsche Nachkriegsgesellschaft'.³⁶ The tangible consequences of SMAD and SED actions included demonstrably lower numbers of those living in temporary camps in 1950: in the GDR, 43,085 refugees remained by 1950 compared to 276,000 in the former British Zone and 115,200 in the former US Zone, of whom 110,000 were in Bavaria alone.³⁷

The GDR's Refugees and Expellees – A Political *and* Literary Taboo?

There followed, however, a polarising disappearance of 'Umsiedler' from public discourse, as the SED officially proclaimed the end and success of its reintegration policy, and made clear its priorities when 'Umsiedlerpolitik und DDR-System schienen frühzeitig inkompatibel geworden zu sein', as Schwartz writes.³⁸ Ther suggests that, when efforts such as so-called 'Umsiedler-Wochen' did not fulfil expectations, the Party 'began to gloss over the integration problem and solve it through denial'.³⁹ In 1949, SED leadership ordered silence, as suggested by a draft document composed by the ZK's *Organisationsabteilung*:

³⁶ The most substantial West German provision for expellees and refugees was the 'Lastenausgleichsgesetz' of 1952, which offered financial compensation to those concerned. See also Schwartz, 'Tabu und Erinnerung: Zur Vertriebenen-Problematik in Politik und literarischer Öffentlichkeit der DDR', pp. 86–7.

³⁷ Ther, 'Vertriebenenpolitik in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und der DDR 1945 bis 1953', p. 97. As Seraphim notes, however, conditions in the camps were far from sanitary, leading to disease outbreaks, and the clearing of these camps did not automatically equate to the receipt of adequate lodgings in return – Seraphim, pp. 8, 25. Nagelstutz submits that the camps equally lacked basics such as furniture, cutlery and adequate bedding – Stefan Nagelstutz, 'Umsiedler' in der SBZ/DDR: *Vertriebenenintegration in der SBZ/DDR 1945–1953* (Saarbrücken: Müller, [2008]), p. 24. The acute material conditions specific to the SBZ/GDR have also generated the view that the 'neu[e] Fremdheit' of a politically and sociologically very different state, for example the new friendship with the USSR or rise of anti-fascist ideology, befell expellees and so-called 'Einheimische' alike, such that the integration of the former and solidarity of the latter came about more rapidly than expected – Schwartz, "'Vom Umsiedler zum Staatsbürger'". Totalitäres und Subversives in der Sprachpolitik der SBZ/DDR', p. 160; von Plato & Meinicke, p. 260.

³⁸ Schwartz, 'Tabu und Erinnerung: Zur Vertriebenen-Problematik in Politik und literarischer Öffentlichkeit der DDR', p. 87.

³⁹ Ther, 'Expellee Policy in the Soviet-occupied Zone and the GDR: 1945–1953', p. 62.

Keine Diskussionen mehr über das ‘Umsiedlerproblem’, sondern nur noch Diskussionen über unsere Arbeit und Sozialpolitik. Der Begriff ‘Umsiedler’ muss schnellstens verschwinden. Alle Genossen sind darauf aufmerksam zu machen, dass nur noch vom sozialen Gesichtspunkt aus gehandelt und gesprochen werden sollte. Unter dem Begriff Umsiedler oder Flüchtlinge verbergen sich oft Klassenfeinde, die unter dieser Führung alle Machtpositionen zu gewinnen versuchen.⁴⁰

Hoffmann notes that, as strands of the 1950 law such as the furniture and housing loans began to expire by 1952–3, the SED did not replace them.⁴¹ Finances played a role in this decision, but so did the ideological unity behind the *Aufbau* and the Party’s ostensible anxiety around refugees’ integration into the population, as part of which functionaries did not envisage privileging ‘Umsiedler-Sonderinteressen’.⁴²

This swift removal of so-called ‘resettlers’ from Party discourse has received much academic attention; however, many scholars have described a complete taboo around ‘Umsiedler:innen’ in SED discourse after 1950, the law notwithstanding, and in GDR public discourse after 1952/3.⁴³ As evidence to chide the SED and its ‘taboo’, many scholars have described the absence of literary depictions of flight.⁴⁴ Some studies on works from the

⁴⁰ Schäfer, ‘Entwurf: Bemerkungen der Org.-Abteilung zum Umsiedlerproblem’, 24 February 1949, SAPMO DY 30/71755, vol. 3, p. 2.

⁴¹ Schwartz, “‘Vom Umsiedler zum Staatsbürger’”. Totalitäres und Subversives in der Sprachpolitik der SBZ/DDR’, p. 160; Lust, p. 983.

⁴² Georg Chwalczyk, ‘Weiterführung des Assimilationsprozesses der Umsiedler’, 8 November 1948, SAPMO DY 30/71755, vol. 3, p. 1. The Party forbade refugees and expellees from forming groups or unions after 1950 out of fear that they might subsequently establish an opposition to the state – cf. the West German ‘Bund der Vertriebenen’ and its pressure to re-establish the pre-war borders. Schwartz, “‘Vom Umsiedler zum Staatsbürger’”. Totalitäres und Subversives in der Sprachpolitik der SBZ/DDR’, p. 105; Seraphim, p. 28.

⁴³ For example Schwartz, “‘Vom Umsiedler zum Staatsbürger’”. Totalitäres und Subversives in der Sprachpolitik der SBZ/DDR’, p. 161; Schwartz, ‘Tabu und Erinnerung: Zur Vertriebenen-Problematik in Politik und literarischer Öffentlichkeit der DDR’, p. 87; Hähnel-Mesnard, ‘Narrative der Flucht, Vertreibung und Integration in der DDR-Literatur der 1950er Jahre’, p. 143. The taboo did not apply to private retellings or recollections, which Dornemann presumes continued – Dornemann, *Flucht und Vertreibung aus den ehemaligen deutschen Ostgebieten in Prosaliteratur und Erlebnisbericht seit 1945*, p. vi.

⁴⁴ For example Schwartz, ‘Tabu und Erinnerung: Zur Vertriebenen-Problematik in Politik und literarischer Öffentlichkeit der DDR’, pp. 87–89; Elke Mehnert, *Landschaften der Erinnerung: Flucht und Vertreibung aus deutscher, polnischer und tschechischer Sicht* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001), pp. 144–145; Björn Schaal, *Jenseits von Oder und Lette: Flucht, Vertreibung und*

period in question have, however, since come to a more pertinent and nuanced view: that the depiction of flight in GDR literature was simply rare in comparison to examples of victims of direct conflict or attack;⁴⁵ that one can still speak of a general taboo because examples exist but only in small numbers;⁴⁶ or that ‘Umsiedler:innen’ did appear in literature but only in minor roles.⁴⁷

In general, many critics seem content with the most eponymous narratives of the genre, namely Anna Seghers’ short story ‘Die Umsiedlerin’ (1950) and Heiner Müller’s 1961 theatrical adaption of it under the same title, and therefore merely embark on an analysis of one or both texts before reaffirming the existence of a taboo.⁴⁸ The relatively frequent reference to Seghers and Müller, or indeed to Christa Wolf’s *Kindheitsmuster* (1976) and Ursula Höntsch’s *Wir Flüchtlingskinder* (1986), has tended to obscure the countless other works on the topic from the early GDR, many of which were written by former refugees and expellees.⁴⁹ That the 2020 publication *Die Deutschen im Osten Europas* acknowledges the presence of literature on the topic but references only Seghers from the *Aufbau* indicates how the rupture of this ‘taboo’ has yet to run its course fully.⁵⁰

Heimatverlust in Erzähltexten nach 1945 (Günter Grass – Siegfried Lenz – Christa Wolf) (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2006), p. 186; Rautenberg, p. 12.

⁴⁵ Louis Ferdinand Helbig, ‘Gemeinsamkeiten und Unterschiede in Darstellungen von Flucht, Vertreibung und Eingliederung in der westlichen und östlichen Literatur Deutschlands’, in *50 Jahre Flucht und Vertreibung*, ed. by Manfred Wille, pp. 69–88 (p. 74).

⁴⁶ Hähnel-Mesnard, ‘Narrative der Flucht, Vertreibung und Integration in der DDR-Literatur der 1950er Jahre’, p. 124.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁴⁸ This corpus is limited to fictionalised narratives, since neither author was a victim of expulsion from the eastern territories. For example Schwartz, ‘Tabu und Erinnerung: Zur Vertriebenen-Problematik in Politik und literarischer Öffentlichkeit der DDR’, p. 89; Hartleb; Elke Mehnert, ‘Ankunft in Deutschland: Vertriebene versus Umsiedler. Ostdeutsche Perspektiven auf ein Kapitel gesamtdeutscher Nachkriegsgeschichte’, in *Ost-westliche Spiegelungen: Beiträge zur deutschen Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Frank-Lothar Kroll (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2005), pp. 90–104; Petra Wohlfahrt, ‘Das Thema “Umsiedler” in der DDR-Literatur’, in *Flucht – Vertreibung – Integration (Begleitband zur Ausstellung)*, ed. by Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Bielefeld: Kerber, 2005), pp. 102–107.

⁴⁹ It should be added, however, that Seghers’ forced exile in France and Mexico gave some insight into the experience of flight after she had been persecuted under the Nazi regime. See for example Bill Niven’s inexhaustive list – Niven, *Representations of Flight and Expulsion*, pp. 19–20.

⁵⁰ Uwe Klußmann, ‘Annäherung in Amnesie. Wie die DDR die Oder-Neiße-Linie schon 1950 als “Friedensgrenze” anerkannte’, in *Die Deutschen im Osten Europas: Eroberer, Siedler, Vertriebene*, ed. by Annette Großbongardt, Uwe Klußmann & Norbert F. Pötzl (Munich: Bassermann, 2020), pp. 250–253 (p. 253).

Since the 1990s, a selection of bibliographies containing FRG and GDR texts has helped to unpick the ‘taboo’ by demonstrating that flight became present and visible in West and East German literature from the mid-1940s.⁵¹ To my knowledge, Bill Niven has produced the only monograph focussing solely on GDR depictions of flight and expulsion, whilst no biography solely concerning the genre in *Aufbau* literature exists. One cannot, therefore, speak of a total taboo, since there is evidence of at least ninety refugees-cum-authors and an as yet incomplete list of narratives about expulsion from across the state’s history.⁵² Party discourse may gradually have relinquished the theme of flight from the early 1950s, but a consistent aesthetic movement contradicted this absence from the very immediate aftermath of the War, ensuring its continued thematisation – as the following corpus exemplifies.

Historical Engagement as Consciousness-Raising

To begin, I survey the plotlines of all four novels in this corpus in order to establish and highlight their historical focus on characters’ experiences of flight and expulsion. *Treibgut*, published in 1949 and written by Dresden-born Annemarie Reinhard, follows the fate of orphaned siblings Ralf and Rosemarie Reimann, who are separated from their aunt and other relatives during a ‘trek’ from their former home in Greiffenberg, Silesia.⁵³ Narrated in the third person, the novel constitutes not only one of the rarer and first examples that directly depict ongoing flight, but also emphasises the hardship entailed by presenting the narrative

⁵¹ Dornemann, *Flucht und Vertreibung aus den ehemaligen deutschen Ostgebieten in Prosaliteratur und Erlebnisbericht seit 1945*; Ernst-Edmund Keil (ed.), *Vertrieben... Literarische Zeugnisse von Flucht und Vertreibung*; Louis Ferdinand Helbig, Johannes Hoffmann & Doris Kraemer (eds.), *Verlorene Heimaten – neue Fremden: Literarische Texte zu Krieg, Flucht, Vertreibung, Nachkriegszeit* (Dortmund: Forschungsstelle Ostmitteleuropa, 1995); Wolfgang Schneiss, *Flucht, Vertreibung und verlorene Heimat im früheren Ostdeutschland: Beispiele literarischer Bearbeitung* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996); Björn Schaal, *Jenseits von Oder und Leithe: Flucht, Vertreibung und Heimatverlust in Erzähltexten nach 1945 (Günter Grass – Siegfried Lenç – Christa Wolf)* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2006); Helbig, *Der ungeheure Verlust*, p. 262.

⁵² Niven, *Representations of Flight and Expulsion*, p. 44; Hähnel-Mesnard, ‘Narrative der Flucht, Vertreibung und Integration in der DDR-Literatur der 1950er Jahre’, p. 133.

⁵³ Annemarie Reinhard, *Treibgut* (Dresden: Sachsenverlag, 1949) – further references to this and other literary works are given after quotations in the text.

through the eyes of a vulnerable child – Ralf.⁵⁴ Whilst taking care of his infant sister, he undergoes a transformation from a resourceful, vulnerable, and overwhelmed child to a headstrong, misguided, and ‘trotzig’ nine-year-old who learns to lie, beg, and steal as part of a band of thieves that patrols the rubble and ruins. Ralf’s behaviour burdens relationships with temporary foster parents (e.g. p. 57) or other children (p. 171). In the final third, the two siblings ultimately find a home with other orphans under the care of Tante Hedwig until moving in with their adoptive parents, when Ralf begins to combat some aspects of his traumatised behaviour as he ponders his imminent adoption: “Nun fängt es mir hier gerade mal an zu gefallen [...] – nun sollen wir wieder wo anders hin! Und es geht wieder alles von vorne los! Ich kann dir sagen, das hängt mir geradezu zum Halse raus!” (p. 266). Despite the cathartic dénouement, the children come to represent the many victims of expulsion who may find solace in the new socialist state but suffer under a traumatic expulsion that casts them as mere ‘flotsam’ (‘Treibgut’).

Die Tage werden heller (first published 1952) was written by Benno Voelkner, a lifelong anti-fascist born in Gdańsk who, like his protagonist Karl Stierner, joined the KPD resistance during the Third Reich.⁵⁵ The novel spans from the months prior to Hitler’s surrender up until the early years of the SBZ, and follows the Stierner family on their forced journey from Danzig to Mecklenburg, where they settle in the village of Kranau. Quickly on good terms with the Soviets, Karl emerges as a natural leader and becomes the village mayor (p. 162), a development that provides the reader with insights into the quotidian demands of people’s immediate postwar reality, such as lack of food, poor infrastructure, and that highlights the

⁵⁴ Christel Berger, “Das Heimweh versteckt ich hinter den Wimpern”. Wie “Umsiedler” die DDR-Literatur besiedelten’, *Neues Deutschland*, 21 & 22 February 2004, 20.

⁵⁵ Benno Voelkner, *Die Tage werden heller* (Berlin: Tribüne, 1959); [n.a.], ‘Genosse Benno Voelkner: Nachruf des Zentralkomitees der SED’, *Neues Deutschland*, 23 January 1974, 2.

torn and divided sociological makeup of a rural village, where devotees of fascism and socialist farmers live side by side. That Voelkner's narrator throughout lends a voice to the manifold positions and experiences of the *Aufbau* even where these are critical, negative, and even offensive earned him critical praise.⁵⁶ Whilst this perspective allows individual transformations – such as that of Rosa, former servant to the local baron – to come to the fore, the narrator's willingness to show conflict and negativity also renders the novel an unapologetic portrayal of needless belligerence and racism, and, therefore, of the necessity of retrospection in order to prevent mistakes being repeated in the future. Karl's leadership in navigating a complex and fragmented political landscape offers a significant example of the potential that this diversity – and indeed former refugees – offered to the GDR's present.

Hildegard Maria Rauchfuss' 1953 novel *Wem die Steine Antwort geben* documents the life of former refugee Karla Dröge, from Allenstein in East Prussia, and saw eleven editions by the 1960s.⁵⁷ Rauchfuss herself was born in Wrocław in 1918 and later settled in Leipzig having fled at the War's end.⁵⁸ The novel begins in 1950, when Dröge resigns as a shop assistant and enrolls as an apprentice at Dresden's Zwinger, a major reconstruction site, which has led to readings of the work as an 'Aufbauroman'.⁵⁹ Although Rauchfuss' novel toes the Party line in its endorsement of the FDJ and FDGB, and of SED membership, its thematic concern with flight differentiates it from the archetypal 'Aufbauroman'. The focus gradually expands to include other characters, such as Dröge's landlady Melanie Krawende and the

⁵⁶ Günter Ebert, 'Das neue Leben auf dem Dorfe', *Neues Deutschland*, 9 October 1955, 9–10 (p. 9).

⁵⁷ Hildegard Maria Rauchfuss, *Wem die Steine Antwort geben* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1953); Katrin Max, 'Hildegard Maria Rauchfuss: *Wem die Steine Antwort geben* (1953)', in *Bürgerlichkeit und bürgerliche Kultur in der Literatur der DDR* (Paderborn: Fink, 2018), pp. 120–131 (p. 121).

⁵⁸ Irmfried Hiebel, 'Eine Autorin mit wachem Sinn für aktuelle Themen', *Neues Deutschland*, 22 February 1988, 4.

⁵⁹ Ibid. Note however, that this categorisation is based upon a definition of the 'Aufbauroman' according to an architectural theme, whereas Winfried Taschner, for example, suggests the key criterion of the genre to be an affiliation to SED ideology. All four novels might count as 'Aufbauromane'; however, I am more interested here in their temporal rather than architectural or Party-ideological aspects – Winfried Taschner, *Tradition und Experiment: Erzählstrukturen und -funktionen des Bildungsromans in der DDR-Aufbauliteratur* (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag, 1981), p. 58.

artist – and Dröge’s boss – Rohloff, who tutors Karla as she learns to sculpt and eventually enables her to acquire a scholarship to study at the art academy. The protagonist, Dröge, demonstrates the value of refugees to the young state, as her success as an artist becomes a story of applying prior experience within the burgeoning political system in the GDR. Structured by the rhythm of reconstruction and the steady promulgation of laws in the new GDR state, the novel offers a powerful contrast between the destitution of war, flight, and fascism, and the new political order, which integrates and motivates characters regardless of their trauma or dysfunctional behaviours.

The title of *Westfälische Ernte*, the 1953 debut novel of Sachsen-Anhalt-born Edith Müller-Beeck (later Bergner), points to its setting outside of the SBZ/GDR, yet the story of expellee Anne Teschke and her son in their newfound home Breken is interwoven with the cross-border political tensions and developments in the late 1940s, as well as with the communist movement headed in the village by cement factory worker Kötter.⁶⁰ Related in the third person by an omniscient and often ideological narrator, the work illustrates the material hardship and social prejudice faced by refugees, for example through the political, economic, and class-based differences and anxieties in the village, which help to trace mistakes during the gradual rebuilding that followed the War. Anne at first lives in poverty, unable to find work, but by chance meets a farmer who takes her on as a workhand, lifting her from a depressive state to allow her transformation into a moral and political leader. Only ten pages of the novel take place in the GDR, when Anne’s estranged husband Fred is caught by border police running an errand for a wealthy landowner; otherwise, Müller-Beeck uses *Westfälische*

⁶⁰ Edith Müller-Beeck, *Westfälische Ernte* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1953); Joachim Walter, *Sicherungsbereich Literatur: Schriftsteller und Staatssicherheit in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Berlin: Links, 1996), p. 734; Christel Berger, ‘Von der Erfüllung eines Traumes – ein Leben mit Kindern, Pädagogik und Lesen’, in *Vom Leben erzählen, so wie es ist... Edith Bergner zum 70. Geburtstag* (Berlin: Kinderbuch-Verlag, 1987), pp. 3–30 (p. 3).

Ernte as an opportunity to criticise Germany's political division and the conditions in which expellees lived in the 'Bizonie' and to delineate the GDR as the seat of wellbeing: "[Anne] fragte sich nach dem Grund, weshalb die Umsiedler in Mecklenburg nicht, gleich ihnen hier in Breken, Flüchtlinge und Fremde geblieben waren" (p. 192).

These brief introductions highlight the historical focus in each of the novels, but their thematisation of flight and expulsion also contains a more substantial political message. Since the characters' recent experiences are marked by the catastrophic consequences of human conflict, the texts contradict a rhetoric of continuous human progress that would overlook the crimes and horrors of the Third Reich in the name of improvement and positive development, as had been invoked in the East and West as governments sought to distance themselves from fascism. Emphasising traumatic events from the past at least also distracts from – if not contradicts – the SED's core focus on preparing for the socialist future of the state, a stance echoed in socialist realism and the expectation of a revolutionary development. At the same time, the integration of recent trauma into these narratives presented something of a challenge to the Party's portrayal of the Third Reich as the product of monopoly capitalism both embodied and inherited by West Germany, not the East. Implying that the horrific consequences of war – which caused people to flee in the first place – continued to be experienced in the GDR did not just tarnish the SED's own projection of an antifascist future, but even questioned its Marxist-Leninist characterisation of the *Aufbau* as a revolutionary step in the teleology of world socialism.

Walter Benjamin's notion of history, predominantly expounded in the series of theses entitled *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* (1940), but also in section N of the unfinished *Passagen-Werke* (1927–1940) and his essay 'Eduard Fuchs, der Sammler und der Historiker' (1937),

complements, even presupposes, the critical historiography evoked by these novels because of its rejection of a teleological chronology based on progress and improvement.⁶¹ Benjamin rejects the notion of systemic development that marks the common epistemology of history, instead conceiving of history as opaque, discontinuous, and free of any teleology, pattern, or reason. Part of his theses entails defining history by what it is not, namely historicism, which takes a positivist slant to impose an ordered continuum upon history and symbolically identify a movement of progress within it: “Der Historismus stellt das ewige Bild der Vergangenheit dar; der historische Materialismus eine jeweilige Erfahrung mit ihr, die einzig dasteht” (*EF*, p. 440).⁶² It follows that any timeline, for Benjamin, equally mischaracterises chronologies because of the implication that the destructive chaos of the past can be ordered and rationalised in this way. Caygill summarises the historicist claim: “If the past and present were continuous, then the present could narrate the past without difficulty and this narration would be the fused experience of past and present bequeathed to a future that is continuous with it.”⁶³

Benjamin views such a hypothesis with contempt not just on account of its artifice, but because it has legitimised a pervasive tradition of political oppression in which the winner of all battles – the ruling classes – always gets to tell their version of history and to call it progress because ‘[d]ie jeweils Herrschenden sind aber die Erben aller, die je gesiegt haben. Die Einfühlung in den Sieger kommt demnach den jeweils Herrschenden allemal zugut’ (*ÜBG*, VII, p. 631). The loot or evidence of these victories, in turn, is synonymous with the

⁶¹ Benjamin, *ÜBG*; *ibid.*, *Das Passagen-Werk*, in *AW*, II: *Abhandlungen, Autobiographische Schriften, Aus dem Passagen-Werk*, 469–737 (hereafter referred to as *PW*); *Ibid.*, ‘Eduard Fuchs, der Sammler und der Historiker’, in *AW*, III: *Aufsätze, Essays, Vorträge*, 437–477 (hereafter referred to as *EF*).

⁶² Cf. the opposition to historicism in the ‘Trauerspiel’ through the ‘Idee der Katastrophe’, represented in the ‘Ausnahmezustand’ – Benjamin, *UDT*, p. 260.

⁶³ Howard Caygill, ‘Walter Benjamin’s Concept of Cultural History’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, ed. by David S. Ferris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 73–96 (p. 91).

‘Kulturgüter’ carried along in the rulers’ ‘Triumphzug’, thus the history of culture becomes a material documentation of oppression, or: “Es ist niemals ein Dokument der Kultur, ohne zugleich ein solches der Barbarei zu sein” (ÜBG, VII, p. 631; EF, p. 449). Michael W. Jennings explains:

The story of the triumph of bourgeois values is nothing more than an anterior reconstruction of events according to a subjectively imposed architecture, an arbitrary juxtaposition of fragments that have no essential relationship to one another. Insofar as any historical event is significant, it has become so because of a significance attributed to it later.⁶⁴

The attribution of, or claim to, significance or signification to events thereby allows historicism to become a narrative of symbolic origin whose entire logic rests on subjective invention. For its acute consciousness of the sociological inflections that are borne out in the past, Benjamin’s corrective is described as historical materialism, which incidentally distinguishes him from the Marxian belief in teleological progress as the driving force behind revolution.⁶⁵

Applying a historical materialist lens to the novels in this corpus means understanding their focus on the traumatic recent past as a rejection of a historicist optimism and as an explicit, though critical, insistence on the relevance of history to GDR cultural discourse. In *Treibgut*, Reinhard’s narrator details Ralf’s flight with his sister Rosemarie for the first 140 pages until

⁶⁴ Michael W. Jennings, *Dialectical Images: Walter Benjamin’s Theory of Literary Criticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 49.

⁶⁵ See Benjamin, *PW*, N 9 a, 1, p. 645; ÜBG, XII, p. 635. Rolf Tiedemann, ‘Historical Materialism or Political Messianism? An Interpretation of the Theses “On the Concept of History”’, *Philosophical Forum*, 15 (1983-1984), 71–104, in Jay Bernstein (ed.), *The Frankfurt School: Critical Assessments*, 2 vols (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), II, pp. 111–139 (p. 115); Marc de Wilde, ‘Benjamin’s Politics of Remembrance: A Reading of “Über den Begriff der Geschichte”’, in *A Companion to the Works of Walter Benjamin*, ed. by Goebel, pp. 177–194 (p. 185); Heinz-Dieter Kittsteiner, ‘Die “geschichtsphilosophischen Thesen”’, in *Materialien zu Benjamins Thesen “Über den Begriff der Geschichte”*, ed. by Peter Bulthaupt (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), pp. 28–42 (p. 29); Gerhard Kaiser, ‘Walter Benjamins “Geschichtsphilosophische Thesen”’, in *Materialien zu Benjamins Thesen*, ed. by Bulthaupt, pp. 43–76 (p. 48).

police rescue the pair from their temporary home with a street gang, but references to earlier stages of the flight also occur through Ralf's traumatic dreams and nightmares. Arguably, the path to a new home concludes only eleven pages before the end when the Wagners adopt the pair – or never does conclude in light of the unresolved disappearance of the children's aunt from the beginning. The retrospective focalisation of the experience of flight renders the work explicitly historical, a perspective intensified by the trauma attached to Ralf's flashbacks, which personalise the narrative and elicit the longer-term impact of the psychological damage incurred: "Ralf schlief lange nicht so fest wie die anderen Kinder. Im Unterbewusstsein horchte er beständig, ob da nicht jemand von ferne pfiiff [...] oder Rosemarie nach ihm verlangte. Häufig träumte er auch seine alten Angstträume" (p. 169). The frequent flashbacks create a double bind to the past in *Treibgut*, exacerbating the thematic emphasis of historical events despite the broader optimism about the early GDR, which I explore below. However, the double bind prevents a linear identification of the narrative with the SED's rhetoric of positive development and instead forces the reader to consider the tragedy of the very recent past. Indeed, the setbacks to the children's personal maturity and path to safety manifest the indirect and often destructive path of history, which in this case means suffering upheaval and isolation numerous times before they find a new home. The children's future, already tarnished by the struggles of the past, does not easily match the cohesive narrative of progress in the Party's description of the *Aufbau*.

Unlike *Treibgut*, *Wem die Steine Antwort geben* begins several years after Dröge's flight from present-day Olsztyn, Poland; however, the narrator also returns to this experience and to Karla's life prior to it through flashbacks, primarily in the first forty pages:

Blech klirrte gegen Blech, es roch wie aus einer Gulaschkanne. Genauso hatte es auf dem Marktplatz von Allenstein vor einigen Jahren gerochen, nicht lange allerdings, dann kamen die ersten Verwundeten mit Medikamentengerüchen, Angst und Panik...

(Rauchfuss, p. 18)

When the flashbacks become less frequent, the reader is nonetheless reminded of Karla's past when calls of 'Flüchtling', 'Waise', and 'Ostprien' follow her through the city (p. 15), and other characters remark on her past whilst praising her rapid development: "Hast du dir schon mal Gedanken gemacht, was [Karla] alles an Furchtbarem erlebt hat? [...] Da kann man nicht einfach sagen: Vergiss das, lache, tanze, singe mit uns" (p. 159). Unlike in *Treibgut*, Müller-Beeck's narrator does not recall flight through direct relation, but rather employs analeptic episodes and a historical setting to underscore the continued impact of Karla's expulsion long after the end of the War. Even if the protagonist's outlook improves with time, Karla's struggles with her past after her arrival in Dresden colour the novel overall and yield a realistic, difficult illustration of the refugee experience. If the full benefits of a socialist transformation do not appear to extend to refugees and expellees in the novel, then the text gives little grounds for the reader to discern a conception of the *Aufbau* as a progressive, inclusive, positive endeavour.

Voelkner's is the only novel in this corpus to depict the before, during, and after of expulsion, which lends its historical focus a sense of completeness. The first train, carrying the Stiemers and others, leaves Danzig on page 113 and arrives in Kranau on page 149, leaving the final 250 pages of the 400-page novel devoted to the *Aufbau*. *Die Tage werden heller* contains only two analeptic episodes – both of Stiemer thinking back to the War (pp. 56, 86) – since the plot otherwise spans from the final months of the conflict and the siege of Danzig (p. 37) to

the creation of the SED in April 1946 and beyond (p. 337), an extraordinary period of change and upheaval. Historical relation goes hand in hand with the opinions and arguments behind these occurrences, including the Soviet justification for the expulsion: “Der deutsche Faschismus hat anderen Völkern noch Härteres aufgezwungen [...]. Das deutsche Volk muss verstehen, wie notwendig diese Umsiedlung ist” (p. 83). This perspective expands the portrayal of flight and expulsion beyond the trauma that dominates in the three other novels by contextualising that suffering within the transnational accords of the allied powers. Indeed, the narrator does not neglect to show the starvation, illness, or emotional turmoil inflicted on refugees, here during their train journey: “Wieder begann Wehklagen, übersprang die Wagen und durcheilte die Kette des Zuges. Der Hunger wurde unerträglich; die Diebstähle begannen, und es kam einige Male zu Gewalttätigkeiten” (p. 123). Unlike Reinhard’s and Müller-Beeck’s novels, Voelkner’s wide-ranging narrative perspective therefore lays bare both the trauma of flight and the continued political resistance to equity and peace, and thus contradicts any characterisation of the young socialist state as a clean break from the National Socialist past.

Westfälische Ernte equally foregrounds the refugee experience through the protagonist Anne’s thoughts, emotions, and encounters. Not only does this focus result in a more intimate and emotive perspective; it also uniquely offers a personal insight into the aftermath of expulsion, despite the retention of a third-person style. The reader encounters, for example, the desperate post-flight reality facing Anne, her son Konrad, and husband Fred, as they integrate (or not) in Breken. In addition to detailing their material poverty, the narrator uses flashbacks from Anne’s perspective as evidence of the emotional toll of her experience:

Das Lächeln in Anne Teschkes Gesicht war gewichen. Um ihre Schläfen ging ein angstvolles Zucken.

Ein Bild jagte das andere...

In der offenen Tür stand Fred, den Soldatenmantel über die Schulter gehängt...

“Entlassen!”

[...]

Aber da waren die Wehen wieder – ihre Augen öffneten sich in Angst und Entsetzen vor dem reißenden Schmerz in ihrem Leib. Ihr Atem ging keuchend, Schweiß brach aus den Poren und verklebte das blonde Haar.

Draußen im Garten stand ein Soldat.

“Räumen,” sagte er, “Sie müssen räumen!”

(Müller-Beeck, p. 10)

As interruptions to the narrative, this and similar episodes break the chronological development of the plot, reminding the reader and characters alike of the traumatic background that preceded the 'Teschkes' new life. Such interruptions also reinforce the historical orientation of the novel through the desperation and suffering of its victims, thus the text remains emphatically retrospective despite its anchor in the early GDR present.

Applying Benjamin's understanding of history here helps to comprehend the work, moreover, as a reflection on the legacy of destruction and atrophy from the Second World War and the GDR's political positioning within it. In these examples of the regressive fate imposed on some humans by others during the War, this and the other texts indicate the necessity of learning from past mistakes in the present and, therefore, of moderating a futurist, even utopian, rhetoric around the *Aufbau des Sozialismus*. In their historical and historically inflected perspectives, all four novels offer a form of testimony about the reality

of refugees in the early GDR, but also a blueprint for the socialist present to become more integrative and reflective.

Benjamin's Historical Materialism Aestheticised

Whilst Benjamin's historical materialism has frequently served as a rebuttal of the idea of progress in light of fascism and the Second World War, Giorgio Agamben warns that one must venture further than a conceptual distinction between historical materialism and historicism.⁶⁶ Benjamin substantiates his anti-historicist position by insisting that there remain reasons for engaging with history without recourse to the symbolic fallacy of progress – a task that he refers to as 'Geschichte gegen den Strich zu bürsten' and 'das Kontinuum der Geschichte auf[zuspreng[en]' (ÜBG, VII, pp. 631–632; EF, p. 440). Caygill, for example, reads the disruption of a continuum in historical materialism as a motive for accessing a past rendered obscure and illogical by the ordering of historicism, as this interruption helps to locate objects from the past through a 'reserve' that has lain hitherto concealed, like the meaning of prelapsarian words, and to make them relevant to the present.⁶⁷ More than just a perspective, therefore, Benjamin's theory also makes it possible to uncover past moments in a manner that cannot occur through normative remembrance ('wie es denn eigentlich gewesen ist') but through a collision of that memory with the present in 'Jetztzeit' (ÜBG, VI, p. 630; XIV, p. 636). Historical materialism thus does not baselessly and abstractly render history an aimless discontinuum, but rather constitutes a tool for locating both what has been

⁶⁶ Giorgio Agamben, 'The Melancholy Angel', in *The Man without Content*, trans. by Georgia Albert (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 104–15 (p. 153).

⁶⁷ Caygill, 'Walter Benjamin's Concept of Cultural History', p. 93. See Chapter Two for a discussion of Benjamin's distinction between pre- and postlapsarian language.

forgotten by the normative teleology in history and what might yet prove valuable in the present.⁶⁸

The kind of recollection envisaged in historical materialism occurs in 'Jetztzeit', which pauses time in the moment of collision between past and present, culminating in a 'Chock' (*ÜBG*, XVII, p. 638) or 'Blitz' (PW, N 2a, 3, p. 629) that yields 'a new form of thought, in which the present fertilizes the past and awakens the forgotten or repressed meaning it bears, while the past, in the heart of the present, discovers a new vitality' (Stéphane Mosès).⁶⁹ This explosive intervention carries the memory through into the present to render it in the only form accessible to the contemporary observer: in a 'Konstellation [...], der] eine, wenn auch bis heute geringe, Chance der endgültigen Befreiung inne[wohnt]'.⁷⁰ Rather than the retrieval of that past moment, since such an effort would be impossible, 'Jetztzeit' reawakens a specific moment from the past in the present, but that moment in turn also helps to redefine the present, marking the productivity in historical materialism. More than just a lens with which to see through historicism, Benjamin's theory enacts a kind of straddling, in which the past is accessed through the present and the present itself becomes influenced by that interaction, altering the path into the future.⁷¹ Although this historiography has a dialectical character on account of the irresolvable tension between those directions, any manifestation of historical materialism affects more than just the past, resulting in a complex chronology that I term a dialectical temporality.

⁶⁸ Stéphane Mosès, 'Eingedenken und Jetztzeit: Geschichtliches Bewusstsein im Spätwerk Walter Benjamins', in *Memoria: Vergessen und Erinnern*, ed. by Anselm Haverkamp, Renate Lachmann & Reinhart Herzog (Munich: Fink, 1993), pp. 385–405 (p. 393).

⁶⁹ Mosès, 'Walter Benjamin: The Three Models of History', p. 113.

⁷⁰ Helmut Thielens, *Eingedenken und Erlösung: Walter Benjamin* (Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2005), p. 381.

⁷¹ de Wilde, p. 185; Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 154.

This dialectical movement within historical materialism evidences just one aspect of a broad dialecticism in Benjamin's work – his 'redemptive dialectics', which voices two of the predominant currents in his work, namely an object's redemption and the dialectical structure through which he theorises it. Benjamin's dialectic, unlike in Hegel or Marx, is neither characterised by synthesis nor by perpetual irretrievability, but by the spontaneous generation of distinct and new meaning in 'Jetztzeit'. Scholars have compared this process to the Jewish notion of 're-remembering' or 'zekher', which in Mosès' words 'does not denote the preservation in memory of events of the past but their reactualization in the present experience' because the dialectical structure reawakens objects from the past 'in der gegenwärtigen Erfahrung'.⁷² 'Eingedenken', as Benjamin terms this, is 'gewählt' and 'frei erschaffen', and can, through an inventive dialectical movement, recast its object – unlike voluntary memory, which, as Geyer-Ryan describes, supposedly relives a moment *as it really was* but thereby imposes a calendrical or categorical order upon it.⁷³

The allusion to 'zekher' also denotes the theological undercurrent in all of Benjamin's thought: "[I]m Eingedenken machen wir eine Erfahrung, die uns verbietet, die Geschichte grundsätzlich atheologisch zu begreifen, so wenig wir sie in unmittelbar theologischen Begriffen zu schreiben versuchen dürfen" (*PW*, N 8, 1, p. 642).⁷⁴ The theological equally appears in references to the 'messianic', which means the kind of salvation explored in the *Ursprung* and nominally identified with the Messiah. The theological subtext that runs throughout Benjamin's writing should not, however, invoke the suspicion that some genuine

⁷² Mosès, 'Walter Benjamin: The Three Models of History', p. 109; Mosès 'Eingedenken und Jetztzeit: Geschichtliches Bewusstsein im Spätwerk Walter Benjamins', p. 392; Thielen, p. 213.

⁷³ Mosès, 'Eingedenken und Jetztzeit: Geschichtliches Bewusstsein im Spätwerk Walter Benjamins', pp. 401–403; Thielen, p. 202; Helga Geyer-Ryan, 'Counterfactual artefacts: Walter Benjamin's philosophy of history', in *Visions and Blueprints*, ed. by Edward Timms & Peter Collier (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 66–79 (pp. 74–75).

⁷⁴ See also Benjamin, *PW*, N 7a, 7, p. 641: "Mein Denken verhält sich zur Theologie wie das Löschblatt zur Tinte. Es ist ganz von ihr vollsogen."

Messiah figure might confute the historicist tradition and enact the ‘heraussprengen’ themselves, but rather ‘uns [ist] wie jedem Geschlecht, das vor uns war, eine *schwache* messianische Kraft mitgegeben, an welche die Vergangenheit Anspruch hat’ (II, p. 629; my italics). Any reliance on (the force of) a saviour figure from above who facilitates the redemption within ‘Jetztzeit’ can be excluded as per this theory. Fredric Jameson similarly reads the theological undercurrents in Benjamin’s work as secular rather than components of a genuinely religious philosophy.⁷⁵ In fact, historical materialism combats the kind symbolic framework identified in the *Ursprung* as characteristic of a Christian eschatology, for example, making it also a force for secularising history. On account of the ambiguity that arises from a ‘messianic force’ in humanity, I forego any reference to redemption in my analysis – an approach that coheres with the avoidance outlined in Chapter Two of reading philosophy and the accessing of ideas as a path to symbolic meaning.

Having already applied Benjamin’s historical materialism to literary analysis, I now investigate how reading the texts’ retrospection in the texts through ‘Eingedenken’ locates their focus firmly in the *Aufbau* present and, as a result, casts their historical focus as a kind of testimony with the potential to influence that present. In also identifying the pervasiveness of a future-orientated and socialist-inflected focus in the novels, I explore the impact of references to the past and future on the present. ‘Eingedenken’ serves as a relevant and effective tool for reading this impact because it captures the reference of the past, its clash in the present, and the potential unlocking of new perspectives for the future.

⁷⁵ Jameson, *The Benjamin Files*, pp. 9–12.

In *Treibgut*, an anticipatory tension builds as the reader wishes for a resolution to Ralf's search for a permanent home, leading up to the final page, in which his attention turns to procuring Christmas gifts for his adoptive parents, having apparently forgotten about his initial desperation (p. 278). This resolution lends greater significance to the new social and welfare structures expanding across the 'Zone', which both punctuate the novel and facilitate Ralf and Rosemarie's adoption. When police chance upon the gang's hideout, one officer takes it upon himself to find the pair a common home: "Interessiert mich wirklich selbst, wo die beiden Racker bleiben" (p. 152). His kindness stands out from the chronic disregard paid to refugees and refugee children by the local population, such that instances of good will by officials stand out to the reader. Elsewhere, for example, a rural mayor advertises for an adoptive family in his own village having pardoned Ralf for stealing some apples (p. 52). More than just anomalous gestures, these instances signal a wider framework of postwar political and moral reform under anti-fascist governance, represented by figures of authority. Inasmuch as the traumatic plot is pulled from the protagonists' past and clashes with torchbearers of the GDR's ideological framework, an optimistic atmosphere emerges that chimes with the anticipatory, forward-looking nature of the *Aufbau*. Arguably, however, this optimism comes about through the combination of historical and future-oriented subject matter in the diegetic present, as the different temporal directions actualise the mnemonic object – the reference to flight – in a gesture that Benjamin calls 'Eingedenken'.

The rhythm of the *Aufbau* equally – or more explicitly – resonates through Stiemer's words and actions throughout *Die Tage werden heller* as he, despite his own frequent ailments (pp. 55, 62, 110, 159, 381) and the setbacks that he faces as a refugee, works hard to execute reform, such as improving conditions for other 'Umsiedler' and implementing the land reform: "Verteilt einen Teil unter Umsiedler und Einheimische [...]. Mit der Bodenreform [...] wird

ein altes, an uns und unseren Vorfahren begangenes Unrecht wiedergutmacht" (p. 252). These allusions to real SBZ policy anticipate what later became the GDR's ideology and thereby project into the *Aufbau* future. It is no mistake that, when Stiemer dies before the end, his close friend Bamberger responds in the presence of his body:

Dir nahm der Tod die Kraft aus den Gliedern; wir schreiten deine, unsere Straße weiter. Die Ernten werden reifen; du hast die Saat mit eingesät; das neue Leben wird blühen, du kannst es nicht mehr schauen.

(Voelkner, p. 396)

Bamberger's words, echoed by Martha Stiemer, Karl's wife, and his successor Anna Wedel (p. 398), embody a dialectical temporality in the bearing of the past on the future through the image of the seeds, fitting because of Kranau's strong agricultural industry. The evident references to the *Aufbau* movement in Stiemer's reforms, moreover, demonstrate the anchor of the work in the moment in which it was published, but the broader anticipation in *Aufbau* ideology projects into the future, such that the novel intersects with the recent past and the politics of the GDR. Locating this temporal clash in the immediate present does not just lead to a reading of the novel's retrospection as a kind of 'Eingedenken', but also indicates that 'Jetztzeit' is something productive because of the optimism that it yields for the present.

The ideological rhetoric in *Wem die Steine Antwort geben* is at times reminiscent of the direct citation of SED slogans and personalities in Hans Marchwitza's *Robeisen*. Indeed, the dynamism and hope of reconstruction in Rauchfuss' novel counteract Dresden's ruinous cityscape in 'die Bauplätze der genesenden Stadt, die wachsenden Fundamente, die täglich höher steigenden Baugerüste, die grell und fröhlich pfeifenden Morgensirenen und die vorwärtsströmenden Straßen' (p. 242). More explicitly than in *Treibgut*, the narrators and characters refer to newly proclaimed laws and groups, such as legislation from 16 March

1950 improving conditions for intellectuals (p. 172) and the FDJ's 'Deutschlandtreffen' in May 1950, which Dröge's friend Brigitte Kallwas attends (p. 203). Whilst these references occur in the intradiegetic present, they fuse with the *Aufbau* project to generate an optimistic expectation of an improved future. Krawende, for example, starts out controlling and prudish (pp. 6, 70, 114) but slowly comes around to the socialist cause, agreeing to view Rohloff's new sculpture despite the putative elitism of the exhibition: "In meinem ganzen Leben zum Beispiel bin ich noch in keiner Kunstaustellung gewesen, aber wenn unsere eröffnet ist, gehe ich, ich gehe, so wahr ich hier stehe" (p. 285). The ideologised perspective in the novel, referenced almost verbatim in laws and 'Massenorganisation', should be regarded as an expression of futurity both because of the anticipatory optimism attached to it and because the discursive weight attached to the FDJ, FDBG, and others by the SED cast them as much larger, more popular, and more significant than they were by this time, as if projecting an as-yet-unrealised identity.

This futurity juxtaposes with the protagonist's past, however, as Dröge's character remains afflicted by her experiences prior to arriving in Dresden. In this clash of temporal directions, though, the retrospective allusions to Dröge's experiences are not simply inserted into a continuum that ends with a stylised, idealised path into the future. No single aspect of the novel is allowed to become overbearing, resulting in a temporal balance and a form of retrospection that exudes disunity rather than a narrative of symbolic progression. The broad optimism in Rauchfuss' text therefore complements a historical materialist reading because it reflects both the destructive image of the past and the subsequent effect of 'Jetztzeit', such that memories liberated into the present diminish the hegemony of the future in the contemporaneous reader's consciousness.

By comparison, in *Westfälische Ernte* the narrator bears far more responsibility for steering the reader to acknowledge a political direction than in the other novels. Regarding Anne's ideological and psychological transformation, the narrator contributes to comments by Kötter and others about plans to hold a charity tombola in aid of refugees: "Nur wenige Einwohner und Umsiedler von Breken besaßen die *Klarsicht* Kötters und seiner Freunde, die die Tombola als eine *bürgerliche Reaktion auf die Maidemonstration* erkannten" (p. 177; my italics). At the same time, the final scene at the East-West border, where crowds from the two sides meet to celebrate peace and demand reunification (pp. 379, 404), shows Anne invigorated and enthused after her gradual familiarisation with communist thought. The ending clarifies the great distance travelled in Anne's development and intimates in which direction progress might continue: "Nicht die quälenden Bilder notvoller Tage, denen sie entgegenfuhr, bedrängten sie. Vor ihren Augen standen die zukunftssträchtigen, sonnendurchfluteten dieses Tages und bestimmten ihre Zuversicht" (p. 407). Given that a broad cross-section of the population was represented in the delegation (p. 400), this scene embodies the GDR's pro-unity 'Nationalfront' strategy and anticipates the *Aufbau* as a guarantee of jobs and peace, and a motor for women's emancipation, all of which seem important to Anne and other characters:

[O]bwohl Anne sich zu jedem Schritt zwingen musste, [...] erschien ihr die Arbeit auch jetzt noch wie ein Trost, wie eine Waffe gegen die Jahre ihres dumpfen Dahinbrütens. So hatte sie ihr Tätigsein zu Hause nie zu empfinden gewusst.

(Müller-Beeck, p. 278)

Müller-Beeck's allusions to SED discourse, less explicit and therefore also less plastic than in Rauchfuss, retain an optimism – albeit one coloured by a kind of cross-border voyeurism – that contrasts with the protagonist's state at the beginning. Travelling back in the direction whence she came as a refugee, Anne in a sense retraces her steps into the past and evokes

her own flight for the reader; yet, at the same time, she returns to the border bursting with inspiration and confidence in the political system in the East.

The clash of past and future in the novel represents a divergent conception of the *Aufbau*'s temporal consciousness, but the 'Jetztzeit' through which the historical reference occurs helps to make the case for history to remain a principal reference point in the present and for victims of flight and expulsion to retain a role in public discourse. Historical materialism thus becomes a lens through which to comprehend how the authors reconceptualise the temporal weighting in GDR cultural and political discourses in this corpus, yielding a moderate perspective that binds history into the present to recast that present as a site for innovation and change.

Having argued for a reading of 'Eingedenken' in these novels to explore how their 'Jetztzeit' functions as the source of a new perspective on the SED's discourse of progress, I now turn to the political implications of this reading. The meeting point of the dialectical temporality in the texts is the microcosmic present, thus the novels should be read as explicitly engaged with their historical moment in the *Aufbau*. *Wem die Steine Antwort geben*, for example, was published in 1953 but set and narrated in 1950, such that the retrospective narratorial perspective did not appear too distant for an early reader. The political atmosphere in the novel would have appeared familiar to such an audience, therefore, whilst the narrator's more direct promulgation of SED propaganda offered a direct bridge between intra- and extradiegetic realities: 'Wir wollen in Frieden leben und lernen' (p. 213); 'Dresdens Wiedergeburt – ein Beitrag für den Frieden!' (p. 260). At times, the narrator provides their own (politically motivated) opinion about events, as when a Polish choir visits: "Und wie sie sangen! [...] Fast war es, als würfen die Mauern des Zwingers das Echo zurück, als hätte der

ganze Bau nur darauf gewartet mitzuklingen” (p. 387). Through the narrator’s omniscience and proximity to the early reader, the novel demonstrates a clear engagement with the *Aufbau* reality and with the thematisation of flight in particular, which prevents the retrospection from dominating or becoming abstract, anchors the work in the present, and offers a new temporal perspective for the GDR present.

This firm socio-political, if not geographical, location of all four works in the SBZ/GDR lends the texts a heightened applicability to the period in which they were written through the creation of a ‘relational present’, in which a reader in the *Aufbau* could recognise their own reality and – crucially – the political dynamic driving it. For example, Voelkner’s work finds space for dissenting voices alongside those that cohere with a socialist framework – something for which the novel came under criticism from Günter Ebert in *Neues Deutschland*.⁷⁶ Frequent xenophobic or pro-Nazi comments contradict the state narrative of successful integration to lay bare the complexity of the historical moment, for example: “[Es waren d]ieselben Leute, die einmal geschrien hatten: ‘Wir wollen heim ins Reich!’ und nun schon wieder davon träumten, dass [...] sie das alte Spiel bald von vorne beginnen könnten” (*Die Tage werden heller*, p. 77). In *Treibgut*, the narrator conveys the thoughts of the children’s temporary adoptive father, whose behaviour is typical of those who help refugees but, despite their own relative wellbeing, always expect something in return: “[M]an gibt sich Mühe, dass ihr’s gut haben sollt, aber ihr wollt das ja gar nicht” (p. 63). Anne’s landlady Hedwig Krügel in *Westfälische Ernte* echoes this: “Konnte die Fremde dafür nicht dankbar sein?! Stattdessen [...] hatte sie auch noch Ansprüche gestellt!” (p. 23). Examples of SED ideology, historical events, and other references echo and reinforce the temporal diversity in

⁷⁶ Ebert, p. 9.

the novel, indicating also the distance between political idealism and reality, but also the overall positive outlook. A dialectical temporality thus makes it possible to relativise and balance differing and contradictory discourses, perspectives, and chronologies without nullifying or neglecting a specific direction, thus the works benefit from their relational present because they do not appear to criticise the Party, but rather reflect the diversity of the populace.

Historical Reference as Allegorical Tool

Returning to the historical aspect of these novels specifically, I now complement the application of historical materialism with Benjamin's theory of allegory, which I discuss in Chapter Two, based on both the destructive-restitutive and constellative character and the structural disunity of the two theories. Helga Geyer-Ryan also makes this connection:

What Benjamin recognizes as the essence of modernist artistic production, the deconstruction of questionable totalities and the remounting of the fragments into artefacts, the meaning of which has no resemblance to their former function, is again fully applicable to the practice of the historian himself.⁷⁷

If in 'Jetztzeit', therefore, an object loses its original context but enters into a new constellation, the reader is reminded of the process of allegory, insofar as the original object becomes a fragment and, inserted into a new context or montage of fragments, both locates a lost reserve of meaning and affects its surroundings. Since 'Eingedenken' entails removing a memory from its origin and clashing it with the present to access what had previously been concealed by the veil of the past, that process of re-remembrance echoes the fragmentation, recontextualisation, and semantic unlocking that occur in allegory.⁷⁸ The allegorical object

⁷⁷ Helga Geyer-Ryan, *Fables of Desire: Studies in the Ethics of Art and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), p. 21.

⁷⁸ Geyer-Ryan equally refers to the 'montage principle as a mode of alternative historiography' seen in historical materialism – *ibid.*, p. 22.

remains a fragment of its old context when thrust into a new constellation; likewise, the memory remains an artefact from the past and withdraws from the ‘continuum’ of history in ‘Jetztzeit’. One might conclude that the perspective granted through ‘Jetztzeit’ even depends on the allegorisation of the historical fragment, which is pulled into – or cited in – the present and reformed: “Geschichte schreiben heißt also Geschichte *zitiieren*” (PW, N 11, 3, p. 648).⁷⁹ Just as historicism offers a symbolic recharacterisation of history in the name of coherence, historical materialism resembles the immanent, fragmented structure of allegory that lays bare the broken and atrophic reality of human history.

In the following analysis, I apply this allegorical reading through a three-part structure: beginning in the aesthetic work, into which the historical enters as a fragment; then the fragment’s moderation of the work; thereafter its clash with the reader in ‘Jetztzeit’. Flight and expulsion constitute the historical object or allegorical fragment in these novels, which appears interrupted and piecemeal before further elaboration or artistic license. In Müller-Beeck, for example, Anne Teschke’s flashbacks and nightmares exemplify the fragmentation of mnemonic objects, which set the scene with a sense of uncanny destruction:

⁷⁹ In the *UDT*, the suitability of textual over aural objects in allegory emerges because of the ‘Ausdruck’ entailed in the allegorical transformation of a given object: “Dergestalt wird die Sprache zerbrochen[,] um in ihren Bruchstücken sich einem veränderten und gesteigerten Ausdruck zu leihen. [...] Die zertrümmerte Sprache hat in ihren Stücken aufgehört, bloßer Mitteilung zu dienen und stellt als neugeborner Gegenstand seine Würde neben die der Götter, Flüsse, Tugenden und ähnlicher, ins Allegorische hinüberschillernder Naturgestalten” – Benjamin, *UDT*, pp. 396, 392. More than this, visualising and even physicalising allegory means emphasising its structural composition and the disunity concealed behind a façade of words. The ‘Trauerspiel’ manifests how ‘das Geschrieben[e] zum Bilde [drängt]. Kein härterer Gegensatz zum Kunstsymbol, dem plastischen Symbol, dem Bilde der organischen Totalität ist denkbar als dies amorphe Bruchstück, als welches das allegorische Schriftbild sich zeigt” – Benjamin, *UDT*, pp. 365–366.

Ihre Hand strich mit einer unbestimmten Gebärde durch die Luft, während sie zu den Gedanken zurückkehrte, die ihr zu der ersten Erkenntnis geworden waren, nachdem die Flucht sie aus ihrem freundlichen Leben herausgerissen hatte. Die einen trifft es, und sie gehen unter... und die anderen laufen einfach weiter... Ein Bild stieg in ihr auf. Sie standen auf dem Güterbahnhof in Forst und mussten auf den Zug warten.

(Müller-Beeck, pp. 63–64)

Analepsis serves to evoke previous events in three of the novels, highlighting the continued impact of the traumatic past on the protagonist's present in a gesture of pathos. Describing this as the first step of allegorisation, I argue that the fragment enters the work as a citation of traumatic experience and therein of the entire history of flight and expulsion; changed by its appearance in these works, the fragment cannot simply recur or be (re-)remembered in its entirety from the present, but rather its clash with the present necessarily changes it. Allegories, according to John McCole, contain 'fragments of meaning' like citations, thus they do not represent or convey the whole of an origin or context, since any total recollection of the history of an object would impose a coherence upon it that Benjamin regarded as historicist.⁸⁰ The first step in allegorisation thus already serves as a helpful lens with which to understand the potency of the flight and expulsion for the GDR present, as the citation of or reference to the past draws refugees' experiences into the foreground of the novels and actualises them for the *Aufbau* in which they reappear.

⁸⁰ McCole, p. 142. One might also understand the objects of allegory as having a monadic structure, whose porous concentric foldings bring a dialectical stability between the fragment's origin, reserved at the core of the monad, and the new context that surrounds and partially penetrates its shell. This dialectical retention and distance derive from the monadological structure of the object – comparable to osmosis or to a concentric castle with openings in its fortifications, the monad exists for itself but, through 'foldings' surrounding it, encounters the outside world, but guarantees its independence. Benjamin writes: "[D]er Ertrag dieser Konstruktion ist der, dass *im* Werke das Lebenswerk, *im* Lebenswerk die Epoche und *in* der Epoche der Geschichtsverlauf aufbewahrt ist und aufgehoben" (*EF*, p. 440; my italics). See Chapter Two for a discussion of the monad in Benjamin's theory.

Voelkner's novel relates the flight from Danzig directly rather than through flashbacks. This less oblique association with remembrance still bespeaks the presence of the fragment, however, given that Benjamin neither stipulates this form nor reads it in the 'Trauerspiel'. In fact, the exemplary but itself fragmented *Melencolia I* by Albrecht Dürer comes in for criticism because of the irreconcilability of its objects, which seem 'atemporal' and 'frozen' rather than dynamic, in flux, interactive.⁸¹ Instead of literally resembling a fragment, the emblem needs to have lost the coherence of its old meaning and its former context, shattered by the rupture of a more perfect signification. Through 'Eingedenken', the historical moment appears revised or redefined *and* constitutes an encounter with the past in the present, thus in Voelkner's novel the mnemonic object still communicates the brokenness of history in the aftermath of the Second World War, with survivors forced into horrendous conditions: "Typhus gibt's auch schon. In manchen Häusern liegen Tote und werden nicht beerdigt. Kein Haus ohne Kranke, keinen Tropfen Milch für die Säuglinge. Bäcker ohne Brot. Kinder ohne Eltern" (p. 65). This asyndetic passage portrays a memory of that particular moment, in which corpses, starving infants, helpless bakers, and orphaned children allude to the traumatic and devastating postwar reality. Rather than construct a wider narrative of history in a symbolic gesture that would 'retell' history as totality, the narrator references a historical situation using objects or memories that exude chaos and destitution. This realistic approach benefits the rhetorical force of the work because it allows the tragedy of flight and its urgent message for the path of political leadership into the future to come to the fore. That allegory, as I read it in Voelkner:

⁸¹ Caygill, 'Walter Benjamin's Concept of Cultural History', p. 87; Agamben, 'The Melancholy Angel', p. 109.

brings life and credence to historical experiences that for the symbol seem to be without weight: the experience of the outdated, the grief-stricken and unsuccessful – in brief, all that cannot be put into relation with the wooing of a resplendent knowledge of the absolute. Allegory grants these unsuccessful and ‘creaturely’ elements of human existence ‘justice’ by rejecting meaningful unity.⁸²

If the first stage in the allegorical process explains the character of the fragment, the second captures the mediating effect of allegory in a work. Rauchfuss’s narrator, for example, reports the SED’s development and expansion in the SBZ/GDR by citing specific regulations and referring to Party organisations: “[D]ieser [Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund] regelt es, dass jeder Arbeiter zu seinem Urlaub kommt” (p. 116). Alone, this clear Party-political affiliation would colour the novel symbolically, but in the second stage of allegorisation the presence of the fragment influences and changes its surroundings, representing a kind of intradiegetic ‘Jetztzeit’. The allegorical character of the reference to flight prevents a complete alignment with the state-approved symbolic method, such that no reified and linear relationship to the future emerges and the mediation incurred by the historical fragment points the reader back to the present. As a former refugee, Stiemer in Voelkner’s novel enacts key legislation and reform as part of the SED’s rebuilding programme, whilst in his own biography he reminds the reader of the recent traumatic past that affected his and many other families. Stiemer himself becomes a meeting point of two distant temporal moments, but this clash works to his advantage, granting him both the lucidity and the authority to make statements such as: “[M]an kann ja auch keinen Menschen dazu zwingen, [in die Partei einzutreten,] er muss das ganz allein erkennen, das Richtige, das Wichtige! [...] Der wird [...]”

⁸² Finkelde, p. 60.

schon von selber draufkommen” (p. 159). As a political leader, he communicates and defends *Aufbau* goals, such as the land reform; yet an allegorical reading integrates his awareness of his own past into this perspective to prevent his becoming idealistic with regard to others’ political development. An allegorical reading, necessarily dialectical in character, thus presents his temporal consciousness as straddling the past and future, and as more effective for this moderation.

A diversity of perspectives equally signals the impact of the fragment on the proliferation of voices who oppose the ideological footing of a purely forward-looking focus in Reinhard’s novel. *Treibgut* sees Ralf describe Wehrmacht soldiers as mostly ‘sehr freundlich’ (p. 9), whilst a fellow refugee supportively bellows: “Die Großdeutsche Wehrmacht beim Ausrücken! [...] Auf die können wir stolz sein. [...] Heil euch, ihr tapferen Vaterlandsverteidiger...!” (p. 23). Contextualised, these comments offer no credible resistance to the post-fascist optimism propagated by the end; yet they clash both with the expectation of ideological backing for the *Aufbau* and with the anathema to glorifying the Wehrmacht. Similarly, Müller-Beeck’s narrator explores at length the oppositional discourse in the small-town conservatism of Breken’s CDU mayor, for example in his shock at the communists’ procession on May Day: “[E]r [fühlte] sich offensichtlich bedroht [...] durch das provozierende Auftreten jener Anhänger einer Weltanschauung, die er als einzige hasste, weil er sich nichts Gutes für seine Geruhsamkeit von ihr versprach” (p. 151). Voelkner’s narrator, moreover, identifies several expellees and locals who, much unlike Stiemer’s family, take no interest in employment or turn to theft and criminality (pp. 24, 300, 316). I argue that this diversity of perspectives derives from the emancipation effected by the integration of historical fragments into the novels, which clash with other temporal elements to generate a new perspective that, in turn, tolerates and integrates a greater intradiegetic diversity. As such, the divergent, even

politically offensive, voices and viewpoints in *Die Tage werden heller* pose no threat to the futurism anticipated in the character of Stiemer, who appears as a kind of role model despite his countless flaws.

The final stage of the allegorical process concerns the relationship between work and relational present in 'Jetztzeit'. The first two parts of allegorisation occur intradiegetically, as an object is removed from its original context and becomes a fragment, after which it exerts its influence upon its new context. But allegory specifically results in the retrieval of a hidden reserve of meaning in its fragmented objects once they are inserted into a new context – or constellation. In Chapter Two, I outlined the importance of an audience to the final, extratextual aspect of allegory, which depends on a commonality between the work and the immediate reader, helping to align – indeed clash – the temporal, spatial, and perspectival consciousness of the work with the historical present. This meeting of allegory and audience describes the third and most productive step in the allegorical process.

In *Treibgut*, the heightened relevance of the reader being a contemporary is implied in the adoption of an SBZ/GDR-relevant ideological stance. Adopting the perspective of the victims attacked by Ralf's band of thieves, for example, indicates the immorality of such behaviour (pp. 124, 129, 133, 137, 141); similarly, Tante Hedwig later rebukes the children for playing a mock game in which they recreate such behaviour: "Wir spielen ja auch nicht Krieg mit Kanonen und Panzerfäusten und Handgranaten, weil wir uns gar nicht erst wieder daran gewöhnen wollen, sondern nie wieder einen Krieg erleben möchten" (p. 191). The child's perspective and the SED-informed anti-war sentiment engender the political and aesthetical norms of the time, so as to cement the relational present in the work; however, the potentiality of allegory emerges in the clash of historical references with the immediate

Aufbau present, which both unlocks the characters' memories through 'Eingedenken' and moderates the temporal perspective of the contemporaneous reader. The resultant deviation from the Party line, examples of which I give above, offers a new means of seeing and behaving in the *Aufbau* that reconstructed and reformed with one eye on the past and another on the future. Taken at face value, the 'Jetztzeit' triggered by all four novels thus held the potential to recast the GDR's development as a historically informed and defiantly humanist ambition that would incorporate the spoils and ruins of a destructive past into the foundations of a state under construction.

As a result, the allegoricism in these works invites the reader to acknowledge the trauma of forced migration in the *Aufbau* present, to integrate it dialectically into the self-conception of that movement, and thus to transform its participants' behaviour looking ahead to the future. The thematisation of flight serves the first of these ends, but only its allegorisation responds to the second in the reconfiguration of meaning that transforms flight into a mode of seeing the present and the future. Anne's optimism at the end of *Westfälische Ernte*, for example, does not come from just anywhere, but rather her leadership qualities – as Kötter (p. 270), Uhlenkamp (p. 327), and Teckentrupp (p. 342) recognise – stem inherently from a willpower nurtured in the depths of her depression in Krügel's loft. Anne approaches the GDR border and its metaphorical optimism with her own concrete utopianism constructed through the lens of trauma, which the novel imparts to the reader. The same pattern occurs in *Treibgut*, in which the siblings' ultimate adoption conveys the achievements of profoundly good moral qualities, exemplified by those in positions of responsibility. The authors seize upon the relational present – the political anchoring of their works – in a sense by demonstrating the change that they simultaneously demand. By depicting characters who themselves are products of a dialectical temporality but not exemplary participants in the *Aufbau*, they elicit

the potential of a non-symbolic, non-reified approach to the growing socialist state that would have prevented the kind of displacement of critical and conflicting views embodied by a more homogeneous optimism around the expected GDR future. This third stage in the allegorical process thus carries the potency of the intradiegetic 'Jetztzeit' to the readership and their milieu so that the allegories of flight and expulsion in these examples come together with the socialist programme for the future in the present – and its participants, the readers – to suggest a novel approach to the politics of that present moment.

Erika Fischer-Lichte describes 'Jetztzeit' as a kind of deconstruction, since the reader first dismantles the fragment in its new intradiegetic context and reflects upon its impact, in the second step, upon the work itself, before relating it to their own experiences and thus reconstructing a constellation anew.⁸³ Indeed, the intradiegetic recontextualisation of historical citations alone does not suffice to posit a radical and radically fertile riposte to the demands and mistakes in the period, thus the interaction of the fragment with the audience denotes both the potentiality of allegory and its most crucial step. The specifically historical (materialist) aspect of this corpus colours that potentiality by stipulating a new perspective for the reader through which to isolate, spotlight, and analyse socio-political discourse, reaffirming the Marxian credo for writers that: “[Die] Entwicklung der Widersprüche einer geschichtlichen Produktionsform [...] der einzig geschichtliche Weg ihrer Auflösung und Neugestaltung [ist].”⁸⁴

⁸³ Erika Fischer-Lichte, 'Die "Allegorie" als Paradigma der Avantgarde. Eine semiotische re-lecture von Walter Benjamins "Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels"', in *Modelle für eine semiotische Rekonstruktion der Geschichte der Ästhetik*, ed. by Heinz Paetzold (Aachen: Rader, 1987), pp. 265–284 (p. 280).

⁸⁴ Contradictions, arguably would remain, whilst new ones would certainly emerge from the 'Auflösung', but Marx draws attention primarily to the necessity of interacting with rather than negating problems – Karl Marx, *Das Kapital: Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, in *Karl Marx Friedrich Engels Werke [MEW]*, ed. by Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED, 44 vols (Berlin: Dietz, 1955–1981), XXIII (1962), p. 512; Winfried Schröder, 'Walter Benjamin – zum Funktionswandel der Literatur in der Epoche des Imperialismus', in *Funktion der Literatur: Aspekte, Probleme, Aufgaben*, ed. by Dieter Schlenstedt (Berlin: Akademie, 1975), pp. 176–186 (pp. 182–184).

By approaching the critical elements of these novels through an allegorical lens, I argue that the historical inflection of allegory could effect a breakthrough in our understanding of the supposed aesthetic deficiencies in *Aufbau* literature, as the dialectical incorporation of historical fragments into an otherwise forward-looking ideology enacts a perspectival revision towards greater inclusivity, tolerance, and historical awareness. Rauchfuss' *Dröge* and Voelkner's *Stierner* serve as primary examples of this potential in their productive response to the challenges of their present by approaching preparations for a socialist future consciously and constructively. When the allegories of flight and expulsion clash with the reader as fragments, their recontextualisation in the *Aufbau* lays a foundation for that same proactive, historically mindful, and avowedly socialist behaviour to enter into the GDR's political consciousness.

The Angel's Trap: Socialist Idealism, Generalisation, and the *Angelus Novus*

None of these novels represents a comprehensively allegorical work, however; rather each also exhibits aspects of a symbolic mode. In the previous chapter, I cast socialist realism as symbolic because of the disjunct between its theoretical attributes and practical realisation, leaving it as a highly ambiguous method that artists necessarily expanded in their work, for which they frequently faced criticism. Rather than propose specific ways in which this corpus contravenes socialist realist criteria, I draw on a key visual motif from thesis IX – the *Angelus Novus* – to understand how, in parallel with their allegoricism, numerous symbolic characteristics also appear in the texts. Benjamin writes:

Es gibt ein Bild von Klee, das *Angelus Novus* heißt. Ein Engel ist darauf dargestellt, der aussieht, als wäre er im Begriff, sich von etwas zu entfernen, worauf er starrt. Seine Augen sind aufgerissen, sein Mund steht offen und seine Flügel sind ausgespannt. Der Engel der Geschichte muss so aussehen. Er hat das Antlitz der Vergangenheit zugewendet. Wo eine

Kette von Begebenheiten vor *uns* erscheint, da sieht *er* eine einzige Katastrophe, die unablässig Trümmer auf Trümmer häuft und sie ihm vor die Füße schleudert. Er möchte wohl verweilen, die Toten wecken und das Zerschlagene zusammenfügen. Aber ein Sturm weht vom Paradiese her, der sich in seinen Flügeln verfangen hat und so



Figure 2

stark ist, dass der Engel sie nicht mehr schließen kann. Dieser Sturm treibt ihn unaufhaltsam in die Zukunft, der er den Rücken kehrt, während der Trümmerhaufen vor ihm zum Himmel wächst. Das, was wir den Fortschritt nennen, ist *dieser* Sturm.

(*ÜBG*, IX, pp. 632–633)

As an exemplary image of Benjamin's allegory, the *Angelus Novus* embodies the clash of historical materialism and historicism, the tension incurred by the relentless pull of 'Fortschritt'. But the angelic image also elicits the potential to unleash that semantic reserve from the ruins of the past, since the angel observes the 'Trümmer' that, for Benjamin, characterises history, and identifies a potential in '[den] Toten' and 'd[em] Zerschlagene[n]' – far more so than in the normative pull of teleology. Readings of the *Angelus* and Benjamin's

description of it have variously described an allegory of natural history or historical materialism (Rolf Tiedemann), of humanity (Gershom Scholem), and of the angel as a human (Tiedemann), a prophet of the Hebrew Bible (Helmut Thielen), Hitler (!) (Johann Konrad Eberlein), and the artist himself, Paul Klee (Perdita Rösch), which point to the angel's hermeneutic significance.⁸⁵ For this analysis at least, Tiedemann's proposition seems most useful. As Sigrid Weigel notes, these hermeneutic variations derive from the ambiguity in the *Angelus Novus*, particularly since scholars reference not one angel but three: the original Klee print; Benjamin's textual description; and the poem 'Gruß vom Angelus' by Jewish philosopher, theologian, and close friend of Benjamin, Gershom Scholem, a stanza of which stands as the epigraph of thesis IX from which this quotation is taken.⁸⁶ Each version differs slightly from the others, as Benjamin for example sees the 'Trümmer' of the past that the angel desires to reach and presumes that a 'Sturm [...] vom Paradiese' pulls him away from the catastrophe of the past, whereas Scholem presumes the angel's provenance as heaven and purpose some kind of announcement.

The ambiguity around the *Angelus Novus* does not end there, however, rather stems back to the liminality of the angel figure himself, who, as Rösch asserts, oscillates between heaven and earth.⁸⁷ Not only does this spatial dialectic haunt the background of the *Angelus Novus* and appear in the skyward-facing wings, the hermeneutic discrepancies also elicit, according to Mosès, a tension between the Klee original and textual expansions of it, between the image

⁸⁵ Rolf Tiedemann, 'Historical Materialism or Political Messianism? An Interpretation of the Theses "On the Concept of History"', pp. 114–115; Gershom Scholem, 'Walter Benjamin und sein Engel', in *Zur Aktualität Walter Benjamins*, ed. by Siegfried Unseld (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), pp. 87–138 (p. 131); Thielen, p. 260; Johann Konrad Eberlein, '*Angelus Novus*: Paul Klees Bild und Walter Benjamins Deutung' (Freiburg & Berlin: Rombach, 2006), pp. 48, 74; Perdita Rösch, *Die Hermeneutik des Boten: Der Engel als Denkfigur bei Paul Klee und Rainer Maria Rilke* (Munich: Fink, 2009), p. 53.

⁸⁶ Sigrid Weigel, 'Thought-images: A re-reading of the "angel of history"', in *Body-And Image-Space: Re-Reading Walter Benjamin*, trans. by Georgina Paul (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 46–56 (p. 53). Benjamin cites the fifth stanza of Scholem's poem: 'Mein Flügel ist zum Schwung bereit / ich kehrte gern zurück / denn blieb' ich auch lebendige Zeit / ich hätte wenig Glück' – Gershom Scholem, 'Gruss vom Angelus', in Walter Benjamin, *Briefe*, 2 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), 296.

⁸⁷ Rösch, p. 53.

and its descriptive performances.⁸⁸ This ambiguity derives – or produces – a tension that also typifies Benjamin’s method, as the collision of Klee’s object with its description in the theses creates a dynamic that exudes contradiction and, at the same time, unlocks some kind of new perspective. As Benjamin’s version differs from Klee’s original, the *Angelus Novus* is not only cited in thesis IX, but performed textually and actualised by it.⁸⁹ Such an undertaking embodies both the work of the historical materialist in ‘Eingedenken’ and that of the allegorist, denoting the profound interconnectedness of Benjamin’s work.

A comparison between the *Angelus Novus* with the *Aufbau* requires little justification, since the ideological gesture towards a reckoning with the past but the constant pull of the future in the GDR’s own ‘Trümmerfelder’ after the end of the War recalls Benjamin’s thesis. The complex and dialectical temporality in the *Aufbau* and its diverse ideological foci is evoked metaphorically in the angel’s desperation to stay in the present ‘um das Zerschlagene zusammenzufügen und damit das zu einem glücklichen Ende zu bringen, was auf sein Glück noch wartet’.⁹⁰ That the angel remains stuck in this predicament does not matter for the historical materialist, however, for whom the *Angelus Novus* becomes a counterpoint, a ‘Denkbild’, from which to draw inspiration.⁹¹ If the angel alone fails to interact with the past and drifts ‘backwards into the future’, in Terry Eagleton’s words, because he cannot defy the tide of progress, the performance of, or perhaps even just allusion to, this original intention

⁸⁸ Mosès, ‘Eingedenken und Jetztzeit: Geschichtliches Bewusstsein im Spätwerk Walter Benjamins’, p. 399.

⁸⁹ Geyer-Ryan, ‘Counterfactual artefacts: Walter Benjamin’s philosophy of history’, p. 68.

⁹⁰ ‘[I]ch weiß, was ich verkünden soll / und weiß noch vieles mehr’ – Scholem, ‘Gruss vom Angelus’, p. 296; ‘Er möchte wohl verweilen, die Toten wecken und das Zerschlagene zusammenfügen’ – Benjamin, *ÜBG*, IX, pp. 632–633. See also Caroline Heinrich, ‘Über den Anspruch der Vergangenheit und das Recht auf Gegenwart’, in *Vom Ende der Geschichte her: Walter Benjamins geschichtsphilosophische Thesen*, ed. by Thomas Schröder & Jonas Engelmann (Mainz: Ventil, 2017), pp. 53–74 (p. 64).

⁹¹ It may be precisely the emphatic plurality of the angel, his ultimate capacity for transcendence into heaven, that brings his demise, since he seems to invoke or refer to a Messiah figure who redeems the world, as Scholem believed – Scholem, ‘Walter Benjamin und sein Engel’, p. 133.

of historical materialism nevertheless steps in to complete the task.⁹² The same applies to the *Aufbau*, as a recognition of its challenging temporality already proves revealing and enlightening in light of the future focus of the SED's political discourse. Benjamin's textual performance of the *Angelus Novus* illustrates, therefore, how the corrective gaze of historical materialism could realise a meaningful interaction with the legacy of the Second World War and a more concrete vision for the GDR's future, in which history no longer selectively informs an antifascist and teleological agenda, but the burdens and legacies from the past influence and moderate the development of socialism. Whereas the programmatic *Aufbau* propagated by the SED contained a bias towards futurity and necessitated a constant dynamic towards that future – as stipulated in socialist realism, for example – the counterpoint of the *Angelus Novus* suggests the reality of temporal pulls in the *Aufbau* present and demands attention.

The similarities between Benjamin's 'Denkbild' and this corpus of novels does not end with their allegoricism, however, because of their common failure to achieve a given ambition. I argue, in the following section, that the novels in this corpus do not realise a wholly allegorical aesthetics, but rather incorporate some elements from a symbolic praxis. Like the *Angelus*, however, an initial recognition of these elements does not automatically negate the potential in this corpus, nor its access to that 'Glück'. The realist, highly dialogical, omnisciently-narrated style in all four novels not only lessens their aesthetic experimentalism, but has led a number of critics to identify them as 'Unterhaltungsromane'.⁹³ When workers at the cement factory in *Westfälische Ernte* strike, the management's willingness to submit to their requests subdues this potential threat to plot development almost immediately: "Nachdem er es

⁹² Eagleton, 'The Marxist Rabbi: Walter Benjamin', pp. 338–339. Cf. Mosès' claim that the performance of the *Angelus Novus* destroys it – Mosès, 'Eingedenken und Jetztzeit: Geschichtliches Bewusstsein im Spätwerk Walter Benjamins', p. 399.

⁹³ Amos, pp. 232–3; Irmfried Hiebel, 'Hildegard Maria Rauchfuss', *Deutsch als Fremdsprache*, 27 (1990), 73–86 (p. 74).

verworfen hatte, sofort die Polizei zu verständigen, was auch einige Zeit in Anspruch genommen hatte, blieb ihm und seinen Mitarbeitern nichts zu tun, als zu warten, was jetzt geschehen würde” (pp. 257, 281). This implausible and plastic dissolution of tension translates into the risk of depicting reality superficially, which, if over-generalised and banalised, could undermine the far more serious description of flight and expulsion. This point is demonstrated further in the criticism from Party-aligned sources, which picked out the generalisations and simplifications as unsatisfactory according to the benchmark of socialist realism; Heinz Entner, for example, criticised Müller-Beeck for failing to depict ‘die Fülle von Gestalten, Problemen, Antrieben und Zusammenstößen, den ganzen Komplex gesellschaftlicher und individueller Bewegungen’ in the novel ‘als notwendige, als dialektische Einheit’ via the Lukácsian specific-general dialectic.⁹⁴

Since these reviews undermine the artistic standing of the novels in their attribution to the ‘Unterhaltungsroman’ genre and ideological criticism, I argue that the critical elements in the texts demonstrate a symbolic undercurrent. Reinhard’s novel *Treibgut*, for example, adopts too linear a presumption of a socialist future that allows a reader to surmise the fate that will befall the orphaned pair rapidly, as a result of which no legitimate challenges to the development of the work occur. Despite the pursuit of a dialectical temporality, the authors’ pursuit of unity in other respects echoes the symbolic cult of a mimetic totality that, in its distinction from and transcendence of reality, signifies something about the world. As I conclude in Chapter Two, any symbolic praxis fails to cohere because of the postlapsarian impossibility of signification described by Benjamin. That same analysis, moreover, indicated the fallibility of GDR socialist realism on account of its symbolism, which both hinders the

⁹⁴ Heinz Entner, ‘Gute Absichten und Ansätze genügen nicht’, *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, 4 (1954), 153–155. See also Eva Braun, ‘Der Blick auf das ganze Deutschland’, *Neues Deutschland*, 19 June 1955, 7; Ebert, p. 9.

transition from theory to praxis and renders supposedly concrete criteria frequently paradoxical and vague. Unlike Entner and other GDR critics, therefore, I am not interested in how socialist realist each novel appears per se, but how, in conversation with the *Angelus Novus*, its perceived allegoricism merits further inspection.

In both their dialectical temporality and the attempted expansion of their internal discursive plane, the texts exhibit a particular generalisation.⁹⁵ *Treibgut*, because of its short length and quick pace, does not contain elaborately developed characters apart from Ralf, whilst on the road the siblings encounter supposedly ‘typical’ figures such as Oskar who cons them out of supplies (p. 21), thieving families (p. 22), and Nazi sympathisers (p. 23); Rauchfuss’ narrator begins each chapter with a different character, structuring the novel emphatically according to a repetition of new narrative perspectives; and in *Westfälische Ernte* Müller-Beeck depicts West Germans through ideologically relevant but nonetheless tired stereotypes such as ‘the capitalist’, portrayed in the cement factory boss and the former landowner expellee Opitz. Critics at the time regarded the passing references to countless typical characters, viewpoints, and approaches as lacking detail, rendering Herta Rohloff’s characterisation and behaviour ‘farblos [und] zu eindeutig’ in *Wem die Steine Antwort geben* or Stiemer’s seemingly inexhaustible motivation in Voelkner’s novel both unsatisfactory and incomplete.⁹⁶

These perceived flaws bind the works to a symbolic mode in the supposition that generalisation would make the work more demographically representative and familiar because it would be absolutely reflective of reality. The clear partisanship and broad

⁹⁵ That generalisation – in some way reminiscent of Georg Lukács’ ‘Verallgemeinerung’ – functions as an alienating tool that gains more significance in the following chapter.

⁹⁶ See for example Franz Höppner, ‘Ein Dokument unserer Zeit: Die Tage werden heller’, *Heute und morgen*, [n.d.] 1952, [n.p.], contained in AdK SV-ZA 5971; Hermann Heinz Wille, “WDSAG”: Ein in Dresden handelnder Roman über die Ehe von H. M. Rauchfuss’, *Sächsische Zeitung Dresden*, 6 August 1958, contained in AdK SV-ZA 4248.

optimism around the socialist future fulfil some ideological criteria, for example, but the generalised portrayal of characters, perspectives, factions, and other discourses robs these texts of the detail and credibility that might persuade the reader. None of the works provoked much critical interest, however; the location of symbolic aspects in each of the texts is thus based not so much on critical appraisals of, for example, their fidelity to socialist realism, as in textual contradictions to the allegorical elements identified above. Much like the paradox of the *Angelus Novus*, this blend of the symbolic and the allegorical complicates the structure of the novels and their messages.

Such deficiencies do not deprive the texts of potential in other areas, however, just as the *Angelus Novus* allows Benjamin to explicate the productivity of historical materialism. This analysis evidences the dynamic scale between symbolist and allegorical aesthetics and its heightened relevance for cultural production in the early GDR, as, the more a work leans away from symbolist or, indeed, socialist realist principles, the more productive its structural *dis*integrity is. Indeed, an allegorical reading of this corpus implies that allegory proceeds in its own performance regardless of symbolic elements elsewhere; the temporal and discursive novelty in these novels for the *Aufbau* present thus remains even if other aesthetic deficiencies remain. In summary, the category hypothesised at the start of this chapter between radical allegorical aesthetics and a symbolic praxis applies to this corpus of novels, which do not fulfil their greatest potential because of the dilution of historical materialism in, for example, their generalisation. Since Voelkner's novel, for example, features voices that were firmly excluded from Party discourse and, more broadly, from the GDR's political sphere at the time, it argues for the inclusion of historical reflection in *Aufbau* consciousness. These efforts do not lose their efficacy simply because the work, in other areas, echoes a symbolic praxis, but the lost opportunity of a fully allegorical work evidently entails a

forfeiture of rhetorical weight. Nonetheless, *Die Tage werden heller* effected a valid and fruitful challenge to the SED's futurist and linear ideology because its inclusion of diverse temporal and discursive identities alongside a conformist orientation around the *Aufbau* project evidenced the possibility of a polysemic socialism. The *Angelus Novus*, a source of yet-to-be-realised potential in Benjamin's theses, thus offers this corpus of novels an anti-teleological, hypostasised path away from the present in the form of what Benjamin called a 'revolutionäre Chance im Kampfe für die unterdrückte Vergangenheit' (*ÜBG*, XVII, p. 638; XIV, p. 636).

Conclusion

In their generation of 'Jetztzeit', *Treibgut*, *Westfälische Ernte*, *Die Tage werden heller*, and *Wem die Steine Antwort geben* draw on the (hi)story of flight and expulsion to establish the newness of a radical temporal approach to the *Aufbau*. By removing their historical referents from a continuum of progressing history, the authors uncover flight and expulsion as important chapters in early postwar history, but also seek to integrate that legacy into the revolutionary present through what I describe as dialectical temporality. Contrary to a supposed taboo around so-called 'Umsiedler:innen', this corpus locates the experience of this sizeable demographic as relevant not only to the GDR's self-conception, but also to its development as part of the *Aufbau des Sozialismus*, in which the characters willingly participate. Even if the limited discursive acceptance for figures such as refugees and expellees – Karl Stiemer and Karla Dröge, for example – lessened the potential impact of these clear and convincing examples of transformed protagonists, the novels deliver a radical reappraisal of the linear futurity propagated by the SED and its vision for the GDR's future.

This gesture of expansion characterises the fulcrum of authors' critical participation in political discourse in the *Aufbau*, but also evidences a fundamental affiliation to the broader

Aufbau project in the temporal clash of historical and idealistic references in a relational present, in which a new, more tolerant perspective emerges. Regardless of their ambition, however, these authors enjoyed little success in the cultural sphere.⁹⁷ Those who posited an alternative temporal logic routinely found their stakeholder ship in the socialist project limited in these and later years in the GDR. Even though the works in this chapter retain elements of a symbolic aesthetics, they call into question the discursive and temporal limitations that led, for example, to the exclusion of refugees and expellees from participating in the *Aufbau* without abrogating their past in favour of a generalised ‘socialist’ identity. The Party-political, journalistic, and academic interest in these novels fell far short of that of *Robeisen* and *Menschen an unsrer Seite*, signalling a widespread reticence about acknowledging their perspective.⁹⁸ The reception of all four novels, however, equally highlights a scepticism about their depictions of or allusions to the early GDR and the individual political transformations within it, which may explain why these texts gained little ground after publication.

More work could be done to explore the impact that this exclusion had on refugees’ visibility and participation in the *Aufbau*, although countless other examples exist of a broader and systemic marginalisation that streamlined the voices and identities deemed acceptable to hold a stake in the state’s development. Indeed, the next chapter investigates how the perceived deviation from cultural-political norms and objectives in a work did not just affect its

⁹⁷ In the case of *Treibgut*, however, Bill Niven intimates that about 75,000 copies sold within nine years, whilst it appears that students in ‘Oberschulen’ and ‘Pädagogischen Instituten’ read the novel as a stimulus to discuss their own experiences from the War – Edith Krull, ‘Sie schrieb unseren neuen Roman’, *Die Frau von Heute*, 26 August 1960, 14. I thank Dr. Carola Hähnel-Mesnard for help with locating this source.

Reinhard’s success amongst audiences doubtless depended upon a degree of institutional support (for example the provision of paper for copies), but engagement from critics and other sources affiliated to the SED was lacking, as it was for all three other texts. Without the level of authority that this interest would have brought, the authors did not enjoy high profiles in cultural discourse. See Bill Niven, ‘Flight and Expulsion in the GDR: A Case of Marginalisation and Taboo?’, unpublished paper presented at the conference ‘Remembering and Rethinking the GDR: Multiple Perspectives and Plural Authenticities?’ (Bangor University, 8–10 September 2010) <<http://afterthewall.bangor.ac.uk/documents/Niven.pdf>> [accessed 17 November 2022] (p. 7).

⁹⁸ One contributing factor may well have been their designation as ‘Unterhaltungsromane’.

reception, but often involved alterations to manuscripts. The relatively limited critical interest in the corpus of this chapter meant that, as per the autonomy-affiliation dialectic, the authors did not have enough authority (through popularity and/or participation in Party structures) to elicit such consequences. Nevertheless, a critical and expansive approach seems to have worked to the authors' detriment given that they did not reach major audiences or attract considerable critical attention – two mechanisms with which the authorities exerted control over the cultural sphere. To what extent more comprehensively allegorical works could further heighten and enact this potential remains unclear, however, as does the role played by an audience in their encounter with a work. In turning to a corpus in the next chapter that lends itself to a more thoroughly allegorical reading, I explore the fate of works that deviate more severely from political and aesthetic norms, and more radically seek to remould the *Aufbau* into an interactive and inclusive movement with a live audience to do so. For that, they encounter considerable resistance.

CHAPTER FOUR

‘NACHGESCHAFFENE WIRKLICHKEIT UND DIREKTE WIRKLICHKEIT ZUGLEICH’: THE THEATRE AUDIENCE AND THE TIPPING POINT

Eine brechtsche Maxime: Nicht an das gute Alte anknüpfen, sondern an das schlechte Neue.
(Walter Benjamin)¹

Und was heißt diese Wirklichkeit? Ist sie nicht die Revolution, also etwas sich Umwälzendes, nie mit sich Zufriedenes, sondern Selbstbewusstes? [...] Heißt es diese Wirklichkeit zu feiern, wenn man sie behandelt wie eine Misere: als hätte sich nicht Möglichkeiten, als wäre nichts zu machen mit ihr, als wäre sie *unter* aller Kritik?
(Volker Braun)²

Theatre, even without a strictly distanced auditorium, needs observers and spectators of some kind, even if observing ‘from within’ as participants in the drama. The allegorical process, broken down into three parts, ends with the contact between work and reader in a moment of extradiegetic interaction that heralds a new constellation of fragments, unleashes their reserve of meaning, and stipulates the immanence of the allegorical mode. This contact occurs in the theatre with an audience during the live presentation of a piece, making drama a particularly effective medium of spontaneous contact and of allegory. In this chapter, I analyse three plays that rely on the spectator’s initiative and participation, and that derive their theoretical framework at least in part from the work of Bertolt Brecht, who lived and worked in the GDR from around 1950 until his death in 1956. Taking Brecht’s model of

¹ Walter Benjamin, *Selbstzeugnisse*, Projekt Gutenberg <<https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/benjamin/selbstze/chap005.html>> [accessed 9 November 2022], chapter five.

² Klaus Höpcke, ‘Ab-fall und Aufstieg. Gespräch mit Volker Braun’, *Neues Deutschland*, 17 September 1966, 7 (italics in original).

epic theatre as a starting point, I explore these plays in the *Aufbau* context, evaluate their reception, and investigate the role foreseen for their audiences.

Walter Benjamin's writings on the dramatic mode, ranging from the series of essays on Bertolt Brecht's epic praxis to the seminal studies 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit' and 'Der Autor als Produzent', contextualise the substantial shifts in cultural and, more specifically, dramatic production over the twentieth century. Benjamin describes, for example, the decline of 'aura', a key landmark in twentieth-century modernism, and praises Brecht's disruption of the passive totality onstage, which he regards as a direct benefit of post-auratic art. Since early GDR playwrights associated themselves with Brecht's epic theory, their works too exemplify a politicised theatre – but one recast for the socialist state, thus direct comparisons between epic theatre and real-existing socialist theatre only go so far. As such, this chapter differentiates Brecht's model from works by Heinar Kipphardt, Helmut Baierl, and Inge and Heiner Müller and instead looks for common traits in this corpus – the criticism, unanswered questions, and atmosphere of expectation onstage. In turn, I apply an allegorical lens to ascertain how these experimental elements did not just break from the expectations of socialist realist theatre, but crucially how they engaged the audience as part of efforts to influence the *Aufbau* present. Given that all three plays underwent varying degrees of censorship, textual revision, and performance delay, I explore how an allegorical reading of GDR theatre helps to understand the more controversial elements in a more constructive light, as the authors utilised the in some cases only very recently rebuilt stages for a participative performance of collaboration and collective engagement.

The 1950s GDR Stage – Socialist Realist Pedagogy vs. Negative Didacticism

In the 1950s, a rift emerged in GDR theatre that distinguished socialist realism from the method pursued by numerous young playwrights, who criticised the socio-political status quo and opted to adapt and experiment with aesthetic form. Fuelled by author and cultural functionary Fritz Erpenbeck with an article entitled 'Blutarmes Theater' in 1957, the controversy surrounding this novel approach revealed polar tensions between aesthetic schools that had existed from the early 1950s: some, like Erpenbeck, propagated a theatre informed by canonical works and a 'blutvoll, leidenschaftlich, komödiantisch und pathetisch erschütternd' style of acting;³ others, Inge and Heiner Müller, sought to express the antagonisms of a society in transformation and their historical roots, demanding the spectator's participation in order to work through these contradictions, as Helmut Kreuzer writes:

[Diese Autor:innen] bekannten sich zum Sozialismus und verstanden sich als Vertreter einer progressiven Position, entschlossen, die Entwicklung hin zum Ziel des vollendeten Kommunismus dadurch zu fördern, dass sie die gegebene soziale Wirklichkeit der DDR [...] aus ihrer Perspektive realistisch-kritisch darstellen und [...] konfrontieren. Sie standen ästhetisch in der Nachfolge Brechts, suchten ihre Stoffe und Themen aber in der wirtschaftlichen Produktion ihrer Zeit und ihres Landes und den damit verbundenen Konflikten zwischen individuellen 'Riesen' und ihrer sozialen Umwelt, zwischen anarchischen 'Selbsthelfern' bzw. vorauseilenden Revolutionären und dem gegebenen Kurs der Partei.⁴

³ Fritz Erpenbeck, 'Blutarmes Theater', *Neues Deutschland*, 30 May 1957, 4. The seeds for his position were sown as early as 1953 with an article in the magazine *Theater der Zeit*, which Erpenbeck founded in 1946 – Fritz Erpenbeck, 'Ein neuer Abschnitt. Zur ersten deutschen Stanislawski-Tagung', *Theater der Zeit*, 8:5 (1953), 1–5. Heated debates around the direction of GDR theatre did begin earlier, however, in the context of the anti-formalism debate.

⁴ Helmut Kreuzer & Karl-Wilhelm Schmidt (eds.), *Dramaturgie in der DDR (1945 bis 1990)* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 1998), I: (1945–1969), p. 578; Hermann Kähler, *Gegenwart auf der Bühne: die sozialistische Wirklichkeit in den Bühnenstücken der DDR von 1956–1963/4* (Berlin: Henschel, 1966), p. 19.

Since these authors founded their approach on the basic tenets of Brecht's epic theatre and yielded a model that broke from several ideological principles devised for GDR aesthetics by Party authorities, the rift generated a peculiar attitude towards Brecht, whose renown guaranteed his status as a crucial figure in GDR culture, but whose own work also embodied the progressive and radical approach to the theatre disavowed by Erpenbeck and others, such that: "Brecht einerseits unausgesprochen zu den inkriminierten Formalisten oder Stanislawski-Gegnern gezählt und andererseits als bedeutendster Theatermann in der DDR genannt wurde."⁵

In secondary material, Party-affiliated critics identified their work as one unified school and called it 'didactic theatre' because of the tendency towards negative depictions of the *Aufbau* reality that exhibited outstanding issues, which reviewers considered a didactic exercise.⁶ The didactic epithet became something of an accusation, with Walter Ulbricht on one occasion attacking the suggestion that the prevalence of 'das sogenannte "didaktische" Lehrtheater' rendered it '*die sozialistische Kunstform*'.⁷ As Hermann Kähler writes of the playwrights, though, 'ihre Begabungen und Intentionen sind unterschiedlich, und sie bildeten keine "Gruppe"'.⁸ A set of characteristics did circulate in secondary material, however, such as those formulated by the head of the ZK's *Abteilung Kultur*, Siegfried Wagner: an emphasis on contradictions in behaviour; an absence of psychology in characterisation; a separation of

⁵ Petra Stuber, *Spielräume und Grenzen: Studien zum DDR-Theater* (Berlin: Links, 1998), pp. 167–168.

⁶ See for example Kreuzer & Schmidt (eds.), I, p. 578; Kähler, p. 18; Horst Schiefelbein, 'Auch so kann man es machen', *Neues Deutschland*, 3 January 1958, 4; Heinz Kersten, "Der Lohndrucker" von Heiner Müller und "Die Feststellung" von Helmut Baierl: Premieren im Berliner Ensemble', in *Mehr als Theater: Kritikerblicke auf Ostberliner Bühnen 1973–1990*, ed. by Christel Drawer (Berlin: Vistas, 2006), pp. 134–135 (p. 134).

⁷ Walter Ulbricht, 'Der Weg zur Sicherung des Friedens und zur Erhöhung der materiellen und kulturellen Lebensbedingungen des Volkes [Referat Walter Ulbrichts auf dem 4. Plenum des ZK der SED, 15. Januar 1959, Auszug', in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur und Kulturpolitik der SED*, ed. by Elimar Schubbe (Stuttgart, Seewald, 1972), I: 1946–1970, pp. 542–543 (p. 543; italics in original).

⁸ Kähler, p. 18. See also Gunnar Müller-Waldeck, 'Aspekte der Brecht-Rezeption in der Dramatik der 50er und 60er Jahre – dargestellt an der Gestaltung des Gegenwartsdramas in Stücken von Helmut Baierl, Heiner Müller, Peter Hacks und Volker Braun' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Greifswald, 1974), p. 19; Wolfram Schlenker, *Das 'Kulturelle Erbe' in der DDR: Gesellschaftliche Entwicklung und Kulturpolitik 1945–1965* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1977), p. 147.

individuals from society; a projection of conflict resolution onto the audience, i.e. lack of resolution in work itself; and a deficient proletarian consciousness.⁹ Whilst the pedagogical ('erzieherisch') aspect of socialist realism dictated the ubiquitous presumption that conforming cultural production in the GDR would employ some kind of didactic method, the accusations levelled against 'didactic' theatre must be differentiated from this, as critics meant to denounce the manner in which associated playwrights forced an unmediated image of the *Aufbau* upon the audiences, but rather than identify commonalities with socialist realism. At stake was the playwrights' decision to forego the criterion of revolutionary optimism in favour of a critical stance, as in the absence of a direct lesson to the reader for their own self-improvement a work could supposedly violate pedagogical expectations and represent a negative didacticism.

Indicating the perceived distance between cultural norms at the time and didactic theatre, Wagner wrote of such authors: "Man will die Widersprüche als aufhebbar zwar zeigen, aber man verzichtet darauf, im Kunstwerk selbst die Widersprüche zu lösen und bezeichnet so etwas als 'verfrühte Harmonie'."¹⁰ According to Gudrun Klatt, critics took issue with the dependence on audience engagement because of the Party's belief that the GDR's nascent society – and, indeed, its citizens – lacked the political maturity to grapple with political questions alone, which represented a level of responsibility for which 'das neue Publikum, ja die Gesellschaft insgesamt noch nicht vorbereitet war'.¹¹ Socialist realism, instead, offered a guiding framework for an audience in need of 'Erziehung'. The term 'didactic' seems, therefore, to have stemmed from a politically motivated campaign to discredit divergent

⁹ Siegfried Wagner, 'Künstler und Publikum auf dem Wege zu einem sozialistischen Nationaltheater', *Theater der Zeit*, 8 (1959), supplement 'Studien', 13, 2–26 (pp. 12–15).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.

¹¹ Gudrun Klatt, 'Erfahrungen des "didaktischen" Theaters der fünfziger Jahre in der DDR', *Weimarer Beiträge*, 7 (1977), 34–69 (p. 57).

authors' work and serves here only as a reference to the critical rejection of this radical model for the theatre. The analysis in this chapter instead explores how authors such as the Müllers, Kipphardt, and Baierl developed a post-Brechtian model whose relationship with and expectations of the audience I identify as dialectical. Substantial and varying methodological disparities exist in the examples in this chapter, however; I thus opt to move beyond the didactic epithet and the characterisation of these plays as one uniform body. Beginning with an introduction to each play, I then compare the texts with Brecht's epic theatre, before turning to a reading of Brecht's praxis through Walter Benjamin's theory of allegory, which I apply to the corpus of this chapter to examine its political potential for the *Aufbau*. In so doing, I refer back to the controversy surrounding 'didactic theatre' and argue, through allegory, how these three plays instead represent a dialectical theatre.

Setting the Scene: Baierl, Kipphardt, the Müllers, Brecht

Helmut Baierl's *Die Feststellung* premiered at the *Städtische Bühnen* in Erfurt on 27 December 1957, after which at least twenty-five premieres at other GDR theatres took place in the new year.¹² Written and presented with the subtitle 'Ein Lehrstück', the play takes place in the office of a 'landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft' (LPG), a farming collective that brings land, machinery, livestock etc. into shared ownership following the Soviet paragon of collectivisation: the 'κολλхоз' (kolkhoz). The anxious Finzes, farmers themselves, had flown to the West, having been criticised by the LPG chairman ('Vorsitzender') for their refusal to join the collective and their illicit purchase of fertiliser on the black market. At the opening, the pair are back in the village, having repented their error of judgement, and they receive

¹² Theaterpremierensübersicht (DDR – nur Infodatenbank), Archivische Hilfsmittel, Darstellende Kunst <<https://archiv.adk.de/BildsucheFrames?easydb=901pt6ch5cnrqa8arun0uajkg0&ls=2&ts=1668511520>> [accessed 15 November 2022], AdK 787–ca. 899; Helmut Baierl, *Die Feststellung*, in *Stücke* (Berlin: Henschel, 1969), 5–38. Further references to this and other primary works are given after quotations in the text.

land from the collective to take up their work again – but not before answering some questions.

In three role play scenes, the Finzes and the chairman recreate their fateful conversation to determine if the latter's actions had left the couple no choice but to leave, as they argue: in the first iteration, the three retain their original roles; in the second, Herr Finze and the 'Vorsitzender' reverse roles; and in the third the obstinate 'unrasierter Bauer' Benno replaces the chairman in character and tone. These performances – plays within a play – force not just the Finzes to self-reflection but also the LPG chairman, whose behaviour contributed to the couple's 'Republikflucht' and who subsequently seems incapable of guiding the collective to allocate responsibility to either party. As a result, the community, under the guidance of the 'Mechanikerin', initiates the third role play, in which Herr Finze becomes willing to join the LPG, showing the power of collective action.

With final preparations bridging the 17 June 1953 uprising, in which workers across the state downed tools over the challenging conditions imposed upon their labour, Heinar Kipphardt's debut play *Shakespeare dringend gesucht* premiered at the *Kammerspiele* of the *Deutsches Theater*, Berlin under Wolfgang Langhoff on 28 June 1953 – an important time for the early political and cultural identity of the GDR.¹³ The uprising shook the political establishment of the state to its core, as it revealed repressed tensions amongst the populace and severe deficiencies in the Party's actions, providing a difficult backdrop for this audacious drama. That said, Kipphardt's work also came at a time when *Sektor Theater* in the *Ministerium für Kultur* had outlined the Party's stance on satirical art on account of its success

¹³ Heinar Kipphardt, *Shakespeare dringend gesucht*, in *Stücke I* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), 7–80.

in the Soviet Union, noting that it could serve ‘überlebte, rückständige Auffassungen zu geißeln, Missstände zu kritisieren und dem echten Humor einen breiten Raum im Repertoire zu geben’.¹⁴ A reading of the play should, therefore, avoid fetishising or absolutising its negativity in light of the theoretical approval from the Party.

As the title suggests, the play sees dramaturge Amadeus Färbel search desperately for a GDR Shakespeare amidst an onslaught of low-quality manuscripts from young writers, which he describes as ‘unbrauchbaren, gereimten Bockmist’ (p. 23). As well as lamenting the apparent lack of aesthetic mastery in contemporaneous socialist writing, the play or ‘Lustspiel’ satirises the bureaucratic and careerist machinations of state theatre in the figure of Schnell, the director, who proves incompetent, hypocritical, and helpless. When Färbel does chance upon a promising manuscript from a certain Raban, however, he impulsively discards it in a fit of rage, leading to a chaotic search for the piece involving encounters with the police, a psychiatric ward, and yet more unhelpful characters. The dramaturge eventually acquires the manuscript thanks to his assistant Fridolin, who sends it to Frau Mellin at the *Ministerium für Volksbildung* in Berlin. With Schnell having fired his dramaturge for his misdemeanours and misconduct, Mellin’s intervention alone secures the premiere of the play after the final scene, during which she corrects the director’s mistake by offering Färbel the role of ‘Intendant’ in his place.

Following much critical interest in their first play, *Der Lohndrucker*, a radio play written in 1956–57 and premiered in 1958 in Leipzig that reworked the story of Hans Garbe (see Chapter Three), Inge and Heiner Müller turned their attention to a commission from the

¹⁴ [n.a.], ‘Der IV. Parteitag der SED und die Aufgaben der Theater’, 11 May 1954, BArch DR 1/18187, p. 2.

Rundfunk der DDR to write a play about workers' reality in the new state.¹⁵ In the summer of 1957, the pair spent three weeks at the 'Braunkohleveredelungswerk' *Schwarze Pumpe*, a so-called 'Großbaustelle', in order to gather material for the work.¹⁶ The result, *Die Korrektur*, did not fulfil the expectations of the *Rundfunk*'s committee, however, leading to an extensive series of discussions with workers from *Schwarze Pumpe*, the ensemble, and Party representatives at the *Maxim Gorki Theater* in Berlin, where preparations for a production were interrupted to facilitate a further set of revisions.¹⁷ The MfK quickly raised concerns in response to the first and second versions of the play, complaining that: "Die Lösung der Widersprüche, die Rolle der Partei, ihre Bemühungen um Überwindung dieser Widersprüche wurden nicht gezeigt."¹⁸

The premiere of a much revised second version took place under Hans Dieter Mäde on 2 September 1958 alongside *Der Lohndrücker*.¹⁹ Although I draw comparisons to the first version, *Die Korrektur (1)*, to indicate the absences and additions occasioned by the authorities' interventions, the second version was the first performed on a GDR stage and thus forms the object of this analysis.²⁰ *Die Korrektur* illustrates the conflict faced by construction workers in a brigade whose salary is jeopardized by missing construction plans and work materials, causing a reduction in productivity. Facing paralysis and a loss of pay,

¹⁵ Marianna Streisand, 'Die Korrektur', in *Heiner-Müller-Handbuch: Leben, Werk, Wirkung*, ed. by Hans-Thies Lehmann & Patrick Primavesi (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003), pp. 235–239 (p. 236).

¹⁶ Heiner Müller, *Eine Autobiographie*, in *Werke*, ed. by Hörnigk, IX (2005), p. 118.

¹⁷ Heiner Müller [& Inge Müller], *Die Korrektur (2)*, in *Werke*, III: *Die Stücke 1* (2000), 127–146.

¹⁸ Millis, 'Einschätzung der zweiten Fassung der "Korrektur" von Heiner und Inge Müller', 25 August 58, BArch DR 1/18187, p. 1.

¹⁹ Frank Hörnigk identifies this second version as a 'neue[s], selbständige[s] Stück' on account of the considerable structural, dialogical, and aesthetic corrections undertaken, which Müller felt had '[mich] wahrscheinlich tiefer getroffen als später die Kampagne gegen die UMSIEDLERIN' – Frank Hörnigk, 'Bibliographische Notizen', in Heiner Müller, *Werke*, III, pp. 534–535 (p. 540); Müller, *Eine Autobiographie*, p. 116.

²⁰ B. K. Tragelehn directed a production in October 1959 at the *FDJ Studentenbühne* in Berlin-Karlshorst that combined the first and second versions of the play; whilst successful (with 19 performances and several accolades), this production does not represent the Müllers' actual work, even if the ultimate production of *Die Korrektur (2)* was the product of supervision and intervention from external sources. See Carsten & Gerhard Ahrens (eds.), *B. K. Tragelehn: 13 x Heiner Müller* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2016); [n.a.], 'Statistik', AdK, Heiner Müller, 3524/2.

they resort to building without complete plans and forging the figures for their daily work quota, which they refer to as ‘die Normenschaukel’. Party veteran Bremer is reassigned to iron out the brigade’s conduct – ‘mit ihnen schlittenfahren’ (p. 130) – but fails to establish a positive rapport after refusing to entertain their sabotage. When building foundations constructed by the group collapse, the site management inculpates Bremer, even though his brigade had intentionally not mixed the concrete after laying it in an effort to save time. In the flurry, Bremer blames an engineer for having produced inaccurate plans, but, facing dismissal, apologizes at the Party secretary’s behest.

Written and performed in the GDR in the 1950s, all three plays entered into a dramatic sphere marked by Bertolt Brecht, who began writing for the theatre in the immediate wake of the First World War. Brecht’s method of epic theatre, which he adapted and revised over decades, was theorised as an opposition to ‘dramatic’ or ‘Aristotelian’ theatre – which he understood as concerned with an immobile (‘unveränderlich’), timeless, and illusionistic model that ‘verwickelt den Zuschauer in eine Bühnenaktion’.²¹ Epic theatre by contrast described a political space in which the aesthetic medium itself became a tool to distance the audience from the work – ‘[d]er Zuschauer steht gegenüber’ – and thereby incite their ‘kritische Haltung’ toward it so as to recognise the litany of contradictions that it evokes.²² The new audience relationship in epic theatre is expressed by the term ‘Verfremdung’, an artificial distancing, which severs the bond of illusion that otherwise encourages an audience to ‘escape’ reality for the duration of the performance.²³

²¹ Bertolt Brecht, ‘Anmerkungen zur Oper “Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny”’, in *BFA*, XXIV, 74–86 (p. 78).

²² As a result, an image of society would emerge not as natural and predictable, but as changeable and flawed – *ibid.*, p. 78–79; Bertolt Brecht, ‘Nachtrag zur Theorie des “Messingkaufs”’, in *BFA*, XXVI, 406–408 (p. 407); Anthony Squiers, *An Introduction to the Social and Political Philosophy of Bertolt Brecht: Revolution and Aesthetics* (New York: Rodopi, 2014), p. 59.

²³ Comparisons can be drawn here between ‘Verfremdung’ and Marx’s term ‘Entfremdung’; Brecht made his own case for reading the theatre as a further site in which the means of production are no longer in the hands of the workers in ‘Kleines Organon für das Theater’, in *BFA*, XXIII, 65–97.

‘Verfremdung’ is generated by actors, set, and props (such as ‘Zeigetafeln’ that function as prolepses), musical elements like a chorus or songs, and structural elements such as ‘Montage’, ‘Kurven’, and ‘Sprünge’ that rid the play of ‘das Selbstverständliche, Bekannte, Einleuchtende’ and interrupt the chronology and performance or comment metatheatrically upon them.²⁴ “Damit ist gewonnen,” Brecht argues, “dass der Zuschauer die Menschen auf der Bühne nicht mehr als ganz unänderbare, unbeeinflussbare, ihrem Schicksal hilflos ausgelieferte dargestellt sieht.”²⁵ Crucially, he did not envisage that this technique would eradicate emotion as a tool of aesthetic engagement, indeed it should still permit or evoke empathy, but avoid an audience’s identification with characters and action in favour of a critical detachment or ‘[e]ine betrachtende, zuschauende Haltung’.²⁶ David Barnett suggests that emotion is performed onstage as if written in speech marks, alluding to Brecht’s preference that the actors maintain a distance from the characters, and to the spectator’s role, in turn, of interrogating the significance of the uncanny, which might lead to them ordering the issues onstage into a web of ‘contradictory behaviours’ across society.²⁷

²⁴ Bertolt Brecht, ‘Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst’, in *BFA*, XXII.1, 200–210 (p. 207); Brecht, ‘Über experimentelles Theater’, in *BFA*, XXII, 540–547 (p. 555). See also Ulrich Kittstein, *Bertolt Brecht* (Paderborn: Fink, 2008), p. 40; Brecht, ‘Anmerkungen zur Oper “Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny”’, p. 79.

²⁵ Brecht, ‘Über experimentelles Theater’, p. 555.

²⁶ Brecht, ‘Verfremdungseffekte in der chinesischen Schauspielkunst’, p. 202.

²⁷ David Barnett, *Brecht in Practice: Theatre, Theory and Performance* (London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 134. Brecht wrote: “[Der Schauspieler] hat seine Figur lediglich zu zeigen [...]. Nur sollten seine eigenen Gefühle nicht grundsätzlich die seiner Figur sein, damit auch die seines Publikums nicht [...] die der Figur werden” – Brecht, ‘Kleines Organon für das Theater’, p. 83.

Compare here also ‘Gestus’, which played a central role in Brecht’s reconception of performance, since it influenced ‘Körperhaltung, Tonfall und Gesichtsausdruck’ in the expression of the socialised roots of each, rendering the unconscious and psychological concrete, as Meg Mumford writes in *Bertolt Brecht* (London & New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 53–7. ‘Gestus’ concerns both the individual’s gestures (‘Gesten’) and their comportment in relation to others, which have a social motivation. Mumford gives the examples of how a farmer might behave upon their return from a day’s labour, with the socio-political backdrop of decreasing profits and perennial climactic challenges, and of a group of diplomats stirring their tea – radiating the history of aristocratic tradition. In a sense, ‘Gestus’ seeks to obviate the myth of ‘natural’ behaviours by insisting both that all conduct has an otherwise unspoken social context and that its motivations are all manmade. For more on ‘Gestus’, see Peter Brooker, ‘Key words in Brecht’s theory and practice of theatre’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, ed. by Peter Thomson & Glendyr Sacks, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 209–224 (p. 219); Reiner Steinweg, *Lehrstück und episches Theater: Brechts Theorie und die theaterpädagogische Praxis* (Frankfurt am Main: Brandes & Apsel, 1995), p. 65; Bertolt Brecht, ‘Anmerkung zu den Lehrstücken’, in *BFA*, XXIII: *Schriften 3: Schriften 1942–1956* (1993), p. 418.

Whilst epic theatre predominated in Brecht's own work and others' interest in it, the significant if short-lived 'Lehrstück' experiment around 1930 preceded it and remained relevant to GDR theatre in the 1950s. Works such as *Der Flug der Lindberghs* (renamed *Der Ozeanflug* in 1949) and *Das Badener Lehrstück vom Einverständnis* responded to the anticipated transition to socialism as the microcosm of the theatre was itself to become a site of collective action, meaning that the explicitly anti-bourgeois sentiment and the focus on revealing contradictions in the playwright's earlier works such as *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* had a minimal, if not absent, role.²⁸ Brecht conceived this new venture to make the theatre an even more effective political vehicle than epic theatre had, since the 'Lehrstück' needed no audience in the strict sense – because the actors themselves became the audience or the audience adopted at least a small role in the work itself, as in the chorus of another 'Lehrstück', *Die Maßnahme*.²⁹ Brecht sought to bind the spectator into a collective of participants from whom they might, by the retention of 'Verfremdung', develop a critical distance, but in a manner adapted to suit the changing political landscape in the Weimar Republic. This new context required, in Brecht's mind, a novel approach that challenged the spectator to a more rigorous and intense political experience, having them participate in the performance and even in editing the manuscript. The participants in *Die Maßnahme*, for example, perform the discussion about the agitators' murder of their comrade after his behaviour jeopardised their undercover propagandising; this integration of the audience into the work itself marks a clear difference from the 'dramatic' model, in which the audience listens and watches passively.

²⁸ Roswitha Mueller, 'Learning for a new society: the Lehrstück', in *The Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, ed. by Thomson & Sacks, pp. 101–117 (p. 104).

²⁹ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Sozialistisches Drama nach Brecht: Drei Modelle: Peter Hacks – Heiner Müller – Hartmut Lange* (Darmstadt & Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1974), p. 9; Joy H. Calico, *Brecht at the Opera* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 17, 33.

That said, Brecht's own pedagogical expectation from the 'Lehrstücke' – "Der 'Flug der Lindberghs' hat keinen Wert, wenn man sich nicht daran schult" – made the genre more integrative and also more acutely didactic, as it became a template designed to facilitate learning not by observing from the auditorium but by becoming part of the performance.³⁰ Epic theatre already tends towards demonstration for its pedagogical purpose, as techniques of 'Verfremdung' facilitate and permit the audience's critical observation; the 'Lehrstück', however, presents a more efficient tool in this respect, since the intradiegetic exemplification and demonstration of a change, perspective, or resolution to a problem becomes a path that the audience-participant must follow to encounter different perspectives.³¹ Robert Cohen describes the genre as designed less to impress a political opinion on the audience than to encourage their development of a certain attitude or behaviour; this reflection does not lessen a didactic reading of the 'Lehrstück', however, as Brecht precisely designed the genre flexibly to make it a broadly applicable political tool. Thus, in this respect I specifically refer to the didacticism in audience's role, not in the content. Brecht utilised the stage to empower the participants to enact the change that they had already performed; however, such an approach meant rendering the stage a platform for teaching – hence 'Lehrstück' as 'teaching play'. On the one hand, the audience could, under the pretext of their enlightened and toughened political consciousness, become part of the play to live the change envisaged by Brecht; on the other hand, this shift depreciated the spontaneity and proactive engagement of the spectator, with the playwright looking to other alternatives in the years thereafter.³²

³⁰ Bertolt Brecht, 'Erläuterungen', in *BFA*, XXIV, 87–89.

³¹ See Robert Cohen, 'The Learning Play', trans. by Marc Silberman, *Brecht Yearbook*, 46 (2021), 197–218.

³² Jürgen Rühle, *Das gefesselte Theater: vom Revolutionstheater zum sozialistischen Realismus* (Cologne & Berlin: Kiepenhauer & Witsch, 1957), p. 235.

Brecht and *Aufbau* Theatre: The Legacies of the ‘Lehrstück’ and the Epic

Notwithstanding the intricacies of his pedagogical praxis, Brecht revolutionised the political capacity of the theatrical mode and remained influential for playwrights in the young GDR, including those of the three plays in this corpus. The subtitle of *Die Feststellung* – ‘Ein Lehrstück’ – already provides a linear connection to Brecht’s short-lived experiment, at least in name. Written for amateurs (‘Laienspieler’), the work equally functions as a kind of template:

[D]ie Spieler [sollten] die Baierschen Lehrstücke entsprechend ihren eigenen Bedürfnissen, Erfahrungen und Problemen selbst umbauen, sie sollten improvisieren, das Stück auf ihre konkrete Situation anwenden und im Spiel über ihre Lebenspraxis verhandeln.³³

But a flyer advertising a reading given on 27 September 1957 by Baierl at the *Pavillon der Nationalen Front* in Leipzig, hosted by the *Kulturbund*, goes further than the subtitle, identifying the play instead as a ‘Lehrstück nach Art der “Maßnahme” von Brecht’.³⁴ As in *Die Maßnahme*, here a chorus appears – a ‘Dorfchor’ – to deliver the prologue, epilogue, and songs on cue, although the collective plays a similar oversight role to Brecht’s ‘Kontrollchor’. In the two plays the original actors replay the core scenes and the other characters discuss them in between, effectively providing running commentary and guiding the spectator. Perhaps most importantly of all, the audience also encounter a ‘Lehre’ in the song ‘Vorteil der Kollektivität’ as the chorus make the case for collective over individual action:

³³ Klatt, pp. 48–51. Despite the countless performances across the GDR following the premiere, I did not find evidence for this approach having been adopted.

³⁴ Kulturbund der DDR, *Die Feststellung (Lehrstück nach Art der ‘Maßnahme’ von Brecht)*, 1957, paper, 30 × 42 cm, Stadtgeschichtliches Museum, Leipzig. Wilfried Adling’s 1958 review in the FDJ magazine *Junge Kunst* also draws comparisons to Brecht’s *Die Maßnahme* (1930) – Wilfried Adling, ‘Zu einigen Problemen und Stücken zeitgenössischer Dramatik’, *Junge Kunst*, 8 (1958), 9–20. See also Müller-Waldeck, ‘Aspekte der Brecht-Rezeption in der Dramatik der 50er und 60er Jahre’, p. 62.

Einer allein wird den Weg verlieren
einer allein gibt das Rennen auf.
Geht gemeinsam, werden wir uns nicht verirren,
baun die sozialistische Großwirtschaft auf!
(Baierl, p. 31)

Despite the ambiguous reputation of Brecht's theatre in the early GDR, critics' and the author's identification of *Die Feststellung* as a derivative of the 'Lehrstück' strikingly suggests the reach of Brecht's legacy and significance for young playwrights in the *Aufbau*.

Die Feststellung does not just echo several characteristics of a 'Lehrstück', however. In total, four manuscripts were produced 'in enger Zusammenarbeit zwischen dem Autor und der Dramaturgie der Volksbühne', a process during which the fidelity of the play to the Brechtian template decreased, as Henryk Keisch intimates.³⁵ Key techniques from epic theatre appear in the final version, such as the following line from the 'Dorfchor', which lessens the initial tension for the first scene, in which the Finzes encounter their former neighbours: "Ist das Beispiel [der Republikflucht] nicht überholt heut? / Nein. Es ist heut überwunden. / Ja, deshalb stellen wir / folgendes fest..." (p. 7). The pre-announcement of the plot in the prologue echoes other techniques like prolepses, signs, and placards that describe the action before it happens and thereby alter the theatrical experience of the spectator, for whom the effect of dramatic tension and of a cathartic plot development dissipates. More than this, metatheatrical asides to the audience abound, which interrupt the flow of dialogue: "[Z]um Publikum Diese Feststellung ist eigentlich der Schluss der Geschichte" (p. 31). As well as

³⁵ Stuber, pp. 190–1; Werner Mittenzwei (ed.), *Theater in der Zeitenwende: Zur Geschichte des Dramas und des Schauspieltheaters in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1945–1968* (Berlin: Henschel, 1972), II, pp. 48–49; Henryk Keisch, 'Ergötzlich und lehrreich', *Neues Deutschland*, 6 February 1958, 4. See original manuscript for *Die Feststellung*, AdK, Helmut Baierl, 34; production programme for *Die Feststellung* and *Das Testament* by Christian Weise, Theater im 3. Stock der Volksbühne Berlin 1957/58, AdK, Volksbühne Berlin, 874.

interrupting, metatheatrical comments during the *mises en abîme* remind the spectator that they are in the theatre at all; some examples, as here, are metatheatrical in the sense of temporarily leaving the play within a play but remaining within the diegesis: “[A]us der Rolle Damit willst du wohl wieder sagen: Erpressung? Kollegen! In Wirklichkeit aber ging ich mit folgenden Worten: Zeig, dass du ein fortschrittlicher Bauer bist” (p. 25). Tension aside, these techniques prevent the audience from falling victim to the illusion of theatre that would absorb them into the walls of the stage, numbing them from critical analysis. Quips such as ‘[m]ach kein Theater jetzt’ (p. 21) remind the spectator of the artifice in the theatre, echoing a key advancement of Brecht’s epic theatre. I read the three short *mises en abîme* similarly, as they disrupt the collective’s discussion about their mistakes, adding a further intradiegetic layer that, paradoxically, draws attention to the performance of the play itself, and ‘verfremdet’.

Kipphardt’s *Shakespeare dringend gesucht* takes a vastly different approach to reality in the early GDR from Baierl’s work, since it addresses the state of the new socialist theatre using satire rather than collective debate and interrogation. At first glance, though, Kipphardt’s satirical critique of the lacking dynamism in *Aufbau* theatre recalls numerous plays by Brecht, such as *Der aufhaltsame Aufstieg des Arturo Ui* with its caricature of Hitler and parody of the climate of fear in the Third Reich, or the satirised hypocrisy and corruption of class-based hierarchies and the superiority of the bourgeoisie in *Die Dreigroschenoper*. Kipphardt, for his part, blames an over-administered bureaucracy, littered with stubborn careerists who reproduce changing ideological slogans, for the desperate state of affairs. When it suits him, ‘Intendant’ Schnell insists: “Darauf kommt es an: kulturelles Erbe! Klassiker! Klassiker! Klassiker!” (p. 15). Later: “Natürlich müssen wir auch unser kulturelles Erbe pflegen, natürlich, aber im Augenblick gehört unsere ganze Kraft der jungen Dramatik” (p. 27). The play also features parodies of ambitious but talentless young writers like Zaun, who introduces himself as a ‘Partisan des

wissenschaftlichen Theaters’, commits himself to ‘historisch-dialektischen Materialismus mit rational poetischer Bildschlüssigkeit’, presents a ‘Lehrstück’ (p. 18), and – according to various sources – could be a caricature of Brecht himself.³⁶ Kipphardt’s ‘satirisches Lustspiel’ becomes aligned here with the satire of Brecht’s theatre in terms of function, applying the technique to critique Party leadership in the figure of Zaun and to indicate the insufficiency of ideologically conforming drama from upcoming authors. If Brecht employs satire and comedy to draw the audience’s attention to contradiction and to render critical issues absurd, laughable, and ‘verfremdet’, and therefore objects of the audience’s interrogation, then Kipphardt’s audience might ask themselves similar questions about the state of theatre production in the GDR. Writing in the programme for the premiere, Kipphardt explains:

Das Lachen über Schnell soll unsere Menschen erziehen, gegen die Schnells in unserem Leben aufzutreten. Das Lachen soll unsere Menschen gegenüber Opportunisten und Karrieristen unduldsam machen und ihnen helfen, sie zu entmachten.³⁷

Experiencing a satirised and negative character like Schnell or Färbel, the spectator should, in turn, be ‘ermuntert’ to improve themselves and those around them.³⁸

Moreover, commonalities between Kipphardt’s play and epic theatre more widely also exist.

In the second ‘Bild’, Färbel suddenly and unexpectedly proposes to the theatre secretary Paula Glück:

³⁶ Silke Flegel, *Bühnenkämpfe: Autor-Dramaturgen in der frühen DDR: Brecht, Kipphardt, Hacks* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017), p. 190; Esther Slevogt, *Den Kommunismus mit der Seele suchen: Wolfgang Langhoff – ein deutsches Künstlerleben im 20. Jahrhundert* (Cologne: Kiepenhauer & Witsch, 2011), p. 398; Uwe Naumann & Michael Töteberg (eds.), *In der Sache Heinar Kipphardt*, *Marbacher Magazin*, 60 (1992), p. 9; Manfred Pauli, ‘Der Dramaturg als dramatischer Held oder “Die Mühen der Ebenen”’: Shakespeare dringend gesucht von Heinar Kipphardt’, in *Theater in Stücken* (Mainz: Thiele, 2013), pp. 201–208 (p. 203).

³⁷ Programme for the premiere of *Shakespeare dringend gesucht* on 2 July 1953 (Deutsches Theater, 1952/3), AdK, Horst Schönemann, 27, p. 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

FÄRBEL [...] Ich hoffte, dass eines Tages – gerade heute hoffte ich – ich liebe Sie! Verzeihen Sie mir. Vergessen Sie, was ich angerichtet habe.

[...]

GLÜCK Ich will es versuchen.

FÄRBEL Ich danke Ihnen. Sie sind der einzige Mensch, der sich neben Fridolin um mich gekümmert hat.

GLÜCK Amadeus...

FÄRBEL Paula...

GLÜCK Ich habe nicht gedacht, dass ich mich heute noch verloben würde.

(Kipphardt, *Shakespeare dringend gesucht*, p. 36)

Regardless of Glück's particular interest in Färbel's wellbeing earlier in the first act, the scene still comes as a shock. That the characters' interaction also seems absurd, incredible, and parodic makes it difficult for the audience to identify this moment as a genuinely emotional interaction, something that Brecht aspired to achieve through epic theatre. This technique does not preclude an empathetic response, as the play ultimately remains a source of entertainment for the spectator, but the stark contrast between the mimetic interactions in Aristotelian theatre and these artificial and plastic characters underscores how Kipphardt, like Brecht, deconstructs the theatre as a space for consumption rather than engagement. As a result, the scene helps to prevent the spectator from becoming engulfed in the tension and flow of the plot, instead inviting their distanced reflection on its content.

Writing about *Die Korrektur*, Helen Fehervary refers to the first version as a 'Lehrstück', which she regards as superior to the second version.³⁹ That Fritz J. Raddatz and Ernst Wendt

³⁹ Helen Fehervary, 'Heiner Müllers Brigadestücke', in *Mit den Toten reden: Fragen an Heiner Müller*, ed. by Jorst Hermand & Helen Fehervary (Cologne, Weimar & Vienna: Böhlau, 1999), pp. 1–38 (p. 16).

incidentally designate the second version as a ‘Lehrstück’ denotes the considerable divergence in critical reception at the time of the premiere and, perhaps, the conflation of terms in GDR theatre studies, which I have already described with relation to ‘dialectical’ and ‘didactic’.⁴⁰ Unlike *Die Korrektur (1)*, the second version of the play includes a prologue and epilogue spoken respectively by a ‘Sprecher’ in part and the actor playing Heinz B. the two scenes provide a kind of pre-emptive summary: “Wir zeigen, wie eine von tausend Brigaden / (Und es ist nicht die beste) klug wird durch Schaden. / Wir hoffen, unser Spiel beweist: / Dumm ist, wer sich selber beschießt” (p. 129). In the prologue, moreover, the actors all introduce each other and provide details of the kind of biographical complexities that provoke their behaviour later in the play:

FRANZ K. Das ist der Major. Von Hitler zum Hauptmann gemacht

Im Arbeiterstaat hat ers nicht mal zum Maurer gebracht

(Heiner & Inge Müller, *Die Korrektur*, p. 129)

Since the workers’ failures and the possible reasons for them are stated before the intrigue begins, the opening scene demystifies the plot in a manner familiar from Brecht’s epic theatre.

Similarly, the structure of the play consists of alternating dialogue scenes on the building site and monologues, in which individual figures relate part of their own biography and comment on the plot in connection with it. The monologues – metatheatrical addresses to the audience also referred to as ‘Haltungen’, commentaries, or ‘Reflexionszenen’ – rupture the chronology not just because they reference the past, but also because they function as prolepses that both pre-empt the characters’ actions and have an anticlimactic effect.⁴¹ But these are not

⁴⁰ Raddatz, p. 455; Ernst Wendt, ‘Die Kraft des Spröden’, *Theater heute*, 8 (1965), 61–62 (p. 61).

⁴¹ B. K. Tragelehn, *Roter Stern in den Wolken 2* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2019), p. 46; Ahrens (eds.), p. 32, fn. 1; Kreuzer & Schmidt (eds.), p. 235; Fehervary, p. 18.

characteristics of the 'Lehrstück' per se, since the structure and plot here are neither consistently linear nor reasonably interchangeable. The unresolved and problematic depiction of the socialist workplace likewise produces a far less navigable and corrigible image of the GDR than emerges, for example, around the LPG in Baierl's work. No structure, such as a chorus, invites the audience to become the actors themselves, nor is there an intradiegetic (path to) resolution; *Die Korrektur (2)* thus demonstrates, if anything, an affinity to epic theatre.

The epilogue offers perhaps the only aspect in *Die Korrektur (2)* that reminds one of the 'Lehrstück', as the rehabilitated brigade comes to understand the motivation behind a style of working based on the principle of solidarity. The 'Darsteller des Heinz B.' optimistically proclaims: "Auf dem Bauplatz zwischen Hoang-Ho und Elbe [...] / Links und links im Schritt der Fünfjahrpläne / Reißen wir aus der krepierenden Alten / Die neue Welt" (p. 146). This final monologue solidifies the Party-supportive conclusion to the play and casts it as a 'Lehre', which lends the work a didactic note following the earlier uncertainty and chaos. At the same time, the tone of these lines clashes distinctly with the preceding scene, thus the recommendation to value the SED's leading role is preceded by numerous contradictions, including the unconvincing linearity of Bremer's persuasion by the Party secretary to acknowledge his mistake and the sudden politicisation of Heinz B. *Die Korrektur* does draw from aspects of epic theatre and the 'Agitpropstück' genre favoured by Brecht because it exemplifies how a work of art could seek to effect agitation in the GDR context, but any attribution of a positive political message that might be translated into action through repetition, as in the 'Lehrstück', does not present itself.⁴² This distinction already highlights

⁴² Dieter Kranz, 'Zwei produktive Versuche', *Theater der Zeit*, 10 (1958), 43–47 (p. 47); Klaus Völker, 'Drama und Dramaturgie in der DDR', in *Theater hinter dem Eisernen Vorhang: Theater unserer Zeit*, ed. by Reinhold Grimm, Willy Jäggi & Hans Oesch (Basel, Hamburg & Vienna: Basilius, 1964), pp. 60–87 (p. 67).

the singularity in the Müllers' dramatic approach, inasmuch as they eschew Brecht's most demonstrative template in favour of a firmly political but comparably more ambiguous theatre. Even understanding *Die Korrektur* as an example of epic theatre set in the GDR falls short of an accurate description, however, because of the often inconclusive treatment of political issues and the resultant lack of clarity around the role of the spectator.

At first glance, epic theatre and the 'Lehrstück' wielded considerable influence over Helmut Baierl, Heinar Kipphardt, and Inge and Heiner Müller. Key techniques appear variously in the plays that demonstrate the continued influence of Brecht's theatre up to and beyond his death in the early GDR. But none is wholly identical to Brecht's dramatic work, either because of a combination of elements from both epic theatre and the 'Lehrstück' at once or because the authors diverge from Brecht's precedent, not least in their setting of the works in the GDR present. That said, in critical reception these plays were interchangeably termed both didactic and, interestingly, dialectic (even 'dialectical-didactic'), which misjudges the aesthetic nuances at work and fuses two fundamentally opposed aesthetic directions. Whilst the two tendencies appeared on the *Aufbau* stage, I am interested in the ways in which these three plays pursue a non- or reduced didactic framework that builds on the foundation of epic theatre to fit their historical present and its political demands.

A Political 'Umfunktionierung': Walter Benjamin's Dialectical Theatre

Walter Benjamin wrote variously on the theatre, including two laudatory essays on Brecht's epic theory, which elucidate the radical employment of the stage as a site of political action.⁴³

⁴³ Benjamin and Brecht, incidentally, enjoyed a long friendship of mutual support and intellectual exchange, which might be borne in mind when one contemplates how much attention Benjamin paid to epic theatre and its potential influence on his own work. For secondary literature on the Brecht and Benjamin, see for example: Nikolaus Müller-Schöll, *Das Theater des 'konstruktiven Defaitismus': Lektüren zur Theorie eines Theaters der A-Identität bei Walter Benjamin* (Frankfurt am Main & Basel: Stroemfeld, 2002); Erdmut Wizisla, *Benjamin und Brecht: Die Geschichte einer Freundschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004); Abdullah Sinirlioglu, *Benjamin und Brecht: Eine politische Begegnung* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2016).

By turning now to these writings, I explore the aspects therein that identify the potential in epic theatre; however, since I argue that the technique of demonstration – a didacticism – limited this potential, I then discern a theoretical framework with which to measure the ways in which Baierl, Kipphardt, and the Müllers experimented with the stage.

Theatre scholar Hans-Thies Lehmann claims that theatre itself cannot engage in propaganda or agitation because ‘political theatre’ only concerns the expression of a political message through a work within a previously existing form.⁴⁴ A political system like the Soviet Union or GDR, however, that binds artists into cultural policymaking by privileging their discursive weight and awarding them the material security to do so presupposed the capacity of art to contribute to and influence the political direction of society. For art to have a tangible political consequence, any reverence around aesthetic form must have given way to allow form and content to become entangled within political discourse, since the capacity of art to influence the latter cannot depend on a symbolic distance from reality. Lehmann’s thesis reads the theatre as a kind of redundant triumphal arch, through which messages – political or not – pass freely without a single stone changing shape, bending to make room, or showing any signs of decay. Such a statement assigns a reverent, if not symbolic, presence to aesthetic form (in this case the theatre), which sees it as a monolithic vehicle for performance that cannot make any utterance because only the individual work within that form can do so.

The participation of art in cultural policy necessitates a simultaneous change to the aesthetic medium itself, which Brecht, here summarised by Benjamin, called an ‘Umfunktionierung’:

⁴⁴ Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Das politische Schreiben: Essays zu Theatertexten: Sophokles, Shakespeare, Kleist, Büchner, Jahn, Bataille, Brecht, Benjamin, Müller, Schleef*, 2nd edn (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2012), pp. 13–14. In his essay ‘Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen’, Benjamin asserts that language serving merely as the apparatus for communicating objective meaning characterises the postlapsarian condition, in which spurious claims to ‘meaning’ amount to little more than the very distortion of meaning in the sign-signified relationship – Benjamin, *ÜSM*.

Für die Veränderung von Produktionsformen und Produktionsinstrumenten im Sinne einer fortschrittlichen – daher an der Befreiung der Produktionsmittel interessierten, daher im Klassenkampf dienlichen – Intelligenz hat Brecht den Begriff der *Umfunktionierung* geprägt. Er hat als erster an den Intellektuellen die weittragende Forderung erhoben: *den Produktionsapparat nicht zu beliefern, ohne ihn zugleich, nach Maßgabe des Möglichen, im Sinne des Sozialismus zu verändern.*⁴⁵

Whereas classical or dramatic theatre entailed the audience's passive observance, Brecht ruptured this tradition, changing form when overhauling content. To overlook the potential of an 'Umfunktionierung' in the theatre would underestimate its uniqueness as an aesthetic medium once text becomes performance, as journalist and critic Fritz J. Raddatz writes:

[D]ie eigentlich als Phantasiehandlungen konzipierten Handlungen werden durch die Realisation von lebendigen Menschen auf der Bühne materielle, also *echte*. Theater ist nachgeschaffene Wirklichkeit und direkte Wirklichkeit zugleich.⁴⁶

Benjamin traces the path towards a possible 'Umfunktionierung' in his essay 'Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit' in what he understands as the decline of art's 'Ritualfunktion': "Die ältesten Kunstwerke sind, wie wir wissen, im Dienst eines Rituals entstanden, zuerst eines magischen, dann eines religiösen" (*KZTR*, pp. 255–256). This ritualistic or cult-like quality describes an obedience to existing rules or characteristics such as the prestigious 'Schönheitsdienst', which anchor the work in a tradition of viewing aesthetics as the bastion of beauty; art should thus pertain to a supposed purity, through which it becomes 'authentic'. As the artwork is orientated more towards these historical

⁴⁵ Ibid., 'Der Autor als Produzent', in *AW*, IV: *Kritiken, Rezensionen, Essays*, 629–647 (p. 637; my italics). Henceforth referred to as *DAP*.

⁴⁶ Fritz J. Raddatz, 'Die dramatische Literatur: Sozialistische Klassik – die "Große Figur"', in *Traditionen und Tendenzen: Materialien zur Literatur der DDR* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), pp. 413–462 (pp. 449–450; italics in original).

ideals, it necessarily becomes, in Benjamin's analysis, increasingly distant from real life even where realist and mimetic, as the pursuit of ritual dominates. The most mimetic work – one that appears to mirror reality – accordingly and paradoxically becomes the most distant because of the motivation not to mimic but to fulfil the criteria of a quasi-religious ritual. Benjamin calls this distance 'aura'; in previous chapters I have described a similar process as transcendental.⁴⁷ The distance preserved by aura equally reminds one of the prelapsarian meaning or signification in language, that is the ability of words to describe and communicate objects comprehensively in and not through language, as aura postulates that the pursuit of artificial ideals in art can guarantee 'meaning'.⁴⁸ Much like the notion of linguistic signification, aura therefore belongs to a symbolic aesthetics that a direct connection with the audience would diminish.⁴⁹

Rather than discussing the presence of aura in earlier art, Benjamin notes that modern technology has ruptured this supposed harmony and distance:

[D]ie technische Reproduzierbarkeit des Kunstwerks emanzipiert dieses zum ersten Mal in der Weltgeschichte von seinem parasitären Dasein im Ritual. Das reproduzierte Kunstwerk wird in immer steigendem Maße die Reproduktion eines auf Reproduzierbarkeit angelegten Kunstwerks. [...] *In dem Augenblick aber, da der Maßstab der Echtheit an der Kunstproduktion versagt, hat sich auch die gesamte soziale Funktion der Kunst umgewälzt. An die Stelle ihrer Fundierung aufs Ritual tritt ihre Fundierung auf eine andere Praxis: nämlich ihre Fundierung auf Politik.*

(KZTR, p. 257; italics in original)

⁴⁷ "Ferne ist das Gegenteil von Nähe. Das *wesentlich* Ferne ist das Unnahbare. In der Tat ist Unnahbarkeit eine Hauptqualität des Kultbildes" – Benjamin, KZTR, pp. 254, fn. 7, 255.

⁴⁸ See the first chapter and Benjamin's essay 'Über Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen' (ÜSM) for this discussion.

⁴⁹ See also Ilit Ferber, *Philosophy and Melancholy: Benjamin's Early Reflections on Theater and Language* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), p. 27.

In technical reproducibility, the more the work is reproduced, the further its reproductions move from the original and its meaning, which complicates the claim to a distant uniqueness through aura; Benjamin thus speaks of the decline of aura in the modern age. The ‘original’ thus becomes as oblique as the supposition that the artwork is what Sabine Müller calls a ‘monolithisches vereinheitliches Ding’.⁵⁰ Interestingly and, indeed, typically, Benjamin sees grounds for optimism in decline; the loss of aura (‘ein ungeheurer Gewinn an Spiel-Raum’) entitled authors to engage no longer with a cult-like pursuit of beauty but the means of production through an ‘Umfunktionierung’.⁵¹ He saw in Brecht’s work the merit of a political aesthetics because of the reorientation around the audience and their milieu rather than the endless and far more esoteric pursuit of ritual and tradition.⁵²

Not only do Benjamin’s writings on epic theatre offer an early, lucid summary of the model until the 1930s; they also construct a manifesto for a theatre built on the dialectical opposition between theory and praxis rather than form and content, a model reflective of the parallel potential in the audience’s repositioning and of the newly ‘secularised’ aesthetic form as a political tool. The structure of epic theatre comes to characterise this dramatic dialecticism, as Benjamin identifies therein interruptions, intervals, and shock as central components that remove the veil of reverent mystery around the theatre.⁵³ He connects this structure to the politicism of Brecht’s plays, since the spectator, no longer distracted by the harmony and auratic distance of the work, becomes more conscious of the performance as

⁵⁰ Sabine Müller, p. 272. Compare references in Chapter Two to Benjamin’s similar comments on mass production as part of the industrial revolution, which initiated commodity fetishism.

⁵¹ Benjamin, ‘Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit. Zweite Fassung’, in *AW*, II, 212–245 (fn. 10, pp. 229–230). “[W]as im Zeitalter der technischen Reproduzierbarkeit des Kunstwerks verkümmert, das ist seine Aura” – Benjamin, *KZTR*, pp. 250–253.

⁵² Benjamin, *DAP*, pp. 641–642; Walter Benjamin, ‘Was ist das epische Theater? (1)’, in *AW*, III, 491–503, ‘Was ist das epische Theater? (2)’, in *AW*, III, 504–511; Wiziśla, p. 222.

⁵³ Walter Benjamin, ‘Das Land, in dem das Proletariat nicht genannt werden darf: Zur Uraufführung von acht Einaktern Brechts’, in *AW*, III, 486–490 (pp. 487–488); Benjamin, ‘Was ist das epische Theater? (2)’, p. 507.

an act and therefore able to interrogate socio-political issues, such as Nazism in *Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches* and war in *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder*. My scepticism of the ‘Lehrstück’ above has to do with the spectator’s consciousness in this respect, which, I argue, cannot fully develop when the play is designed to enable, demonstrate, or even communicate a certain attitude or perspective, let alone opinion, because the audience still remains dependent on the stage for the provision of some knowledge. Only when the stage becomes dependent on the audience – as I argue in relation to three *Aufbau* plays – can this occur.

Attempting to pinpoint the formal significance of Brecht’s techniques, Benjamin highlights epic theatre as a method based on ‘Staunen’ and reflection, which he sees in the loss of the orchestra, whereby the stage becomes a ‘Podium’.⁵⁴ The second ‘Was ist das epische Theater?’ essay mentions this aspect in the final thesis (VIII) rather than at the beginning, as in the first, which suggests a growing appreciation for this particular technique:⁵⁵

Der Abgrund, der die Spieler vom Publikum wie die Toten von den Lebendigen scheidet, der Abgrund, dessen Schweigen im Schauspiel die Erhabenheit, dessen Klingen in der Oper den Rausch steigert, dieser Abgrund, der unter allen Elementen der Bühne die Spuren ihres sakralen Ursprungs am unverwischbarsten trägt, hat an Bedeutung immer mehr eingebüßt. Noch liegt die Bühne erhöht. Aber sie steigt nicht mehr aus einer unermesslichen Tiefe auf: sie ist Podium geworden. Lehrstück und episches Theater sind ein Versuch, auf diesem Podium sich einzurichten.⁵⁶

This passage draws attention to the abrogation of auratic distance – that between the ‘Toten’ (actors) and ‘Lebendigen’ (spectators) – as what formerly counted as an ‘abyss’ becomes a

⁵⁴ Benjamin, ‘Was ist das epische Theater? (2)’, pp. 507, 511; Benjamin, ‘Was ist das epische Theater? (1)’, p. 491.

⁵⁵ Samuel Weber, “‘Mitteilbarkeit’ und ‘Exponierung’ – Zu Walter Benjamins Auffassung des ‘Mediums’”, *Theater-Wissenschaft*, 7 May 2015 <<https://www.theater-wissenschaft.de/mitteilbarkeit-und-exponierung-zu-walter-benjamins-auffassung-des-mediums/>> [accessed 1 February 2021].

⁵⁶ Benjamin, ‘Was ist das epische Theater? (2)’, p. 511.

platform utilised by Brecht to foster a closer relationship between those present in the theatrical space. Indeed, the podium heralds a proximity of spectator and stage in a manner possible only because of the decline of aura, meaning that epic theatre tries ‘[d]ie Dinge sich räumlich und menschlich “näherzubringen”’ (KZTR, p. 254). The simultaneous convergence of stage and ‘Zuschauerraum’, work and audience consists, therefore, in a contrary movement to ‘Verfremdung’, meaning that proximity and distance occur side by side in epic theatre. Benjamin’s analysis thereby seems to imply a dialectical quality in Brecht’s renegotiation of the dramatic space because of the necessarily constant tension between proximity and distance, through which the spectator comes to a position of reflection by the close of the play.

In fact, into the 1950s Brecht had explicitly sketched out a ‘dialectical theatre’. He wrote in ‘Vom epischen zum didaktischen Theater’ (1954) that: “[D]ie Praxis des epischen Theaters und sein ganzer Begriff keineswegs undialektisch [waren], noch wird ein dialektisches Theater ohne das epische Element auskommen.”⁵⁷ Recognising that his earlier work had been orientated toward a bourgeois audience, he conceived of a new approach for the socialist spectator that would reveal the contradictory historical situations in need of change, but, crucially, guide the spectator more convincingly toward executing that change by expecting public engagement during the performance itself, not its aftermath: “Somit verwandelt sich das Publikum selber in einen Erzähler.”⁵⁸ A dialectical method looked different to epic theatre, therefore, as Brecht’s earlier and predominant approach instead tends to incite the spectator, having left the theatre, to mimic behaviors already seen onstage. Insofar as epic theatre guided the audience towards specific political observations, it

⁵⁷ Bertolt Brecht, ‘Vom epischen zum dialektischen Theater 1’, in *BFA*, XXIII, 299.

⁵⁸ Schivelbusch, p. 16; Anya Feddersen, ‘Dialektik’, in *Brecht Lexikon*, ed. by Ana Kugli & Michael Opitz (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 2006), pp. 70–71; Bertolt Brecht, ‘Vom epischen zum dialektischen Theater 2’, in *BFA*, XXIII, 300.

dampened its own dialectical potential, which should have embraced the spectator's interaction with the work during the performance itself. Dialectical theatre would instead permit the audience to confront the onstage conflict without a final demonstrative synthesis by retaining the fundamentally dialectical 'Verfremdungstechnik'. As a tool for reading and reacting to society, its contradictions, and its fallibility, a dialectical approach would allow 'the audience [to] [...] become "co-inventors" of their stories from the perspective of those who are most likely and most impatient to change society'.⁵⁹ In essence, the shift from epic to dialectical entailed a reconception of the audience's role: rather than reflect upon content as a result of demonstrative steering, the spectator would need to engage directly during the performance to work out the path to reflection themselves. The 'Lehrstück' contains the template or apparatus by which the audience can do so but leaves little room for questions to be answered by the spectator alone. Barnett underscores this shift in responsibility because the audience in a dialectical theatre must accede to an understanding of the world based upon dialectical materialism in order to realise their new role, since *showing* failures on the stage in order to convince of the need to change them would not grant the spectator enough flexibility and responsibility.⁶⁰

Benjamin's analysis is perhaps too generous in its reading of epic theatre in this sense, as it alludes to a structural reformation of the theatre that does not entirely come to fruition, but rather at best appears in the theory of a dialectical theatre that Brecht first sketched more comprehensively after Benjamin's death. Brecht had recognised that the stage-audience dynamic in epic theatre had a dialectical quality but acknowledged that its potential was not

⁵⁹ Marc Silberman & Steve Giles, 'Introduction to Part Three', in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. by Marc Silberman, Steve Giles & Tom Kuhn (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 261–270 (p. 268).

⁶⁰ Barnett, p. 107.

fully realised.⁶¹ The focus on demonstration during the performance understood the artwork as a didactic tool to exemplify a behaviour or perspective to an audience, whose engagement would begin fully after the play itself. As a result, that distinctive character of the theatre as a live medium – live performance and live audience; or ‘nachgeschaffene Wirklichkeit und direkte Wirklichkeit zugleich’ – was not fully realised.⁶² In other words, the dialecticism in ‘Verfremdung’ and other epic techniques was not transferred onto the audience, whereas Brecht’s dialectical theatre indicates how the spectator would become both ‘verfremdet’ and pulled into the performance at the same time.

Dialectical Theatre as Allegorical Theatre

Considering the three plays in the corpus of this chapter, I look for criteria with which to differentiate their relationship with the audience from Brecht’s oeuvre. Benjamin’s theory of allegory – a fundamentally dialectical structure – collates these techniques under a heading that can describe the structure of a dialectical theatre and how its political engagement can effect change. Though Benjamin never identified epic theatre or a variation on it as allegorical, his study of the break from the symbolic precedent in theatre certainly lays the foundation for allegory to take hold. Sinirlioglu already compares the ‘Unabschließbarkeit’ of montage in the example of Brecht with that of Benjamin’s allegorical model because the two demonstrate that: “Die Kunst ist in einen Veränderungsprozess einbezogen, weil sie einen immanenten Bezug zum Wissen hat und daher vom veränderten Wissen kritisiert werden kann.”⁶³ Montage, a fractured form composed of many single units, becomes key to Benjamin’s identification of a dialectical structure in the theatre:

⁶¹ Brecht, ‘Vom epischen zum dialektischen Theater 1’, p. 299.

⁶² For Brecht’s intentions with the live audience, see Laura Bradley, ‘Training the Audience: Brecht and the Art of Spectatorship’, *Modern Language Review*, 111:4 (2016), 1029–1048.

⁶³ Sinirlioglu, p. 33. See also Noa Levin, ‘Montage Mahagonny: Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht’s Theatre of Interruptions’, in *Material und Begriff: Arbeitsverfahren und theoretische Beziehungen Walter Benjamins*, ed. by Frank Voigt, Tzanakis Papadakis, et al. (Hamburg: Argument, 2019), pp. 145–159.

Hier nimmt das epische Theater also – mit dem Prinzip der Unterbrechung – [...] ein Verfahren auf, das [...] aus Film und Rundfunk, Presse und Photographie geläufig ist. Ich spreche vom Verfahren der Montage: das Montierte unterbricht ja den Zusammenhang, in welchen es montiert ist.

(*DAP*, p. 643)

The structural disunity in montage makes it, for Benjamin, visual, since he perceives form through the materiality of its fragmented components rather than according to a symbolist notion of unity that covers the tracks of its own genesis, pretending that it is immaterial as well as immutable. Such a materialist reading explains the demonstrative use of images in Brecht, for example, as Benjamin noted of montage that it ‘nichts zu sagen [hat]. Nur zu zeigen’ (*PW*, N1a, 8, p. 627). Rolf Tiedemann suggests that the critique of ‘bourgeois ideology’ in *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, for example, pulls apart its material in order to recycle it within the work itself and come to a new perspective: “Brecht zerschlägt [...] die geschlossene Totalität der bürgerlichen Ideologie, um ihre Trümmer wie Versatzstücke neu zu montieren.”⁶⁴ The assembly of the ‘Trümmer’ into a montage – or a citation, as Benjamin suggests – allows the individual components to retain their old meaning, but also to enter a new common body that redefines them dialectically because it contains both new and old guises.⁶⁵ Benjamin absolves montage – and the citation – of the idealistic shackles of mimetic representation for its components to become, in Sabine Müller’s words, ‘Gegenst[ä]nd[e] für sich selbst, [die] Ambiguität herstell[en]’.⁶⁶ The task of art then becomes

⁶⁴ Rolf Tiedemann, *Dialektik im Stillstand: Versuche zum Spätwerk Walter Benjamins* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983), pp. 60–61. Note that the shift to the visual mode despite this concerning text denotes the ‘Dingcharakter der Sprache’ – Sabine Müller, p. 270.

⁶⁵ “Einen Text zitieren, schließt ein: seinen Zusammenhang unterbrechen. Es ist daher wohl verständlich, dass das epische Theater, das auf die Unterbrechung gestellt ist, ein in spezifischem Sinne zitierbares ist” – Benjamin, ‘Was ist das epische Theater? (2)’, p. 508.

⁶⁶ Sabine Müller, p. 265. Benjamin relates the task of his amalgamation of citations and fragments relating to Paris in the nineteenth century, the *Passagen-Werk*, as ‘die Kunst, ohne Anführungszeichen zu zitieren, zur höchsten Höhe [zu] entwickeln’, by which he means utilising citations in a manner that renders them part of the structure of a work itself, not identifying them as external sources, and redefines them by rupturing their contextual roots – Benjamin, *PW*, p. 625 (N1, 10).

to disrupt the communicative unity of symbolic signification through citational or montage-based structures that allow individual elements to be reformed rather than unilaterally replaced and negated for the sake of ritual and aura, as occurs with the symbol.⁶⁷

These elements appear in *Die Korrektur*, for example, of which fragments constitute the structure through the monologue scenes, which guide the spectator away from a linear chronology in the dialogue scenes and act as prolepses. In scene 3a, for example, Heinz B., from a working family in the West, relates how he joined but soon left a VEB because of the brigade leader's behaviour, instead finding employment with a private company (p. 135). The authors' inclusion of background information explains characters' problematic behaviour in the intradiegetic present by linking it to issues from the past – i.e. Heinz's difficulty in marrying the VEB's conditions with his own desire to maintain a certain distance from work in a manner that guarantees personal freedoms – which renders it both habitual and systemic. The historical references temper the rest of the work through the character's behaviour but interrupt the chronology throughout the play and, therefore, as fragmented objects constellate or clash with the other scenes into a montage. In another instance, when the workers attempt to bribe Bremer and, failing that, attack him when he does not tolerate their sabotage (pp. 131–132), the audience only learns this second-hand, denying the drama of a live performance and thereby leaving the audience to reflect on the missing perspectives, such as Bremer's. This dislocated structure and its associated absences and divisions also shift responsibility to the audience to collate the fragments of the work. Thus B. K. Tragelehn suggests that the spectator becomes aware of, reflects on, then starts to 'montieren' the

⁶⁷ Likewise, Benjamin's own propensity for using short theses or even direct quotations as a structure for his work, as seen in the *Passagen-Werk* or the over 600 quotations that constitute the *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, implies that citation serves both as a literal intertextual reference and also as a means of understanding language and art by repurposing the original material – Sabine Müller, p. 263; Jameson, *The Benjamin Files*, p. 35.

fragments itself.⁶⁸ The Müllers thus task their audience with plugging the gaps that the text and its authors could not, casting the work out into the auditorium but also pulling the audience into the performance in a dialectical relationship with relation to the podium. Interspersed with the ‘Reflexionsszenen’, the structure of *Die Korrektur* comes to resemble a montage whose individual components remain as fragments even when integrated into a new constellation until offered to the audience – as in Benjamin’s allegory.

Kipphardt’s *Shakespeare dringend gesucht* does not demand a distanced style of acting that might itself be fragmentary, but its comedy does have that characteristic. Fantastical occurrences, such as Raban knocking Färbel unconscious or the dramaturge discarding Raban’s manuscript when unknowingly offered it by Raban’s wife Anna (p. 44), show the comedic nature of the play, which in its predictability could amuse *and* have a ‘verfremdend’ effect by interrupting the stability of plot. This dynamic precludes emotional investment and the possibility of catharsis for the spectator by provoking them to disregard the illusory stability of action, to laugh at it, and thus to fracture the ritual of the good story. The entire second act features a series of interchangeable scenes in which the protagonist Färbel overlooks an opportunity, almost finds Raban, or is prevented from doing so by an absurd circumstance – such as spending the night in prison for interrupting a boxing match by ‘innocently’ walking straight through the ring: “[Raban] saß ganz oben. Die Menschen waren irgendwie irregeleitet und ließen mich nicht durch. Da versuchte ich durch dieses [...] Viereck mit den Stricken [...] zu kriechen, aber auch daran behinderte man mich” (pp. 46–47). The irrationality of Färbel’s behaviour limits empathy because he is portrayed as the victim of his own idealist

⁶⁸ Ahrens (eds.), p. 32, fn 1. Compare Heiner Müller: “Das Stück versucht nicht, den Kampf zwischen Altem und Neuem, den ein Stückschreiber nicht entscheiden kann, als mit dem Sieg des Neuen vor dem letzten Vorhang abgeschlossen darzustellen; es versucht ihn in das neue Publikum zu tragen, das ihn entscheidet” – Heiner Müller, ‘Der Lohndrucker’, *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, 5 (1957), 116–141 (p. 116).

and petit-bourgeois tendencies, thereby actually enabling a critical perspective on his behaviour – Kipphardt thus described Färbel as a ‘Held mit Fehlern’.⁶⁹ Not only the interchangeability, but also the banality of the dramaturge’s foreseeable actions leaves them independent of the more concentrated first and third acts, but nonetheless a complement to them by fragmenting any notions of unity and coherence for the spectator and providing disconnected citations that they might analyse. On the one hand disintegrating the structural soundness of the work and, on the other, serving a ‘verfremdend’ function that gives the audience the required distance for political reflection, these distinct scenes or fragments join together into a montage structure that, I argue, has an allegorical character. Whereas the Müllers achieve this through absences, Kipphardt employs satire as a tool of disintegration that both distances and attracts the spectator to reflection, leaving the play at once a hyperbolised, disharmonious collection of scenes and an acerbic commentary on GDR cultural affairs – a dialectical structure.

As for *Die Feststellung*, Christoph Funke notes that the spectator:

[S]ich bei [Baierl] nicht sicher fühlen [sollte], er wird zu der besonderen Freude provoziert, die denkerische Anstrengungen zu bieten vermögen. Baierl misstraut der glatten ‘Straße’, er liebt das Kopfsteinpflaster [...]. Der Dramatiker will deutlich machen, dass das Verhalten ‘erfundener’ Menschen auf der Bühne, kritisch beurteilt, dem Publikum eine Hilfe sein kann, im Leben mit Problemen und Konflikten fertig zu werden.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Heinar Kipphardt, ‘Bemerkungen zu “Shakespeare dringend gesucht”’, in *Schreibt die Wahrheit: Essays, Briefe, Entwürfe*, in *Gesammelte Werke in Einzelausgaben* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1989), VII: I: 1949–1964, 70–73 (p. 73). Compare here also the debate around Mutter Courage in Brecht’s play of the same name, the premiere of which nevertheless produced, for the author, a far too empathetic reaction to the flawed protagonist from the audience.

⁷⁰ Christoph Funke, ‘Über Helmut Baierl’, in Helmut Baierl, *Stücke* (Berlin: Kunst & Gesellschaft, 1969), pp. 235–243 (p. 235).

These comments allude to the application of ‘Verfremdung’ in the three role plays, for example, which demonstrate the LPG’s process of understanding whom to make responsible for the Finzes’ flight to the West. In this sense, *Die Feststellung* exhibits a certain didacticism; but one might also read the role plays as allegorical. The second, in which Herr Finze (‘Der Bauer’) and the ‘Vorsitzender’ play each other, has constant interruptions to the re-enactment, which fracture the integrity of the actors’ new roles and of the conversation that they recreate:

DER VORSITZENDE [...] Wir Bauern sind eben erst mal nicht für den Sozialismus. *Aus der Rolle* Kollegen das war meine Rede schon 1930.

DIE MECHANIKERIN Bitte, Vorsitzender. Spielt weiter!

DER BAUER Nun, Finze, als Vorsitzender, [...] sage [ich] dir, Kleinwirtschaft taugt nichts. Schon Lenin schreibt: Mit der Kleinwirtschaft kommt man nicht aus dem Ärger heraus.

DER VORSITZENDE *unterbricht* Kommt man nicht aus der Not heraus, schreibt Lenin.

DER BAUER Aus dem Ärger aber auch nicht

DER VORSITZENDE Das hat Lenin nicht gemeint.

(Baierl, *Die Feststellung*, pp. 21–22)

These asides, directed at the collective, draw the audience’s attention to the presence of an onstage audience as a result of the character’s ‘Kritikasterei’, and thus also to the fact that the role plays take place on a subsequent diegetic level of action as *mises en abîme*.⁷¹ That the

⁷¹ Adling, p. 16.

figures do not allow these scenes to run smoothly interrupts the internal mimesis even of the role plays, and, alongside metatheatrical quips, fragments the play and its performance, which equally reminds the live audience of the artificial, imperfect recreation of reality across the levels of performance. Klatt remarks that the avoidance of fixed roles here actually clarifies the core issue in the play, since the resultant ‘verzerres Bild’ both allows the contradictions to appear and the audience (including the actors) to aggregate the pieces of that performance, ‘aberfertigen’ and ‘überwinden’ them so as ‘zu neuen Haltungen [zu] gelangen’.⁷² Baierl thus utilises the three intradiegetic performances to shatter the mimetic illusion, creating a structure that I read as allegorical on account of its fragmented elements. The disruption to character identities supports this, as the playwright makes it difficult for the audience to distinguish categorically the behaviour of, for example, the Finze of role play two with the Finze from the opening scene, and some traits straddle the entire plot.⁷³ *Die Feststellung* is a play about the reintegration of villagers to an LPG community, but also a narrative plagued by the complexities of collectivity, the ambiguity of Party leadership, and the linear rhetoric of the programmatic *Aufbau* project, all of which shine through as fragments in a new mode of theatre for the GDR stage.

Structural Allegory and the Role of the Spectator

Nevertheless, one must beware of suggesting that montage can liberate its fragments to such an extent that they overcome the supposed inherent flaws in human language after the Fall, as I discuss in the two previous chapters. The path to the reserve of meaning in the fragment cannot occur intradiegetically, but rather requires interaction with the external – with the

⁷² Klatt, p. 48.

⁷³ Cf. Müller-Waldeck’s claim that the characters in *Die Feststellung*, compared to the ‘statuarisch und nicht-individualisiert’ figures in Brecht’s ‘Lehrstücke’, appear more individualised and identifiable, denoting the location of the play in a socialist context rather than theorised setting – Müller-Waldeck, ‘Aspekte der Brecht-Rezeption in der Dramatik der 50er und 60er Jahre’, p. 65.

audience or reader – in order to establish a formal basis of meaning generation.⁷⁴ This step is key to the allegorical reading of this corpus. Rather than locate meaning inherently and internally through montage, I argue that the recycling of the object – a citation, for example – through its assembly into a new montage obligates the reader to adopt responsibility for collating shorter fragments into a larger project. The emphasis thus shifts towards a method focussed on the reception of a work.⁷⁵ In so doing, I identify a connection between allegory and a theatre both fraying at the edges and subject to the disdain of Party critics, whose interventions damaged the authors' reputation and even delayed the performance of these three plays.

In the previous chapter, I explore how the first two stages of allegory constitute intradiegetic aspects, whereas the final, extradiegetic stage comes to influence its external environment through contact with the relational present (i.e. the live audience) that actualises the fragment. The didacticism in epic theatre proves a limiting factor in terms of the final step because it provokes the audience to learn rather than depend on the spectator's engagement for an internal shift to occur. The radicality in epic theatre, specifically its fragmented structure and lack of intradiegetic coherence, suffices to call it partly allegorical, though. A similar reading of novels in Chapter Four as pertaining to symbolic and allegorical elements also offers some precedent for such a reading. The three plays in question, however, build on Brecht's work and, as I argue in the previous section, also provide more evidence for an allegorical reading, thus I look beyond their affinity to epic theatre or the 'Lehrstück' in order to measure their aesthetic significance.

⁷⁴ Benjamin, *PW*, pp. 623 (N1, 2), 629–630 (N2a, 3); Sabine Müller, pp. 625–626.

⁷⁵ I described this process in Chapter Three with regard to a 'relational present'.

Indeed, an allegorical reading of the plays also draws upon the inherently theatrical nature in allegory because of its dependence on the 'Vorstellung' of its objects both to other fragments and to a new context. Samuel Weber, evoking the sense of 'vorstellen' as also literally placing before ('vor-stellen'), writes: "[A]llegory is eminently theatrical, since the being of what it represents can be determined only by virtue of its being placed before (vorgestellt) someone else: for instance, before a spectator."⁷⁶ Once in the hands of the spectator, the fragments of the work can form a montage to render that meaning visible and yield a new perspective for the audience, which they might in turn apply to their present. Locating an allegorical structure in individual plays exacerbates this characteristic of Benjamin's allegory and ultimately heightens its capacity for disruption and renegotiation.

Nevertheless, Brenda Machosky notes that aesthetic 'Darstellung' concerns not representing but *presenting* objects in allegory, since: "Allegory [points] to itself as allegory, as able to be art but also uniquely able to present art (without representing it)."⁷⁷ Allegory does not render, reproduce, or recite the object, since each of these possibilities means a total and signifying reproduction of an original, contrary to the loss of its aura theorised by Benjamin. Instead, in allegory the clash of work and audience underscores the fundamental and inescapable immanence in art, not least because what the artwork gains from its audience makes it possible to retain some of its origin and also generate a new image. A dialectical structure plays a crucial role in allegory because a closed, symbolic, or didactic character diminishes the agency of the audience as foreseen in the third step of allegorisation. I argue that the dialectical interdependency of audience and work, which climaxes in their clash in 'Jetztzeit', requires the open, questioning, and incomplete style seen in the three plays in question for

⁷⁶ Samuel Weber, *Benjamin's -abilities* (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 154–155.

⁷⁷ Brenda Machosky, *Structures of Appearing: Allegory and the Work of Literature* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 25.

that allegorical process to come to an end. Cast through fragments, ‘Darstellung’ on the stage grants an allegorical play access to a dialectical structure with greater potential, thus at least in the case of theatre an allegorical approach to text alone does not suffice to unleash the hidden reserve of significance in the fragment.

Die Feststellung expands the parameters of acceptability in terms of state-approved theatre and political discourse through its appeal to the contemporaneous spectator, which consists in allusions to troubling aspects of the *Aufbau* reality. The critical depiction of the LPG, its ‘Vorsitzender’, and the Finzes’ difficult relationship to both grounds the play in the immediate GDR present. Baierl encourages an awareness of this, as the play begins with the appeal: “Wir bitten aber, seht / das Verhalten der Spieler kritisch, / findet es merkwürdig, achtet / ja auf das Kollektiv / und die Leitung” (p. 7). At first glance, these lines read like the didactic invitation seen in Brecht’s *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*, for example, but the montage structure and other allegorical aspects already lead to a different conclusion.⁷⁸ That the work does not continue to a resolution debunks the idea that a ‘kritische Haltung’ per se on the part of the spectator would set them on a path to resolution, as instead the spectator is confronted with unresolved criticism and a fragmented structure that they must piece together, consider, and then use to apply a new perspective to their own reality.

The instances of metatheatre in the play facilitate this process of shifting responsibility, as do the gaps in the plot, such as the soon irrelevant fertiliser subplot and the process of regret

⁷⁸ Karl-Heinz Müller, ‘Gespräch mit Helmut Baierl’, *Theater der Zeit*, 5 (1976), 57–61 (p. 57); Helmut Schiemann, ‘Dialektik auf dem Theater: “Die Feststellung” von Helmut Baierl und Erfurt und Berlin’, *Theater der Zeit*, 3 (1958), 41–44 (p. 42). Note the epilogue to Brecht’s *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan*: “Wir stehen selbst enttäuscht und sehn betroffen / Den Vorhang zu und alle Fragen offen. / [...] Das kam schon vor. Was könnt die Lösung sein? / Wir konnten keine finden, nicht einmal für Geld. / Soll es ein anderer Mensch sein? Oder eine andre Welt? / Vielleicht nur andere Götter? Oder keine? / Wir sind zerschmettert und nicht nur zum Schein! / Der einzige Ausweg wär aus diesem Ungemach: / Sie selber dächten auf der Stelle nach / Auf welche Weis’ dem guten Menschen man / Zu einem guten Ende helfen kann. / Verehrtes Publikum, los, such dir selbst den Schluss! / Es muss ein guter da sein, muss, muss, muss!” – Brecht, *BFA*, VI, 175–279 (pp. 278–279).

about the Finzes' flight to the West. Rather than address these topics, the characters mention them as central issues at the beginning but leave them open, creating absences in the structure of the work that the spectator must collate and rationalise. Such a technique resembles 'Verfremdung' initially but takes it to a new level in necessitating audience interaction to plug these gaps. A spectator, wondering why the black-market purchase of fertiliser no longer holds any relevance, may conclude that the Finzes' transformation simply dominates. In the first role play, the foreman's accusation leads to a fight, as Herr Finze retorts: "Damit kriegt ihr mich nicht. Das ist Zwang und Erpressung" (p. 17). Alternatively, they might reflect on Finze's response and question the approach taken by the 'Vorsitzender', which ultimately fails. In this example, the clash of the aesthetic work with the live audience during the performance entails a reconception of the theatre that I call allegorical. More than enable the acquisition of a stance or perspective as in Brecht's 'Verfremdung', here Baierl presents an incomplete, fragmented work that frays the boundaries of the stage so as to practise precisely the collective responsibility that it preaches. Bound into a performance that, alone, lacks coherence, Baierl's spectators must undertake the collective endeavour of collating the fragments and deriving some fractured sense from their allegorical montage.

None of these characteristics was uncontroversial, however, in the context of socialist realism and the preference for a cohesive, unified, total artwork. Benno (the 'unrasierter Bauer' from the third role play) does not develop across the work, for example, but rather begins as a loose-lipped critic ('Überstunden wegen Versammlung, wo sowieso bloß einer redet und alle die einstimmige Hand heben', p. 9) and is one at the end, explaining to Finze: "Der ganze Sozialismus, sag ich dir, ist eigentlich bloß was für die Faulen, die weniger arbeiten wollen. [...] Ich sehe keine Aussicht für dich als Einzelbauer, so faul zu werden wie wir" (p. 34). His stereotypical behaviour as the stubborn farmer perhaps even proves most

effective because his immunity to the rhetorical persuasion of the 'Vorsitzender' forces a change in tack. More than simply represent a plastic and predictable topos, Benno's incomplete identity exemplifies the dialectic at work in this kind of 'Darstellung' because the spectator is not presented with a linear and complete character, but rather one riddled with gaps and contradictions – indeed, structured by fragments, which they must pull together into an allegorical constellation. Regarding 'Darstellung' in an allegorical theatre as the presentation of fragments to an audience cast as part of the work and, in this case, tasked with finishing the play, the gaps in *Die Feststellung* suggest the dialectical character of Baierl's theatre and its adaptation of 'Verfremdung' into an inclusive, participatory gesture.

Similarly, the prominent 'Vorsitzender' proves too ideological, unpragmatic, and fundamentally distant from farmers either to lead effectively or to propagate the expansion of the LPG in the community. Accused by Benno of tending to his own 'Personenkult' (p. 11), he appears unable to respond to real-life situations dynamically and speaks as if quoting from a Party textbook: "Der Sozialismus [...] ist das Neue, was sich entwickelt im Schoß des Alten. [...] Die Losung ist: Vorwärts schauen, nicht rückwärts!" (p. 16). Faced with the collective's condemnation of his behaviour towards the Finzes, he responds with weakness: "Angenommen, ich habe falsch gehandelt, wie hätte ich vorgehen sollen? Was hättet ihr getan an meiner Stelle? [...] So helft mir doch! Sagt was! Gebt einen Rat!" (p. 29). Rather than the character's efforts to embody inclusive accountability as part of the collective, these desperate final questions signify a leader-turned-victim of the LPG. Kähler finds some sympathy by forgiving the inexperience of the 'Vorsitzenden', but this does not stop other critics from finding fault with his uninspiring conduct and the potential that Benno and the mechanic prove far more in touch with the community, demoting its Party-sponsored leader

to an ‘abgesetzte Randfigur’.⁷⁹ With examples of his poor conduct dispersed through the play, however, the ‘Vorsitzender’ cannot fully redeem himself with his confession of guilt and adherence to the collective learning process at the end. As such, Baierl confronts the audience with an at best lacunary character who fails to fulfil the high expectations of SED-affiliated representatives and appears unable to solve the conundrums presented onstage. Baierl opts against an intradiegetic resolution to the issue of Party leadership in this respect, leaving a key ideological question unanswered. Not only does this evasive measure harm the Party-political cohesion of *Die Feststellung*, it presents the problem to the live spectator to solve. In light of the Party’s expecting leading role and, similarly, of a coherent ideological framework supportive of the SED according to cultural norms in the early GDR, these absences in *Die Feststellung* offered a challenge on the *Aufbau* stage for an *Aufbau* audience.

It comes as little surprise, therefore, that these aspects of the play aroused suspicion at the *Volksbühne* and in Party circles, which recognised in the first draft of *Die Feststellung* ‘die Gefahr [...], dass die hier dargestellte erfolgreiche Methode als die einzig mögliche Art der Überzeugung erschien’.⁸⁰ Accompanied by cultural authorities, Baierl embarked on a series of changes to the manuscript, predominantly in the scenes that frame the three role plays, for example: ‘Der Vorsitzende lernt erst sein Referat auswendig, der studiert noch die Argumente’ becomes ‘Vielleicht ist die Argumentation noch nicht da vom Kreis’; ‘[Der] Vorsitzende[r] hat keine Ahnung vom Dorf. *Mädchen*: Weil er aus der Stadt ist, das kannst du nicht sagen’ becomes ‘Der Vorsitzende hat eben keinen blassen Dunst. *Mädchen*: Das sagst

⁷⁹ Kähler, p. 31, Adling, pp. 14–16. Irmer proposes that the setting in a village community rather than industrial site helped this critical depiction reach the stage, even after efforts at the *Volksbühne* to change the script, in particular the third role play, because the agricultural milieu ‘eine gewisse Überschaubarkeit’ verspricht’ in terms of controversy – Thomas Irmer & Matthias Schmidt (eds.), *Die Bühnenrepublik: Theater in der DDR* (Berlin: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2003), p. 59. See also Hagen Mueller-Stahl, ‘Ein Gegenwartstück’, *Theater der Zeit*, 10 (1957), 14.

⁸⁰ Production programme for the *Volksbühne* premiere, AdK, Volksbühne Berlin 874.

du bloß, weil er ein Städter ist'.⁸¹ The initial version perhaps offered too harsh a critique for responsible parties to approve its performance, thus a process of review began that aimed 'aus dem Lehrstück ein realistisches Theaterstück zu machen'.⁸² By characterising *Die Feststellung* as an allegorical work, I do not just bolster the hypothesis that all three plays are examples of a dialectical – not didactic – theatre, but also argue that techniques such as metatheatre and montage disintegrate the work into fragments that the audience is tasked to collate in a reformed 'Zuschauerraum'.

Whilst *Die Feststellung* embodies key tenets of structural allegory, *Shakespeare dringend gesucht* offers even clearer evidence for the audience's implication in the work, for which it equally earned criticism. Satire without an audience is scarcely satire, thus Kipphardt required spectators living in the *Aufbau* and aware of Party discourse to comprehend his characters' complaints. Not only does Kipphardt himself appear in the dramaturge protagonist and in the description of Färbel's office, which matches Kipphardt's own study at the *Deutsches Theater* according to Silke Flegel, but young writers in the play also potentially satirise ambitious figures in GDR theatre – Zaun as Brecht; Monhaupt as Harald Hauser; even Schnell as Langhoff.⁸³ These direct allusions to reality in the GDR provide a clear-cut example of audience dependency because they require a clash with the spectators both to work humorously and to have any resonance; but they also touched a nerve. Explaining a cause for several delays in the approval process and to the premiere, Flegel refers to 'den über die Anleihen an reale Personen des kulturellen Lebens in der DDR hinausgehenden,

⁸¹ Original manuscript for *Die Feststellung*, AdK, Helmut Baierl, 34.

⁸² Production programme for the *Volksbühne* premiere, AdK, Volksbühne Berlin 874.

⁸³ Flegel, pp. 190, 200; Slevogt, p. 398; Naumann, p. 9.

deutlich hervorgehobenen Realitätsgehalt des Stücks.⁸⁴ This could be the satirical content of the play.

Kipphardt faced considerable opposition in institutional and Party circles because of his negative approach, culminating in meetings with Berlin ‘Intendanten’ and the *Kulturkommission* in the *Politbüro* in March and April 1959; on one occasion cultural policy maker Siegfried Wagner declared:

Wenn [Kipphardt] ehrlich ist, steht er sehr weit von uns entfernt, oder er glaubt, dass wir alle so wenig gebildet sind, um seinen, wie hier vorhin gesagt wurde, Jongleurkünsten hier nicht folgen zu können, seiner dialektischen Akrobatik nicht folgen zu können.⁸⁵

Müller-Waldeck proposes that, without the recent death of Stalin and the 17 June 1953 uprising, the play would not have reached a stage, since recent events had brought about greater pressure for political liberalisation from artists, though in part the roaring success of the production also stifled some controversy.⁸⁶ Whilst Schnell – the Party representative – comes under criticism for being too concerned with ‘karrierebedachten Opportunismus’ than political intervention, the play also targets the poor work of young writers.⁸⁷ The perceived underdevelopment of drama in the fictional GDR seems not merely the fault of

⁸⁴ Flegel, p. 203; Adolf Stock, *Heinar Kipphardt: mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1987), p. 44.

⁸⁵ [n.a.], ‘Stenografische Niederschrift der Beratung der Kulturkommission beim Politbüro des ZK mit den Intendanten der Berliner Theater im K.-L.-Haus, Thälmannsaal am Montag, dem. 16. März 1959’, BArch SAPMO DY/30/70771, pp. 133–134; [n.a.], ‘Bericht über die Auswertung einer Beratung der Kulturkommission des Politbüros am 16.3.59 im Deutschen Theater am 31.3. und 4.4.1959’, BArch SAPMO DY 30/85045. See also internal comments of the StaKoKu, BArch DR 1/6046–6047 (83382). Wolfgang Langhoff appealed for Party participation in a discussion about Kipphardt’s play: “[Ich möchte] recht herzlich darum bitten, in Anbetracht der Sorgfalt und Aufmerksamkeit, zu der wir einem Gegenwartsautor gegenüber verpflichtet sind, dieses Stück doch noch von einem der entscheidenden Genossen [...] lesen zu lassen. Ich halte dies für absolut notwendig” – Letter from Wolfgang Langhoff to the *Kulturabteilung* of the ZK, 14 October 1952, SAPMO DY 30/85035, fiche 1.

⁸⁶ Gunnar Müller-Waldeck, ‘Heinar Kipphardts “Shakespeare dringend gesucht”. Zu Fragen der Satire in der jungen DDR’, *Weimarer Beiträge*, 36:9 (1990), 1407–1418 (p. 1414).

⁸⁷ Keisch, ‘Shakespeare dringend gesucht’, p. 4. Färbel sarcastically summarises the ‘Produktionsstück: “Wohnküche, Sitzung, Sabotage, Brigade – Schade – Wohnküche, Sitzung, Brigade, Gesang [...]”. In diesen Stücken geht es zu wie in einem Kuhmagen, nur, dass statt Gras Gedanken und altes Zeitungspapier wiedergekaut werden” (p. 9).

‘Auch-Schriftsteller’, in Keisch’s words, but also that of the Party, whose ‘Erbe’ cult and anti-formalism witch-hunt drown creativity.⁸⁸ Presenting these faults through satire invites the audience’s critique; working alongside the comedic and other techniques that remind the spectator of their presence not in the work but the ‘Zuschauerraum’, Kipphardt’s thematisation of mistakes and problems becomes a task for the audience to consider.

In an allegorical theatre, the spectator is able to look beyond the absurdity of characters’ behaviour, for example, and question its causes. Individual flaws and peculiarities in Kipphardt’s characters should, accordingly, not distract from the audience’s critical agency, but rather function as a mask that conceals the harshest criticisms – arguably to such an extent that the play could even be performed. Färbel’s prison companion Käthe, for example, later steals his wallet, which would easily see her categorised as a criminal with minimal discursive weight – yet she stingingly declares of socialism:

Früher, da konnte man leben, da bewohnte ich eine ganze Etage. [...] Und heute? – Die enteignen die Fabriken, verteilen das Land und kümmern sich einen Dreck um unsere Existenzlage. Und so was nennt sich Sozialismus.

(Kipphardt, *Shakespeare dringend gesucht*, p. 46)

By balancing individual character weakness with negative remarks about the present, Kipphardt covers his tracks in the same way that the *dea ex machina* Mellin seems to iron out the woefully insufficient conduct of the theatre’s director.⁸⁹ This all constitutes material for audience reception, but both the diversity of perspectives and the unresolved negativity of the play evoke questions that the spectator alone can answer – shifting part of the performance from the stage to the auditorium, as the third step of allegoricisation allows that

⁸⁸ Keisch, ‘Shakespeare dringend gesucht’, p. 4.

⁸⁹ Pauli, p. 205.

material to be reworked.⁹⁰ Despite the confinement of the central questions in *Shakespeare dringend gesucht* to the politico-cultural sphere – making them, therefore, not necessarily matters for ‘regular’ citizens – this dynamic between work and audience resembles the allegorical process. Diagnosing Kipphardt’s method, because of its inability to signify independently and transcendently, through Benjamin’s allegory does not, therefore, mean that he conceived his work as such, but rather that allegory serves as a pertinent and profane lens through which to comprehend its structure, characters, and themes.

As for *Die Korrektur*, in the prologue each character is introduced to the audience: “Das ist Bremer, Brigadier, Kämpfe gewohnt. / Aber die alten Waffen genügen nicht an der neuen Front” (p. 129). This quip anticipates Bremer’s confrontation with the engineer, which itself alludes to the contradiction between old and new in the workplace, since Bremer represents the new intelligentsia, whereas the engineer harks from an intellectual class whose social esteem the GDR’s ideology had downgraded.⁹¹ The engineer interjects: “Gestatten Sie, dass ich ergänz: / Hier steht die alte, da steht die neue Intelligenz” (p. 129). Since this temporal dynamic influences the characters’ behaviour later in the play, the prologue sets the scene – not in order to bind the spectator into passivity, however; but rather to exacerbate an internal conflict produced by the varying affinities during a time of political upheaval. Read as a montage of fragments that casts the ideological makeup of the *Aufbau* at the workplace as disharmonious, the characters and their motivations represent an object ripe for change. When that montage comes together, however, still no convincing solution is found for the brigade’s complaints or their behaviour, which erodes the ritualistic practice of the closed-in stage and its unity of action. Rather than incite the audience’s reflection after the curtain falls,

⁹⁰ Hans Ulrich Eylau, ‘Der Lächerlichkeit preisgeben: Eine Satire gegen Mängel unserer Kulturlebens im Deutschen Theater uraufgeführt’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 4 July 1953, 3.

⁹¹ Streisand, ‘Die Korrektur’, p. 236.

the play thus provokes and even requires a response during the performance in order that the plot can continue. Since the Müllers avoid the depiction, as expected in socialist realism, of a unified and anticipatory political discourse in favour of positing a candid but disparate reality, *Die Korrektur* constitutes a political aesthetic founded on contradictory and fallible fragments over symbolic deception.

This mode of ‘Darstellung’, which I read as allegorical, necessarily disappointed the expectations of cultural authorities because of its demands on the spectator, who should draw from the new perspective granted to them by reflection, and engagement with, the criticism and questioning in the work, which offered an offensive riposte to the top-down method sanctioned for all GDR cultural production. *Die Korrektur* did not please its reviewers, with a wide consensus highlighting a too negative portrayal of society and, in particular, labour and production.⁹² Efforts by the authors to address issues during two rounds of discussions (at *Schwarze Pumpe* and the Gorki) did not rectify this, despite Heiner Müller’s intermittent recognition with regard to the ‘Normenschaukel’: “Die die Norm nicht akzeptierten, missbrauchen sie schon. Perspektivisch richtig wäre hier für ‘schon’ ein ‘noch’ zu setzen’. Fehler in ‘Korrektur’: Das ‘noch’ ist nicht gesetzt.”⁹³ Schivelbusch explains that version one placed too much confidence in the spectator’s ability to identify the sabotage as a new kind of problem idiosyncratic to socialism, rather than a continuation of the early contradictions described in *Der Lobndrucker*.⁹⁴ Insofar as intradiegetic solutions do occur, such as Bremer’s apology and Heinz’s request for Party membership, they appear rushed and unconcrete, which contributes to the ideological ambiguity of the play and invited further

⁹² Wagner, p. 12; Inge Müller & Heiner Müller, ‘Die Korrektur. Ein Bericht vom Aufbau des Kombinats “Schwarze Pumpe” (1957)’, *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, 5 (1958), 21–36 (p. 21); Kranz, p. 46; Hans Kaufmann, ‘Ästhetische Probleme der ältesten und der jüngeren sozialistischen deutschen Literatur’, *Junge Kunst*, 12 (1958), 76–80 (p. 79).

⁹³ Heiner Müller, ‘Zwischenbemerkung’, in *Geschichten aus der Produktion*, 2 vols (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1975), I, pp. 61–62 (p. 61).

⁹⁴ Schivelbusch, p. 106.

criticism. *Die Korrektur* (2) reflects the demands made of the Müllers in shifting the ideological weight in the work, such as the addition of Heinz's rather didactic line in the epilogue: "Links und links im Schritt der Fünfjahrpläne / Reißen wir aus der krepierenden Alten / Die neue Welt" (p. 146). But this ending, which underscores the benefits to the Party leadership, did not appear in the original version and injects only a semblance of partisanship into the work, especially when contrasted with the disruptive and contradictory effect of the middle scenes. Critics also took issue with the authors' decision to portray the *Aufbau* as unfinished, interrupted, or flawed, and to task spectators with resolving these issues, whereas the Müllers project the work outwards to the audience and plead for answers. Franz K. begins the song 'Der Pole kriegt die Kohle, / der Tscheche kriegt das Licht...'⁹⁵ (p. 133), which the spectator silently finishes: "Der Deutsche kriegt nischt!"⁹⁶ Whilst changes to the manuscript unavoidably diluted some of the dialectical dynamic vis-à-vis the audience, the corrective process – "Die Korrektur" wird korrigiert', as Müller wrote – did not vacate the play of its allegoricism and of the structural, discursive, and dramatic disruptions that became characteristic of Heiner Müller's own plays later on.⁹⁶ The same can be said of *Die Feststellung* and *Shakespeare dringend gesucht*. That this analysis concerns the manuscripts approved for performance and still locates examples of a dialectical, allegorical theatre within them demonstrates the significance of these plays for expanding the dramatic medium in the *Aufbau*.

For these plays to generate a dialectical relation with their audiences, the playwrights necessarily broke with Brecht's dramatic theory to develop new ways of approaching the

⁹⁵ See for example Wagner, p. 12; Inge Müller & Heiner Müller, 'Die Korrektur', *Theater der Zeit*, p. 21; Kranz, p. 46; Hans Kaufmann, p. 79.

⁹⁶ Jan-Christoph Hauschild, *Heiner Müller oder Das Prinzip Zweifel: Eine Biographie* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2003), p. 137; Heiner Müller, 'Zwischenbemerkung', p. 61.

GDR present and the growing epidemic of contradictions and anxieties in the *Aufbau*. Whilst traces both of epic theatre and elements of ideological didacticism seen in socialist realism appear in all three works, the texts present a reappraisal of the audience's role in socialist art and, as a result, the degree to which that art must be Party-affirming. Opting for a structure, themes, characterisation, and political discourse that are typified far more by their tension, conflict, and fragmentation than by their unity, the authors distance themselves from a didactic praxis that views the audience as an object of ideological education. Instead, they capitalise on the presence of a live audience and their capacity for reflection and independent thought to project a dialectical model for the theatre dependent on collective participation, which far more recognisably alludes to the systemic recharacterisation of politics in socialism. This aesthetic shift constitutes – for a political project founded on principles of solidarity and collective action – a font of overlooked potential in the GDR. The plays incorporate techniques of 'Verfremdung' and of interaction, compelling the spectator to engage with for the plot to cohere, for personal failures to become reconciled with long-term political ambitions, but also for the hindrances to the GDR's success to be overcome. That authorities commissioned and oversaw the watering down of manuscripts to prompt their cohesion with socialist realist precepts ultimately limited the reach of these texts and their political influence on the *Aufbau* audience, however.

The plays refamiliarise the spectator with the reality of the 'Zuschauerraum' as a profane space rather than a cultic site of ritual, but they also capitalise on the 'Podium', as Benjamin terms it, to present objects for the final aspect of performance to take place: the reception by a thinking spectator who relates the dramatic material to their lived reality and considers avenues for change within it. Only having distinguished the dramatic praxis of these works from the didactic theatre epithet can one fully appreciate the divergences in aesthetic

interpretation at the time and the significance of allegory, as I read it in these plays, as an alternative to symbolism for the early GDR.

Conclusion

In exploring how three plays rely on and diverge from Bertolt Brecht's models of epic and dialectical theatre and the 'Lehrstück', I have re-emphasised the revolutionary breakthrough heralded by Brecht's œuvre in the 'Umfunktionierung' of the theatre as communal and political space. Moreover, the continued influence of Brecht's theatre on young playwrights even beyond his death signals the appetite for and applicability of similar techniques to a politicised stage in a politicised cultural sphere. Since the GDR corpus in this chapter breaks from the tendency towards demonstration, for example, and appears to realise the dialectical theatre sketched by Brecht before his death, I identify a dialectical – and allegorical – approach to a live audience. This dialectical theatre in the *Aufbau* held the potential for transforming the theatre as a site of political dialogue, particularly in a state undergoing political reform into a socialist system in which individual participation was explicitly demanded.

Their potential notwithstanding, not one of the three works escaped the process of Party-internal debates, production ensemble conversations, and experiments with those real-life people fictionalised in the plays, which moulded their political and aesthetic content and/or delayed their performance. Since versions of *Die Korrektur* and *Die Feststellung* readily demonstrate how such intervention condensed critical content to a partly more specific and therefore excusable commentary, Kipphardt witnessed numerous delays as authorities considered how to deal with one of the GDR's first works of political satire. As a result of the textual revisions and the (often resultant) symbolic techniques in the plays, none

constitutes a fully allegorical work, as the process of rewriting (or of self-censorship) introduced, in parts, a more demonstrative ideological optimism and a tendency to correct or resolve issues plastically so as to shore up the didactic content of the work. In the case of the Müllers and Baierl, one can more soundly suppose their intention to convey a harsher critique to the audience as a more effective means of inciting the change required, since their final manuscripts indicate a dilution of content deemed inappropriate by reviewers. These apparitions of a symbolic aesthetics do not nullify the allegoricism that I read in this corpus, though, because the elements that remain continue to clash with each other and with the audience into a constellation that enabled spectators to interrogate serious and current questions about the reality of the GDR's *Aufbau*.

The works employ the audience to finish sentences, plug gaps, and answer questions, thereby adopting collective responsibility for forging a path out of the inevitable contradictions of the state's considerable socio-political upheaval. These textual aspects, which I read as allegorical, go hand in hand with a conception of the theatre as a fragmented space in which the boundary between stage and auditorium gives way to a 'verfremdet' but participatory audience. Such praxes manifested a belief in the capacity of socialist aesthetics to influence political discourse, without which the appeal to the audience, particularly in works recast according to Party specifications, would have no logical application.

If anything, these examples testify to the efforts made by authors to prevent the total obfuscation of that productive potential in the hope that their work might be examined, reinterpreted, and recycled. They also indicate the relevance of the autonomy-affiliation dialectic theorised in the Introduction because the authors ultimately had to cede to recommendations and revisions in order for their works to reach the stage, even if that meant

replacing original content and even inserting suggestions from others to do so. Kipphardt's play exemplifies the preference for a theatre that uncovered contradictions and mistakes, rather than what he termed the 'Trott des herkömmlichen bürgerlichen Theaters', but by 1959 he had no option but to resign his post at the *Deutsches Theater*.⁹⁷ This confrontation of politico-aesthetic norms brought Kipphardt to the tipping point, therefore, at which the intellectual's dialectic of autonomy and affiliation could no longer sustain his work in public life. Neither Baierl nor the Müllers progressed in their careers with ease after these plays.

In a socio-political climate in which aesthetics theoretically had the discursive latitude to influence cultural policy, the investment of agency in the audience delineates the potential for an allegorical theatre. Subtle techniques in writing, directing, and performance unique to the theatre led to the performance of such plays that established an alternative dialogue with the audience to SED discourse. Commenting on his own 1974 production of Heinrich Heine's *Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen*, Adolf Dresen, director at the *Deutsches Theater* from 1965 to 1977, said:

There were people in the audience with tape recorders who played back what we had said and accused us of changing Heine. But they couldn't prove a thing because every single word had originated from Heine. An actor can speak the words differently. [...] [T]hey speak a subtext, and there's no way to control that. How are you going to register that on a tape recorder? You can't.⁹⁸

This subversive performance gestured away from the cultural policy of the SED, but crucially did not consist in the total dismissal of the SED's aims for the *Aufbau*. Likewise, the three

⁹⁷ Heinar Kipphardt, 'Zu einigen Fragen des heutigen Theaters', *Neues Deutschland*, 14 July 1957, 4; [n.a.], 'Stenografische Niederschrift der Beratung der Kulturkommission', p. 138.

⁹⁸ Adolf Dresen, 'The Last Remains of the Public Sphere', in *Redefining Shakespeare: Literary Theory & Theatre Practice in the German Democratic Republic*, ed. by J. Lawrence Guntner & Andrew M. McLean (London: Associated University Presses, 1998), pp. 151–162 (p. 161).

authors in this corpus still contributed to the *Aufbau* movement and, crucially, sought not just to thematise problems but to find solutions to them. If allegory itself is founded on a dialectical structure, the dynamic evidenced here between play and audience in the theatre evinces the suitability of allegory to the stage, particularly in challenging questions of cultural policy.

Ultimately, *Die Feststellung*, *Shakespeare dringend gesucht*, and *Die Korrektur* demonstrate the impact of Party intervention on the artistic process, which diminished the authors' intentions in their first drafts and lessened their efficacy because they could not realise all possible opportunities for inciting audience engagement. The loss of potential meant a reduction in live interaction, a less effective or less certain application of spectators' responses to the plays during the performance, and therefore also a limited chance of these reflections and conclusions being applied outside of the auditorium in the GDR present. It did not, moreover, prove possible to locate audience responses to the performances at the time. Noting, nonetheless, the potentiality of the audience for the third stage in allegorisation, I turn in the following chapter to a corpus that utilises similar techniques of fragmentation, disruption, and interruption and that I read as comprehensively allegorical. This final chapter investigates the implications of allegorical aesthetics for the GDR's political discourse in the *Aufbau* using the most experimental and, arguably, politically controversial corpus in this study.

CHAPTER SIX

ALLEGORY, ARCADES, *AUFBAU*:

POETRY AND LITERARY SUPPRESSION

der neu anfangende, der die tradition nicht beherrscht, fällt unter die herrschaft der tradition zurück
(Bertolt Brecht)¹

Many literary works in the GDR underwent processes of ‘correction’ and ‘censorship’, often self-imposed. While the previous chapter analysed dramatic works that encountered obstacles in the production stage, resulting in textual revisions and performance delays, in this chapter I examine a corpus of texts that publishers rejected, that writers composed in secret, or that demonstrably flouted standards of cultural production and counted as unpublishable in the immediate present. In outlining the role of censorship as a regulatory mechanism, I observe both that this mechanism, despite its perception, lacked any absolute or concrete credentials and that even the most subversive artworks did not necessarily harbour destructive tendencies, but rather explored how to diversify the role of aesthetics to pursue the *Aufbau* cause. In the chapters thus far, I have established how an allegorical aesthetics pertains to a fragmented structure that grants the reader insight into the complexities and contradictions of the present; applied to the early GDR context, allegory becomes a means to distinguish non-symbolic elements in works and to capture the political efficacy of such elements. Here, I consider the most experimental body of texts in this study, gathered from the *Archiv unterdrückter Literatur der DDR*, including by Herbert Bräuning and Paul Gerhard Reitnauer, from an early collection by Bernd Jentzsch, and from the (in)famous

¹ Bertolt Brecht, *Arbeitsjournal*, 2 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), II: *1938 bis 1942*, p. 143.

‘Lyrikabend’ of 11 December 1962. Drawing primarily on Walter Benjamin’s unfinished *Passagen-Werke*, I also expand the theory of allegory applied thus far through reference to the ‘Wunschbilder’ to ask how the very structure of art itself can – in allegory – enact a kind of construction, which I apply to the *Aufbau*.

Whereas, in drama, the system of ‘Begutachtung’ and ‘Vorprüfung’ consisted in critical ‘discussions’ and ‘correction’ of works with the engagement both of theatre professionals and Party representatives, publishing houses and censorship organs held responsibility for the printing permits (‘Druckgenehmigungen’) for literary texts, although these two processes could and did run in parallel.² I reference the process of review (‘Begutachtung’) in previous chapters without providing an in-depth historical overview because of the comparative lack of (traceable and concrete) external intervention into the artistic process for the relevant authors, whereas the authors discussed below faced hindrances to the publication of their work. Instead, I provide such an overview below. Indeed, censorship is not a central theme of this study as I see it. The Introduction outlines both the dynamic governing intellectuals’ relationship in and with the Party, and the cultural policies that shaped literary production in the *Aufbau*, of which censorship was only one. Previously, I have focussed on varying strands of the SED’s ‘Kulturpolitik’, such as socialist realism or dialectical theatre, using exemplary literary texts; that some underwent intervention and revision does not figure as a major feature of analysis.

² Note, however, that theatre, as well as music, fine art, and ‘Laienkunst’ came under the supervision of the *Staatliche Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten* from 1951 until 1953, after which the *Ministerium für Kultur* (MfK) overtook its responsibilities. Jochen Staadt argues that this occurred following criticism of the StaKoKu’s practice by, among others, the *Akademie der Künste* – Jochen Staadt, *‘Die Eroberung der Kultur beginnt!’: Die Staatliche Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten der DDR (1951–1953) und die Kulturpolitik der SED* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), p. 233.

In this chapter, according to the overall dynamic of this study, I consider literary works in a form conceived for publication and which, as it transpired, could not, at least immediately, be published. The following body of examples, therefore, serves to evaluate the effects and misconceptions of the censorship apparatus in the *Aufbau*. To begin, I catalogue how political variation and aesthetic experimentation were considered a potential threat to the success of the *Aufbau* project by authorities charged with reviewing manuscripts, and how a variety of changing structures and criteria emerged with which to control these tendencies. Ultimately, I consider how unpublished and even banned works of literature in the period, read as allegorical, provided a constructive outlook on the *Aufbau des Sozialismus* and should be reappraised in this light.

Censorship: History of an Ambiguous System

As early as 1946, the SMAD established the *Kultureller Beirat* to undertake the ‘Vorzensur’ of works destined for publication to remove any ‘problematic’ passages, with the military administration itself intervening in cases that warranted ‘Nachzensur’, i.e. the supply of manuscripts to authorities after publication for review.³ Approval for printed material and artistic performances (theatres, cabarets etc.) from SMAD authorities became a requirement as early as August 1945, however, with the *Deutsche (Zentral)Verwaltung für Volksbildung* overseeing this under the auspices of the SMAD’s *Verwaltung für Propaganda und Zensur* (later *Verwaltung für Information*) and *Abteilung Volksbildung*.⁴ This example of shared authority elicits

³ Editor-in-chief of *Neue Zeit*, Wilhelm Gries, related that ‘Nachzensur’ took the form of a verbal warning from the censor if rules or expectations were transgressed – Peter Strunk, *Zensur und Zensoren: Medienkontrolle und Propagandapolitik unter sowjetischer Besatzungsberrschaft in Deutschland* (Berlin: Akademie, 1996), pp. 96, 105–113, esp. p. 111. See also Siegfried Lokatis, ‘Vom Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen zur Hauptverwaltung Verlagswesen im Ministerium für Kultur’, in *Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer: Zensursystem und literarische Öffentlichkeit in der DDR bis Ende der sechziger Jahre*, ed. by Simone Barck, Martina Langermann & Siegfried Lokatis (Berlin: Akademie, 1997), pp. 19–60 (p. 27); Maximilian Becker, ‘Die Kulturpolitik der sowjetischen Besatzungsmacht in der SBZ/DDR 1945–1953: Sowjetische Literatur und deutsche Klassiker im Dienst der Politik Stalins’ (unpublished Master’s thesis, Ludwig Maximilian University Munich, 2007), p. 33.

⁴ David Pike, *The Politics of Culture in Soviet-Occupied Germany, 1945–1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 88–94; ‘Die Eroberung der Kultur beginnt!’, p. 9; Helga A. Welsh, ‘Deutsche Zentralverwaltung für Volksbildung (DVVV)’ in *SBZ-*

both the broad net of the censorship programme in the SBZ and the scope of intervention by authorities in the publishing industry to the point of exaggerated bureaucracy. Whereas Soviet functionaries populated the DVV and SMAD, the *Beirat* had a German board, contributing to a practice of shared authority in the SBZ's censorship programme; simultaneously, however, the vast and repetitive intervention by authorities in the publishing industry resulted in delays in granting licenses, a deceleration in the pace of publishing, and a *Beirat* lacking both the funding and the personnel to tackle the growing backlog in manuscripts into 1947.⁵ That said, David Pike suggests that one factor in the substantial obstacles to the review process lay in the SMAD's disinclination to contravene its professed democratic National Front strategy by being seen to further a centralised political agenda.⁶ Indeed, the obligation for all licensed publishers to submit manuscripts for 'Vorzensur' was lifted in February 1947 and, from April, replaced with quarterly reports on intended publications, though in practice political material still underwent the same process of official review.⁷

With the founding of the GDR and development of its own cultural politics, in 1951 the remit of the *Kultureller Beirat* transferred to the *Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen*, which oversaw 'Begutachtung', 'Themenpläne', and 'Verlagsarbeit'.⁸ In a 1953 statute for the *Amt*, its main responsibilities included: the 'systematische Verbesserung und Versorgung mit fortschrittlicher Literatur aller Gebiete'; 'ständige Hebung der Qualität der Verlagsproduktion'; 'Erfüllung aller [...] Planaufgaben'.⁹ Several smaller departments

Handbuch: Staatliche Verwaltungen, Parteien, gesellschaftliche Organisationen und ihre Führungskräfte in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands 1945–1949, ed. by Martin Broszat & Hermann Weber (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1990), pp. 229–238 (p. 229).

⁵ Pike, pp. 135, 356–7, 360.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 360.

⁷ Strunk, p. 110. The *Kultureller Beirat* retained a central role in this de facto 'Vorzensur' – Welsh, p. 235.

⁸ Lokatis, 'Vom Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen zur Hauptverwaltung Verlagswesen im Ministerium für Kultur', p. 23.

⁹ [n.a.], 'Statut des Amtes für Literatur und Verlagswesen bei der Regierung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik', 9 February 1953, BArch DR 1/7170, pp. 1–3.

focussed specifically on scientific, artistic, and children's literature, as well as areas such as the book trade, publishers' affairs, and literary criticism.¹⁰ In internal documents that acknowledge the existence of 'Begutachtung', functionaries emphasise its purpose as upholding the principles of the 'Verhinderung von Völker-, Rassen- oder Kriegshetze' and 'Förderung, was unsere Politik unterstützt'; a handwritten addition qualifies: "[U]nter strikter Nichteinmischung in den liter[arischen] Schaffensprozess des Autors."¹¹ These unpublished notes describe the justification of rejecting manuscripts according to set political criteria; yet this direction did not, according to a 1953 document, preclude the intervention for aesthetic reasons in the case of works: "[D]eren Qualität eindeutig so weit unter der Qualitätsmindestgrenze liegt, dass ihr Druck und ihre Verbreitung im Interesse der Öffentlichkeit nicht gerechtfertigt sind."¹² Promising writers should, therefore, have the chance to publish harmless texts ('nicht schädlichen Inhalts') even if they fall short of aesthetic standards ('deren künstlerisches Niveau nicht den Anforderungen der literarisch gebildeten Leser gerecht wird').¹³

As the shockwaves of Stalin's death and the USSR's 'Tauwetter' made their way to the GDR, pressure from intellectuals (for example at the writers' congress in 1956) led to a re-evaluation of the review process on the part of the SED, resulting in the transfer of these responsibilities to the newly founded *Hauptverwaltung Verlagswesen* attached to the MfK in October 1956, and in the decision no longer to require publishers' submission of manuscripts for 'Vorprüfung' to the HVV, with the understanding that they would carry out this task themselves.¹⁴ Siegfried Lokatis notes, however, that this restructuring resulted in the HVV rescinding

¹⁰ Lenke, 'Zusammenstellung der Aufgaben und Leistungen der politischen Abteilungen und Referate des Amtes für Literatur und Verlagswesen', 10 October 1955, BArch DR 1/7170, p. 1.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 4.

¹² [n.a.], 'Der neue Kurs in der Arbeit des Amtes für Literatur und Verlagswesen', 8 August 1953, BArch DR 1/7170, p. 8.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 20, 51–56; Gansel, p. 148.

permits and withdrawing already printed works on account of perceived issues, which both increased staff workload and entailed other economic and material (i.e. for paper) implications.¹⁵ Responsibility for ‘Vorprüfung’ returned to the authority in 1958 for all except the *Dietz* and *Volk und Wissen* publishing houses, which printed material for the SED, including schoolbooks and political theory. By October 1961, coinciding with the construction of the Berlin Wall, publication abroad required approval from the copyright office, except for West Berlin, for which publishers only had to notify the office of their intention.¹⁶ Finally, in early 1963 the HVV became the *Hauptverwaltung Verlage und Buchhandel* in the MfK, responsible for the control of an increasingly nationalised book market.¹⁷ By this point, a publisher’s manuscript submission had to include their own internal evaluation of the work, in response to which the HVVB produced two reviews (‘Gutachten’); in particularly complex cases – as Bernd Jentzsch documents in relation to his debut poetry collection *Alphabet des Morgens* – the MfK further commissioned an external reviewer.¹⁸

This broad system in the SBZ and early GDR functioned with the pretext of protecting paper supplies and political sensibility according to the Party’s norms, such that, for example, many literary and non-fiction works from the period of National Socialism were withdrawn and banned from bookshelves.¹⁹ Likewise, texts that contained direct criticism of SED decision-making, of the Soviet Union, and of socialism in general attracted the attention of the authorities, initiating a process of negotiation that resulted either in the censorship of

¹⁵ Siegfried Lokatis, ‘Die “ideologische Offensive der SED”, die Krise des Literaturapparates 1957/1958 und die Gründung der Abteilung Literatur und Buchwesen’, in *Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer*, ed. by Barck, Langermann & Lokatis, pp. 61–96 (p. 85).

¹⁶ Siegfried Lokatis, ‘Die Hauptverwaltung Verlage und Buchhandel’, in *Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer*, ed. by Barck, Langermann & Lokatis, pp. 173–226 (p. 213).

¹⁷ Michael Westdickenberg, *Die ‘Diktatur des anständigen Buches’: Das Zensursystem der DDR für belletristische Prosaliteratur in den sechziger Jahren* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004), p. 25; Lokatis, ‘Vom Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen zur Hauptverwaltung Verlagswesen im Ministerium für Kultur’, p. 21.

¹⁸ Bernd Jentzsch, *Akte Alphabet des Morgens: Amputation vor der Geburt*, 2 vols (Euskirchen: Gablenz, 2010), I, p. 250.

¹⁹ See for example the ‘Listen der auszusondernden Literatur’.

problematic passages or of a total refusal of publication. Astrid Köhler recognises, however, that no dichotomous structure between pro- and anti-SED existed here, since many critical works found great success in the GDR, whilst others that did fall prey to state censorship in fact shared in the political vision of the SED, but perhaps privileged alternative means to arrive at it.²⁰ The MfK, for example, attacked the works of dialectical theatre discussed in the previous chapter for their criticism of the Party and the characterisation of socialism as transitory, but also for un(der)developed characters and unresolved negativity. Although literary critics often were occupied with aesthetic analyses, much critical attention in Party circles centred on political questions, but these two approaches were not mutually exclusive: as one internal reviewer explained, '[d]ie ideologischen Unklarheiten [eines Kunstwerks] [...] beeinträchtigen den künstlerischen Wert'.²¹ This problematic stance might cast aesthetics in the SED's vision as part of a 'Gesamtkunstwerk' – something theorised by Boris Groys, for example – but it conflates two distinct aspects of the work.

Instead of a top-down structure of command, what Simone Barck and Siegfried Lokatis call 'Zensurspiele' can be characterised through negotiations rather than dictates, as a 'dynamisches Rollenspiel mit wechselnden Teilnehmern an allen Bereichen der Gesellschaft'.²² On the one hand, the onus fell upon writers even before the influence of institutions or state organs, leading Joachim Walter to draw attention to those works of literature that never even made their way to paper because of authors' supposition that they would fall foul of their ultimate reviewer – termed 'Selbstzensur'.²³ This practice of self-

²⁰ Astrid Köhler, *Brückenschläge: DDR-Autoren vor und nach der Wiedervereinigung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), p. 11.

²¹ This appears in comments by the MfK *Sektor Theater* with reference to Peter Hacks' *Die Sorgen und die Macht* – [n.a.], 'Einschätzung "Die Sorgen und die Macht" v. Peter Hacks', BArch DR 1/17089, p. 5.

²² Simone Barck & Siegfried Lokatis (eds.), *Zensurspiele: Heimliche Literaturgeschichten aus der DDR* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2008), p. 8.

²³ Joachim Walter, 'Angsträume und literarische Gegenwelten', in *Gesperrte Ablage: Unterdrückte Literaturgeschichte in Ostdeutschland 1945–1989*, ed. by Ines Geipel & Joachim Walter (Düsseldorf: Lilienfeld, 2015), pp. 29–36 (p. 32).

correction or self-censorship meant that authorities seemingly avoided considerable paper trails of the actual censorship process in favour of a transfer of responsibility to authors, who redrafted their work to the required standard.²⁴ On the other hand, various levels of and actors in publishing executed an ‘intricate process of negotiation and competition’ that saw the influence of both state and individuals in the passage of a book to the press, rather than the one-sided decision-making of, for example, the HVV.²⁵ The lack of thorough archival documentation on the printing permits indicates how much of this process was undertaken verbally: the author had to interpret the publisher’s or reviewer’s suggestions alone, requiring them to navigate the terms of acceptability and consider, for example, what aspects to omit from a work in order to guarantee the safe passage of others.

As such, censorship embodies the dialectic of autonomy and affiliation elucidated in the Introduction, according to which an intellectual’s (contractual) involvement in the examination or correction of their own work could yield them paradoxical advantages if they agreed to compromise; the removal of a reference to Stalin, for example, in Voelkner’s *Die Tage werden heller*, might have won the author concessions or a greater liberty of expression and experimentation in other areas.²⁶ This dialectical dynamic stretched beyond texts and individual publications, and could result in the end or furthering of a career depending on authorities’ decisions regarding print runs, for example. Rather than a monolithic fossil, the censorship process is characterised by its dynamism and ephemerality, as Sara Jones explains:

²⁴ Consider, for example, the ‘Gutachten’ to Benno Voelkner’s novel *Die Tage werden heller*, analysed in Chapter Four, which simply refers to the removal of references to Stalin in advance of the manuscript’s submission for approval by the MfK – see letter from Tribüne Verlag to the *Hauptabteilung Literatur und Buchwesen* (6 January 1959), BArch DR 1/5098.

²⁵ Sylvia Klötzer & Siegfried Lokatis, ‘Criticism and Censorship: Negotiating Cabaret Performance and Book Production’, in *Dictatorship as Experience*, ed. by Jarausch, 241–264 (p. 257).

²⁶ Letter from Tribüne Verlag to the *Hauptabteilung Literatur und Buchwesen* (6 January 1959), BArch DR 1/5098.

The view of what constituted hostile behaviour or politically untenable literature was thus liable to change over the course of time. [...] In terms of self-censorship, the shifting nature of the Party line and the increasing room for discussion of ‘taboo’ topics meant that a writer wishing to avoid meeting with censorship could not assume fixed ideological tenets that might direct his or her decision to broach a potentially contentious topic. Authors would not only have to know what was taboo, but what was taboo at what point, that is, to be able to follow the sometimes imperceptible widening or narrowing of the room for debate.²⁷

At the same time, authors themselves could shift the limits of acceptability.²⁸ As such, the censorship process exemplifies intellectuals’ precarious dialectical standing in the state because it demonstrates their significance to the political system, in which a work of literature could provoke the Party’s intervention to steer political and aesthetic movements in favour of state interests.

An unavoidable element of dogmatism remains in the question of censorship, insofar as authorities retained the unilateral authority for allowing a book to go to print in the GDR; simultaneously, however, actual ‘censorship’ often occurred in the form of a collaborative discussion before a publishing house commissioned any reviews. As characterised by Jentzsch’s *Alphabet des Morgens*, the ‘problematic’ passages or, in this case, poems frequently did not make their way into the published version of a manuscript following their omission by the author; however, the author’s willingness to omit a particularly controversial aspect of a work could equally gain them concessions in that work, their later writing, or their career. Whilst, to take one example, 2039 manuscripts were submitted to the ALV’s ‘Belletristik’

²⁷ Sara Jones, ‘Writing in Ambiguity: Negotiating Censorship in the GDR’, in *Writing under Socialism*, ed. by Sara Jones & Meesha Nehru (Nottingham: Critical, Cultural and Communications Press, 2011), pp. 11–27 (p. 14).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

section in 1954–5, only 28 were rejected entirely.²⁹ Jentzsch's collection, for example, underwent five separate reviews, yet the paper trail does not match up to the author's own recollections of the process, nor to the necessity of omitting several poems from the work before its publication – the reviewer for the *Mitteldentscher Verlag* simply does not mention the controversy surrounding the manuscript, but rather notes that 'manche dieser lyrischen Miniaturen nicht ins Zentrum unserer heutigen Situation vorstoßen'.³⁰ Censorship therefore constitutes a misleading label, since its application, in the GDR's *Aufbau* at least, did not develop into a total and comprehensive process, nor did those supposedly tasked with its execution regularly take a red pen to an author's manuscript. For this reason, I navigate a middle ground between a totalitarian reading of a one-way process and a purely collaborative and mediated praxis, which overlooks the SED's ultimate reserve of authoritarian power.

Introduction to Texts: Unpublished & Unpublishable

A work with negative political content, questionable aesthetic merit, and/or an element of experimentalism had a reasonable chance of some degree of suppression in the early GDR, meaning that any selection of unpublished literature likely includes a more radical aesthetic style and political content. But collating resources that did not pass the review process or, for reasons such as the author's self-censorship or even the imprisonment of the author, never made it to the desk of a publisher, does not come without challenges. The low number of literary texts that were in fact banned in 1954–55, for example, does not definitively negate or undermine the scale of suppression that took place, since manuscripts could have been edited heavily in order to facilitate publication, never submitted for publication, or never been allowed to reach the desk of a reviewer – for example because authorities confiscated

²⁹ Lokatis, 'Vom Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen zur Hauptverwaltung Verlagswesen im Ministerium für Kultur', p. 47.

³⁰ G. W., 'Gutachten' for *Alphabet des Morgens*, 12 April 1961, BArch DR 1/5007.

the work in advance.³¹ Locating banned manuscripts has hitherto proven difficult, suggesting that the suppression of literature in the *Aufbau* resulted from a more complex process in which a publisher foresaw political controversy, engaged with Party authorities, and/or negotiated with an author to avoid the ultimately profligate rejection of a completed manuscript, especially in a system that universally recognised the discursive value of cultural production and heritage.

A search of the *Bundesarchiv* and archive of the *Akademie der Künste* in Berlin for documentation of the procedures for printing licenses ('Druckgenehmigungsverfahren'; 'Druckgenehmigungsvorgänge') and authors' participation in it equally yields few results. Not only are the available documents pertaining to actually published – but censored – works in many cases lacunary; no evidence of rejected manuscripts and the paper trail surrounding them could be located at all. The reasons for this absence remain unclear, although an arduous manual search through the entire holdings of the MfK and its related organs may prove otherwise.³² No comprehensive source exists to document the titles of censored or rejected manuscripts, nor the date of their submission, nor the reasons for which this fate befell them. In particular for the GDR's early years, the search for such works depends, at present, on passing references in existing literature or archival access.

As a result of this difficult documentary backdrop, only a limited number of banned or censored texts from the period could be located, many of which were poems. The decision to limit this corpus to poems complements the breadth of forms in the study overall,

³¹ Some examples of confiscated manuscripts count amongst the holdings of AUL – Ines Geipel, 'Die Stunde Neuschuld. Unmittelbarer Krieg', in *Gesperrte Ablage: Unterdrückte Literaturgeschichte in Ostdeutschland 1945–1989*, ed. by Ines Geipel & Joachim Walter (Düsseldorf: Lilienfeld, 2015), pp. 38–104 (p. 38, fn. 33).

³² Some confiscated manuscripts can be found in the *Stasi-Unterlagen-Archiv*, but it is likely that these texts did not undergo review ('Begutachtung').

however, and thus captures a diverse and even representative snapshot of *Aufbau* literature in its varied, contradictory, and unexpected guises. But unlike the pangenerational authors who populated prose and drama in the early years of the GDR, former exiles or those belonging to the older generations – Becher, Arendt, Brecht – dominated poetry for the first decade of the state’s history, as both the younger authors and a corresponding audience struggled to catch up. Commenting on poetry in the early GDR, author Johannes Bobrowski wrote:

Wir können annehmen, dass sich eine so hartnäckige Erscheinung wie die moderne Lyrik nicht gut als Fehlentwicklung wird bezeichnen lassen. Wir sind freilich gut daran, bei uns in der DDR. Denn – mit wenigen Ausnahmen, wie schon gesagt, existiert moderne Lyrik hierorts nicht.³³

Having already attracted criticism in the year of the state’s founding, this trend of poetic belatedness slowly lost its hold at the start of the 1960s, as a host of new lyric voices gained attention through publications, predominantly in journals and magazines, and public readings.³⁴ The works considered in this chapter stem from these new and young voices and testify to the difficulty faced by many seeking to have their work published. As such, the texts in question present drafts intended, in that form, for publication by the authors, meaning that this corpus offers a higher degree of authorial authenticity, although self-censorship potentially had an impact.

This corpus derives from three separate sources. Established in 2001 by Ines Geipel and Joachim Walter, the *Archiv unterdrückter Literatur der DDR* (AUL) constitutes one resource of ‘suppressed’ works from across the GDR’s history, primarily in the form of ‘Nachlässe’

³³ Johannes Bobrowski, ‘Lyrik in der DDR (20.4.1960)’, in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by Eberhard Haufe (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1998), IV: *Die Erzählungen: vermischte Prosa und Selbstzeugnisse*, 423–442 (p. 436).

³⁴ See for example Gustav Leuteritz, ‘Wo steht die Gegenwartsdichtung?’, *Tägliche Rundschau*, 12 November 1949, 4.

containing manuscripts and further documentation.³⁵ The archive, the only such resource explicitly designed for suppressed GDR literature, makes accessible what had intentionally fallen into oblivion or is otherwise scattered across the *Stasi-Unterlagen-Archiv*, AdK, and elsewhere. I draw several poems from the work of Herbert Bräuning and Paul Gerhard Reitnauer, which appears in the collections of the AUL. Reitnauer, a trained physicist, attempted in vain to publish his poetry over a number of decades in the GDR, ultimately resorting to a self-published volume; Bräuning, having been imprisoned in 1956 for ‘Boykotthetze’, composed and memorised poems during his internment, then wrote them down following his release. They first appeared in 1998 in the self-published book *Zwischen Tag und Traum*.

Further texts derive from the censored cycle *Alphabet des Morgens* by Bernd Jentzsch. This debut collection appeared in 1961 with *Mitteldeutscher Verlag*, but not without the removal of several poems (‘Alma Mater Conventionalis’; ‘Mittelhochdeutsches Stündchen’; ‘Die grünen Bäume starben in uns ab’) and what the author describes as three controversial lines in, amongst others, the poem ‘Nocturno II’.³⁶ Despite Jentzsch’s frequent resistance to intimidation, he acknowledges and documents the prolonged negotiations with the publisher and various external commentators that resulted in a revised and printed version of the collection. The authors of an essay in *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, for example, complain of the general ‘subjektive Impression’ in the poems and that: “[Die Alltagsthemen können] nur ein Moment sein, weil solche Beschränkung dazu führen kann, dass die Gedanken- und Gefühlswelt des sozialistischen Menschen in ihrer historischen und weltanschaulichen Fülle

³⁵ Efforts undertaken to alter the absence of these works beyond 1989 derive primarily from the AUL’s holdings and publications by its founders in *Gesperrte Ablage*, in titles of their ‘Die verschwiegene Bibliothek’ series, and in Ines Geipel’s work on unpublished women writers from the GDR – Ines Geipel, *Zensiert, verschwiegen, vergessen: Autorinnen in Ostdeutschland 1945–1989* (Düsseldorf: Artemis & Winkler, 2009)

³⁶ Bernd Jentzsch, *Ur-Alphabet des Morgens: Gedichte 1957–1961* (Euskirchen: Chidher, 2014), p. 27; *Akte Alphabet des Morgens*, I, p. 218.

nicht erfasst wird.”³⁷ I draw from Jentzsch’s 2014 *Ur-Alphabet des Morgens*, which presents the cycle as originally submitted to the *Mitteldentscher Verlag*, for this chapter, examining precisely those poems that provoked controversy.³⁸

Finally, several poems stem from the now legendary ‘Lyrikabend’, which took place at the *Akademie der Künste* in Berlin on 11 December 1962. Organised by Stephan Hermlin, at the time secretary of the *Sektion Dichtkunst und Sprachpflege*, under the title ‘Junge Lyrik: unbekannt und unveröffentlicht’, the event offered a platform to young poets such as Wolf Biermann, Sarah and Reiner Kirsch, Volker Braun, and Bernd Jentzsch, whilst many important GDR poets such as Peter Huchel, Günter Kunert, and Georg Maurer were conspicuously absent.³⁹ Hermlin read over fifty submissions of explicitly ‘ungedruckte Gedichte’ on the evening itself, whilst the poets themselves recited others, making the ‘Lyrikabend’ a significant and perhaps the earliest public reading of new poetry by young writers in the GDR. According to Gerrit-Jan Berendse, Hermlin conceived of the event to some extent in response to restrictions on journalistic and artistic freedoms, as embodied by poet Peter Huchel’s removal as editor-in-chief of the journal *Sinn und Form* for, among other things, having published material sympathetic to Kafka but sceptical of dogma, for example.⁴⁰ No evidence of intentional dissidence on Hermlin’s or the authors’ part has come to light, yet the presentation of hitherto unknown texts manifestly served to open up the GDR’s poetic field

³⁷ Silvia Schlenstedt, Dieter Schiller, Christian Löser, et al., ‘Entwicklungsprobleme der Lyrik seit dem V. Deutschen Schriftstellerkongress’, *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, 11:9 (1963), 55–71 (pp. 66–69).

³⁸ See Jentzsch, *Ur-Alphabet des Morgens*.

³⁹ Alan Ng, ‘The Lyrikabend of 11 December 1962: GDR Poetry’s “Geburtsstunde” as Historiographic Artifact’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2002), p. 51.

⁴⁰ Gerrit-Jan Berendse, *Echoes of Surrealism: Challenging Socialist Realism in East German Literature, 1945–1990* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn, 2021), p. 70; [n.a.], ‘Junge Lyrik der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik’, *Sinn und Form*, 15:1 (1963), 62–93

to new voices; Hermlin's defence of an untypically, if not extraordinarily, liberal expression of criticism amongst the spectators on the evening equally suggests some political ambition.⁴¹

The debut of unpublished and, in some cases, rejected poems at the 'Lyrikabend' subsequently caused a political storm on account of their frankness and, at times, criticism, but the event also heralded the beginning of a 'Lyrikwelle' that rejuvenated poetry for the *Aufbau*.⁴² Despite positive initial reception, with applause and cheers to be heard on the recording throughout the event, Hermlin's event in time became notorious as the SED's lyric example of misguided and misjudged early GDR culture, joining Peter Hacks' play *Die Sorgen und die Macht*, for example, as a politico-cultural mistake not to be repeated.⁴³ Criticism slowly emanated from Party circles, with Alexander Abusch (at the time 'Vorsitzender' of the *Ministerrat*) bemoaning, for example, that: "[E]ine ideell-künstlerisch klare Führung der Akademie im Sinne des sozialistischen Realismus [nicht] spürbar war."⁴⁴ Characterised by what an internal MfK report calls 'ernste ungesunde Stimmungen', the event and its reception soon led to Hermlin's own dismissal as secretary at the AdK in March 1963 and much difficulty thereafter marketing or stocking his works.⁴⁵ There followed a disappearance of the

⁴¹ Ng, p. 115; Berendse, *Echoes of Surrealism*, p. 71.

⁴² Kurt Hager, 'Parteilichkeit und Volksverbundenheit unserer Literatur und Kunst. Rede des Genossen Kurt Hager, Mitglied des Politbüros, auf der Beratung des Politbüros des Zentralkomitees und des Präsidiums des Ministerrats mit Schriftstellern und Künstlern am 25. März 1963', *Neues Deutschland*, 30 March 1963, 3–5; Kurt Hager, 'Ein leninistisches Programm', *Neues Deutschland*, 19 January 1963, 6; Bernt von Kügelgen, 'Nach einem Abend', *Sonntag*, 6 January 1963, 2.

⁴³ See for example Pe., 'Lyrik mit Temperament', *Berliner Zeitung am Abend*, 12 December 1962, 3[?]; Heinz Kersten, 'Die Defensive der Dogmatiker. Kulturpolitische Auseinandersetzungen vor und auf dem VI. Parteitag der SED', *SBZ-Archiv*, 14:5 (1963), 66–71 (p. 66). As for criticism during the event itself, however, Ng's attribution of a heated exchange with Hermlin to Willi Köhler cannot be corroborated with the transcript held in the AdK. Hermlin may be responding to John Heartfield – Ng, p. 11; audio recording of the 'Lyrikabend', AdK AVM-31 1617.

⁴⁴ [n.a.], 'Protokoll über die Aussprache beim Stellvertreter des Ministerrates Alexander Abusch mit dem Präsidium der DAdK am 9.1.1963', BArch SAPMO, DY 30, IV 2/2.026/27, p. 323.

⁴⁵ Ng, pp. 13–14, 89–90; Gudrun Geißler, 'Stephan Hermlin und die junge Lyrik', in *Kablschlag: Das 11. Plenum des ZK der SED 1965: Studien und Dokumente*, ed. by Günter Agde, 2nd edn (Berlin: Aufbau, 2000), pp. 395–412 (pp. 403–404); Sven Vollrath, "'Junge Lyrik – Unbekannt und Unveröffentlicht". Akademie der Künste 1962/63', *Angebote. Organ für Ästhetik*, 7 (1994), 39–64 (p. 43); Leon Hempel, *Stillstand und Bewegung: Hoher Stil in der Lyrik Ost- und Westdeutschlands* (Berlin: GegenSatz, 2011), p. 305, fn. 24. These disagreements, which predated December 1962, seem to characterise a fundamental ideological distance between the AdK's staff and Party leadership. Whereas the Academy described the 'Lyrikabend' as 'optimistisch' and 'kämpferisch', with a 'klares Bekenntnis zur neuen sozialistischen Gesellschaft', the Party, as represented by Kurt Hager in *Neues Deutschland*, berated the institution's 'erhabene, geradezu majestätische Isoliertheit im Elfenbeinturm': "Der Lyrikabend der Akademie, der auf Initiative und unter Leitung des Genossen Hermlin stattfand, wurde zu Ausfällen gegen das Zentralorgan der Partei missbraucht und zur Verbreitung von Gedichten, die vom Geist des Pessimismus, der

‘Lyrikabend’ from GDR Party and scholarly discourse from 1963 until 1985.⁴⁶ Although many of the poems from the event did find a platform in journals such as *Sinn und Form* and *Neue Deutsche Literatur* in the two to three years following the ‘Lyrikabend’, when first presented to a GDR audience at the AdK they counted as unpublished and, judging by the controversy that they provoked, unpublishable.⁴⁷

One can distinguish this corpus from more conventional *Aufbau* poetry both in the absence of central socialist realist tenets and in their antagonism, if not disinterest, vis-à-vis the state’s *Tagespolitik*. One key contributor to socialist realist poetry was Kurt Bartsch (Kuba), whose texts cast socialism rigidly, as in the four-verse poem ‘J. W. Stalin’, which declares the Soviet politician’s life a success and an inspiration:

unwissenden Krittelei und der Feindschaft gegenüber der Partei durchdrungen waren” – Hager, ‘Ein leninistisches Programm’, p. 6.

⁴⁶ Ng, p. 73; Kersten, p. 67. Sylvia Schlenstedt’s biographical work on Stephan Hermlin purportedly broke this decades-long academic taboo. Although one might now question parts of this description, Schlenstedt detailed: “Was an jenem Abend zu hören war [...], war höchst unterschiedlich und im Ganzen neuartig in der Weise der Aneignung gegenwärtiger Umwelt [...]. Dass hiermit neue Haltungen einer jungen Generation zur sozialistischen Gesellschaft in Erscheinung traten, Zugriffe zum eigenen Lebensstoff, durch die das Gegebene als selbstverständlicher Ausgangspunkt für subjektive Aktivität genommen wurde, spürten wohl alle bei dieser Veranstaltung, ob sie nur darin mehr die provokativen Normverletzungen oder geschichtlich fällige Zeitreflexe sahen” – Silvia Schlenstedt, *Stephan Hermlin: Leben und Werk* (Berlin: Das europäische Buch, 1985), p. 189.

⁴⁷ For a list of which poems were published, see Ng, pp. 185–190. For the reception of the ‘Lyrikabend’ more broadly, see Ng; Matthias Braun, *Kulturinsel und Machtinstrument: die Akademie der Künste, die Partei und die Staatssicherheit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 157–173.

Er kam auf die Erde, ein dürftiger Gast,
verwüstet die Welt war vom Hasse. –
Das Leben war Schuhpech und Leisten und Last,
ein Stiefel der Räuber im Fürstenpalast.
Das Arbeiterkind ward vom Strome erfasst
dem Mahlstrom der Arbeiterklasse!

Gendarmen und Trommeln und Spießbrutenlauf,
gelassen ertrug er die Hiebe.
Das Buch in den Händen, die Augen darauf,
nahm er eine Welt voller Bosheit in Kauf.
Ging aufrecht den Kreuzgang der Schmerzen hinauf,
voll Mitleid, voll Zorn und voll Liebe. –⁴⁸

The regular form and repetitive rhyme pattern (ABAAAB) underscore Stalin's status as a figure of stability and inspiration in the GDR, inasmuch as the two aspects hark back to poetic tropes from the national 'Erbe' and thus absorb Stalin into that tradition to project a continuum into the future after the *Aufbau des Sozialismus*.

Socialist realism does not apply as a constant benchmark with which to compare the corpus in this chapter, particularly because of the ambiguity in its tenets and their practical application, which more experimental authors did not universally eschew; however, the authors here did radically redraw the boundaries of a lyric landscape dominated by the officially sanctioned aesthetic method, typically with clashes of old and new forms, styles,

⁴⁸ Kurt Bartsch, 'J. W. Stalin', *Gedichte* (Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1952), 118.

and themes alongside a depiction of or allusion to the early GDR in a potentially disorientating and distracting manner.

Since the sonnet form or an apolitical theme alone are not inconceivably characteristics of socialist realist poetry; instead, Gerrit-Jan Berendse delineates the work of many young GDR poets who were themselves influenced by Brecht, Huchel, and others by emphasising their parallel application of: “Saloppe Redensweisen [...], Jargon des Marxismus-Leninismus und ältere Formen, wie etwa die des Sonetts, der Ballade, Ode, Elegie und Hymne.”⁴⁹ In constructing a corpus for analysis, I identify the texts’ heterogeneity in terms of poetic forms, thematic choices, and even authorial background, which has rendered categorisation difficult since.⁵⁰ The authors’ efforts to diversify the notion of aesthetic acceptability form the basis of their inclusion in one textual body.

To begin, two poems serve to exemplify the key characteristics of this corpus. Herbert Bräuning composed the following poem as part of a cycle of ‘Haftsonette’, which he composed covertly during his internment:⁵¹

⁴⁹ Gerrit-Jan Berendse, *Die ‘Sächsische Dichterschule’: Lyrik in der DDR in den sechziger und siebziger Jahren* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990), pp. 97–98; Harald Hartung, ‘Die Generation Volker Brauns. Lyrik in der DDR seit 1965’, in *Deutsche Lyrik seit 1965: Tendenzen, Beispiele, Porträts* (Munich: Piper, 1985), pp. 98–139 (pp. 108, 128).

⁵⁰ Whereas the analysis below includes the possibility of categorisation according to the literary works themselves, Barbara Mabee summarises: “Autorbezogene Erfahrungen, poetologische Reflexion und Fragen nach individuellen Gestaltungsmöglichkeiten treten mit der ‘mittleren Generation’ (gemeint sind die zwischen 1930 und 1940 Geborenen, deren erste literarische Veröffentlichungen fast ausnahmslos im Rahmen der sogenannten ‘Lyrik-Welle’ zu Beginn der 60er Jahre erfolgten) ins Zentrum, der Lyrik und Lyrikdebatten” – Barbara Mabee, *Die Poetik von Sarah Kirsch: Erinnerungsarbeit und Geschichtsbewusstsein* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989), pp. 21–22. The poets in question from the ‘Lyrikabend’ later became collectively known as the ‘Sächsische Dichterschule’, a heterogeneous group with some connection to Saxony (birth, study, domicile) – Berendse, *Die ‘Sächsische Dichterschule’*, pp. 139–140; Robert Straube, *Veränderte Landschaften: Landschaftsbilder in Lyrik aus der DDR* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2016), p. 217.

⁵¹ E. S., “‘So eine glückliche Ehe’”. Herbert und Ursula Bräuning feiern Geburtstag und Diamantene Hochzeit’, *Münchner Wochenanzeiger*, 12 April 2011 <<https://www.wochenanzeiger-muenchen.de/muenchen/so-eine-glueckliche-ehe,32918.html>> [accessed 22 November 2021].

Die Gärten meiner Sehnsucht sind wie gestorben.

Auf den verwahrlosten Wegen fault

das Laub verjährt Gedanken.

Welcher Winter hat meine Träume verwüstet,

welche Trauer mein Lachen verheert?

Die einst so buntgefiederte Phantasie

streicht müde ein grauer Fremdling

ums kahle Geäst erfrorener Hoffnung.

Verloren ragt hier und da

blickloser Torso Erinnerung auf,

und für Sekunden

durchbricht wohl der weiße Schrei

des Marmors den Panzer

den gläsernen meines Schweigens.⁵²

On the one hand lacking distinctive form or rhythm, as if the exasperated speaker has become the rigid, 'blickloser Torso' evoked in the final lines, the poem centres, on the other, on natural imagery, a theme employed here in the sense of loss and decay. Though Bräuning harmonises the melancholy of the 'ich' with foliage that 'fault', a 'grau' springtime, and 'kahle[s] Geäst', nature does not immediately belong in a political lexicon, which suggests a possible distance from political affairs. In its invocation of a depersonalised and historically common theme, Bräuning's self-reflexive and pessimistic poem does little to embody the engaged socialist citizen expected of GDR artists, particularly compared to Kuba's work.

⁵² Herbert Bräuning, '2 [Im Strafvollzug]', in *Zwischen Tag und Traum: Hundert Gedichte. Eine Auswahl aus zwei Jahrzehnten 1938–1958* (Germerich: [n. pub.], 1998), p. 90.

A further example is Bernd Jentzsch's 'akademisches Gedicht' 'Alma Mater Conventionalis' (1961), composed during his studies in Leipzig, which alludes to a dissatisfaction with the conventional character of the GDR's higher education system. As Jentzsch details in *Ur-Alphabet des Morgens*, the poem did appear in *Neue Deutsche Literatur* as something of an experiment, but the criticism that it provoked from Hans Mayer (director of the *Institut für Deutsche Literatur in Leipzig*), for example, rendered it unpublishable when proposed as part of the collection to *Mitteldentscher Verlag*.⁵³ Adopting a satirical stance in images of stasis and tradition ('Virgilsche Ekloden', 'Pomadenperücke', 'Die Theodizee'), the speaker mocks a dry and uninspiring milieu:

Gegipster Kentaur.
Die Luft stockt im Takt.
Der Stuck an der Mauer
Klebt goldüberlackt.
[...]
Es biegt sich das Buchbord
Vor Nietzsche und Gleim.
Und Vorsicht: kein Brecht-Wort.
Das Haus stürzt sonst ein.⁵⁴

Four regular quatrains with alternating rhyme seem to reference a kind of traditional poetic regularity in the same way that allusions to canonical figures of the university curriculum point towards a historical anchor for the work. The satirical tone, however, recasts these references as stuffy and out-dated, thus the mention of Brecht – controversial avant-gardist

⁵³ Mayer's critique in *Neue Deutsche Literatur* singled out the 'Brecht-Wort', which, according to Jentzsch, triggered 'den zweitenunami gegen mich' – Bernd Jentzsch, *Ur-Alphabet des Morgens: Gedichte 1957–1961* (Euskirchen: Chidher, 2014), p. 50.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 'Alma Mater Conventionalis', *Ur-Alphabet des Morgens*, p. 52.

on the one hand and central figure in *Aufbau* theatre on the other – in the penultimate line suggests Brecht’s absence from the speaker’s studies as a bone of contention and critiques the SED’s anti-formalist and anti-avantgarde stance. Yet a satirical and light-hearted tone cushions the blow of these provocations, making them less direct and threatening. Bräuning’s poem sounds more provocative by comparison, resounding more with a sense of bereavement at the speaker’s loss of time and potential as a young and engaged citizen. Importantly, these two poems already demonstrate the combination of old and new forms, techniques, themes, images etc. and locate this clash in the *Aufbau* present, in this instance because the authors draw on moments from their own reality as an anchor to the GDR.

I propose to expand on this detection of a clash to understand the political and aesthetic implications within the wider cultural and political context, particularly considering how the resultant structure of the poems offered a significant but overlooked contribution to the *Aufbau*. Per se not disruptive or subversive, the invocation of historical themes, styles, and forms encountered negative reception when the text as a whole appeared politically distant to the point of being revisionist, apolitical, or even a GDR-specific return of the individual(istic) ‘ich’ (as opposed to the collective ‘wir’), which indicates the expectation of poetry and literature more broadly to identify with political (including aesthetic) norms explicitly.⁵⁵ The benchmark of political affirmation derived from socialist realism is not always reflected obviously in these poems, as in Sarah Kirsch’s ‘Quergestreiftes’ (1962), which Hermlin read at the ‘Lyrikabend’ and which remained unpublished thereafter:

⁵⁵ Straube, p. 221; [n.a.], “Junge Lyrik – Unbekannt und Unveröffentlicht”. Akademie der Künste 1962/63, p. 63.

Es waren einmal dreißig Streifen,
davon konnten zwei nicht begreifen,
dass sie nur längs zu laufen hatten –
wie's ewig alle Streifen taten.

[...]

Von jenem Streifen der eine
hatte Allüren, ganz kleine:
Er schlängelte sich etwas zur Seite –
doch merkte man's nicht aus der Weite.

[...]

Der andre aber, vermessen,
wollte die Tradition vergessen:
er sprang davon mit sichzig Grad,
was keiner ihm verziehen hat.⁵⁶

A reading of the poem as a blinkered, hedonistic escape in the search for identity outside of the political realm – as has been offered critically – would myopically characterise Kirsch as an apolitical and naïve poet, denying the glaring engagement in GDR politics of her oeuvre and this text.⁵⁷ Instead, in 'Quergestreiftes' Kirsch combines a more rehearsed metre and form with a somewhat abstract reflection on reality, in which the desire 'die Tradition [zu] vergessen' connotes a break from the principle of faultless solidarity in GDR socialism, which is cast as a kind of unwanted obsequiousness. The speaker's desire for breathing space and individuality thus instead coheres with Robert Straube's proposed interpretation of

⁵⁶ Sarah Kirsch, 'Quergestreiftes', in 'Veranstaltung "Junge Lyrik – unbekannt und unveröffentlicht" am 11/12/62', AdK-O 312:1, pp. 16–17.

⁵⁷ Cf. Peter J. Graves, *Three Contemporary German Poets: Wolf Biermann, Sarah Kirsch, Reiner Kunze* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1985), e.g. p. 17.

Kirsch's and others' work as 'innenpolitisch', since it does not reflect the ideologised content of Party-supported literature, but does embody a transformed, socialism-supportive poetic voice.⁵⁸ Instead of adding a further voice to the chorus of normative SED-affirmative socialists, Kirsch's poem adopts a different, less explicit kind of political nature – but remains engaged with the GDR reality nonetheless.

Benjaminian 'Wunschbilder': The Clash of Old & New

Walter Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*, consisting of two longer drafts or exposés (one in German [1935], the other in French [1939]), a collection of fragments and citations organised into 'Konvoluten', early sketches, and an essay on Baudelaire ('Charles Baudelaire. Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus'), offers one means of interpreting the explorations, perspectives, and structures seen already in this corpus of poems. Benjamin describes the return of the historical as a kind of escape from the very recent past in an effort to overcome its flaws, which he demonstrates using the example of Paris in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵⁹ After thirteen years collecting material from primary and secondary literature, as well as from personal experience as an exile in the city, Benjamin extensively analysed the panoramas or dioramas pioneered by Louis Daguerre, the world exhibitions, the domestic interior as conceived by Louis Philippe, Charles Baudelaire's Paris, George-Eugène Haussmann's destructive reconceptualisation of the French capital, and – most prominently – the 'Passagen'. The Parisian arcades, glamourised shopping streets, appeared in the first decade and a half after 1822, meaning that Benjamin's retrospective analysis refers in many respects to those surviving examples that he had personally seen and otherwise

⁵⁸ Straube, p. 218.

⁵⁹ Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press, 1989), p. 5.

concerns an investigation of the others' 'origin'.⁶⁰ The sheltered arcades, which serve as his primary and recurrent example, offered a precursor to the department store as 'eine Stadt, ja eine Welt im [K]leinen' (p. 471, quoting the 'Illustrierter Pariser Reiseführer'), but the author does not solely content himself with a dialectical materialist reading of the Parisian arcades as a microcosmic example of the idealised – or fetishised – commodity. Instead, he comments on the return of the historical in their architectural novelty not only because the arcades became 'der Schauplatz der ersten Gasbeleuchtung' (*PW*, pp. 735, 471), signalling them as a site of engineering innovation, but also on account of the use of iron as a constructive *and* decorative material.⁶¹ The architects of the arcades executed, for example, a return to motifs from ancient Greece: "Diese Baumeister bilden Träger der pompejanischen Säule, Fabriken den Wohnhäusern nach, wie später die ersten Bahnhöfe an Chalets sich anlehnen" (*PW*, p. 472). In their form – often that of a cross, with 'chapels' along the nave – they also recall temples or churches, resulting in a modern construction that served the tastes of the indulgent Parisian bourgeoisie and profited from revolutionary building techniques, but that also incorporated ancient forms and motifs, resulting in an inspired or experimental body of 'Traumhäuser': "Die Passagen als Tempel des Warenkapitals" (*PW*, A2, 2).⁶²

Given that the arcades catered to a wealthy consumer base, the evocation of archaic and religious imagery seems oxymoronic or even arbitrary, particularly alongside the application of ironwork – yet this does not occur solely in the 'Passagen', but also in 'Wintergärten,

⁶⁰ Benjamin, *PW*, p. 471; Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 132.

⁶¹ Note that the application of iron to decorative ends did not come immediately and at the start faced much controversy, as the advance and potential of technology in the first instance pushed art into extremes of autonomous pursuit, until, as with the arcades, a synthesis appeared that saw some exploitation of technological innovation for artistic purposes – Benjamin, *PW*, p. 472 (G1, 1).

⁶² See also Benjamin, *PW*, pp. 508 (A2, 1), 484 (L2, 4).

Panoramen, Fabriken, Wachsfigurenkabinette[n], Kasinos, Bahnhöfe[n]’ (*PW*, L1a, 1). Benjamin suggests that the return of historical techniques and motifs becomes not just a question of reference but a utopian gesture of (re-)remembrance or ‘Eingedenken’ that casts back into history in order to innovate by bypassing or, indeed, surmounting the recent past; he calls the results ‘Wunschbilder’ (*PW*, p. 472).⁶³ These sites project into an unachieved but desired future, a ‘Form des neuen Produktionsmittels, die im Anfang noch von der des alten beherrscht wird (Marx)’, which Benjamin describes in section F with a citation from Marx’s *Kapital*:

Wie sehr im Anfang die alte Form des Produktionsmittels seine neue Form beherrscht, zeigt [...] vielleicht schlagender als alles Andre eine vor der Erfindung der jetzigen Lokomotiven versuchte Lokomotiven, die in der That zwei Füße hatte, welche sie abwechselnd wie ein Pferd aufhob. Erst nach weiterer Entwicklung der Mechanik und gehäufte[r] praktischer Erfahrung wird die Form gänzlich durch das menschliche Princip bestimmt und daher gänzlich emancipirt von der überlieferten Körperform des Werkzeugs, das sich zur Maschine entpuppt.⁶⁴

Whilst the Marx reference did not make it into the exposés, since it differs from Benjamin’s purpose in the *Passagen-Werk* to elaborate on the confluence of commodity and utopian social ambition, it does cohere with the description of the stuttered and layered route to revolution traced in the arcades project. The arcades, as one example of many, expressed their creators’ desire to replace ‘das Jüngstvergangene’ and its failures by alluding to an ancient, classless society (an ‘Urgeschichte’) through its architectural forms (churches, temples, and more).⁶⁵ In the collective (sub)conscious, these ‘Wunschbilder’ constitute attempts to work through (recent) history with the help of the distant past, citing what, in its massive

⁶³ Compare the discussion of ‘Eingedenken’ and ‘zekher’ in Chapter Four.

⁶⁴ Karl Marx, *Kapital*, I, fn. p. 347; cited in Benjamin, *PW*, p. 538 (F 2a, 5).

⁶⁵ See Benjamin, *PW*, pp. 473–475.

chronological unfamiliarity, has become an estranged fragment of a former society, and combining it with what has yet to exist.

If a similar combination of diverse chronological elements appears in a literary text, Benjamin's concept of the 'Wunschbild' also applies to the aesthetic sphere. A further text from the 'Lyrikabend', Rainer Kirsch's poem '2005' (written in 1962), formally resembles a kind of sonnet (four stanzas, two of four and two of three lines, all with alternating rhyme) and conveys a scepticism around the future – 2005 – or, in other words, a reticent imagining of future generations' disdain for the author's potential failures:

Unsre Enkel werden uns dann fragen:

Habt ihr damals gut genug gehasst?

Habt ihr eure Schlachten selbst geschlagen

Oder euch den Zeiten angepasst?

Mit den Versen, die wir heute schrieben,

Werden wir dann kahl vor ihnen stehn:

Hatten wir den Mut, genau zu lieben

Und den Spiegeln genau ins Gesicht zu sehn?⁶⁶

Kirsch's speaker addresses their anxiety, conveyed in the numerous questions, as a matter for the present, yet the poem evokes the centuries-old sonnet form. These two chronological pulls give '2005' a sense of uncertainty both that the speaker echoes and that results in an ambiguous structure. In this sense, one might read the poem as a 'Wunschbild' because it

⁶⁶ Rainer Kirsch, '2005', in 'Veranstaltung "Junge Lyrik – unbekannt und unveröffentlicht" am 11/12/62', AdK-O 312:1, p. 16. The poem was subsequently published in 1963 in *Sinn und Form* in a section entitled 'Junge Lyrik der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, where some other texts from the 'Lyrikabend' also appeared – *Sinn und Form*, 15:1 (1963), 62–93.

projects the question of the ‘Vers[e], die wir heute schreiben’ away from the immediate GDR present and into the distant future, whilst the structure offers a demonstrably historical anchor. These elements, combined, suggest a desire to overcome the lack of proactivity and responsibility in the present and particularly in aesthetic production, thus the poem chimes with the ambitions of the ‘Wunschbilder’, which themselves utilise a combination of temporal directions to cast ahead into the future. Kirsch does not challenge the status quo in the *Aufbau des Sozialismus* here, yet the poem did not appear in print until a year later, along with several other texts from the ‘Lyrikabend’, because its structural and temporal clash, despite its forward-looking dynamism, arguably offered too fragmented and ambiguous an aesthetics for early GDR cultural discourse.

Paul Gerhard Reitnauer’s poem ‘Parteilichkeit’, written 1961 and self-published in *Hundert Private Gefühlsausbrüche* in 1991, addresses ‘partisanship’, but the speaker’s stance interprets it not in the GDR-normative manner as a show of support for the Party, but as a dogmatic and ultimately vacuous term:

Jederlei Parteilichkeit
bleibt ein übler Brauch,
ist sie nicht Parteilichkeit
für die Wahrheit auch.⁶⁷

This stanza depicts ‘Parteilichkeit’ as an empty symbol or ‘üble[n] Brauch’ that individuals are taught idealise (‘mystisch zu verehren’) rather than interpret and apply of their own free will. A direct critique of Party standards was more or less taboo and certainly controversial in the *Aufbau*, particularly in this concentrated and explicit form; thus here it does not occur

⁶⁷ Paul Gerhard Reitnauer, ‘Parteilichkeit’, in *Hundert Private Gefühlsausbrüche: Mein verbotenes Buch* (Frankfurt am Main: [n. pub.], 1992), p. 82, in BStA, AUL, Paul Gerhard Reitnauer, I.

without the counterbalance of a regular structure of four rhyming quatrains (ABAB), evoking a more traditional form and rhythm that pull the topical and critical subject matter back towards the past. Whereas both older and more experimental lyric forms and metres appeared in socialist realism, there they paralleled politically acceptable contents; here a rehearsed rhyming quatrain contains criticism of one the central pillars in SED ideology, embodying a clash. According to the ‘Wunschbild’ template, this dialectic of two halves – more traditional aesthetics with contemporary content – allows the author to cast off utopically from the present or recent past into a different future, thereby negating one dysfunctional aspect of the *Aufbau* present in the new form. Both ‘2005’ and ‘Parteilichkeit’ therefore lend themselves to a reading through the ‘Wunschbild’ despite their differences, with Kirsch’s subtler decision to sidestep the immediate GDR present by posing difficult questions about it from a future perspective and Reitnauer’s more direct address. As Reitnauer himself acknowledges, however, the politically vociferous content of the poems did not submit to Party standards, hence his inability to publish them at the time.⁶⁸

Charles Baudelaire: Allegories of the Phantasmagoria

In Benjamin’s examples of ‘Wunschbilder’, the clash of old and new ‘stellt die Ware schlechthin: als Fetisch’ (*PW*, p. 481), making them very much of their time in their concern around innovations that always serve the expansion of the commodity. Benjamin problematises the echo of this issue in the ‘Wunschbilder’, however, because they can only avoid the commodity by adopting the form of a dream and thereby abstracting from reality (*PW*, p. 482), rather than constitute a tangible and feasible goal. For this reason, the arcades, the world exhibitions, and Daguerre’s dioramas cannot overcome the capitalist social

⁶⁸ Ibid., *Mein verbotenes Buch* (Dresden: [n. pub.], 1998), p. 8, BStA, AuL, Paul Gerhard Reitnauer, I.

conditions under which they were conceived and, therefore, essentially fail in Benjamin's eyes: they represent phantasmagorias 'in die der Mensch eintritt, um sich zerstreuen zu lassen' (*PW*, p. 476) – 'zerstreuen zu lassen' from the all-consuming reality on the outside, which they pretend no longer exists: "[Die Phantasmagorien] verklären den Tauschwert der Waren. Sie schaffen einen Rahmen, in dem ihr Gebrauchswert zurücktritt" (*PW*, p. 476). The utopianism of the 'Wunschbilder', their desire to overcome the discomfort of the recent past, thus cannot break free from that reality, and the images produce a cult-like and fetishistic battle for newness that reproduces itself perpetually, like the commodity, without ever actually seeking or achieving a new form. The 'Wunschbilder' in the *Passagen-Werk* necessarily cede their claim – if they ever staked one – to the capacity for effecting change in favour of a mimetic worship of the commodity that Benjamin understands as symptomatic of the modern age:

The [nineteenth] century was incapable of responding to the new technological possibilities with a new social order. That is why the last word was left to the errant negotiators between old and new who are at the heart of these phantasmagorias. The world dominated by its phantasmagorias, to make use of Baudelaire's term, is 'modernity'.⁶⁹

Benjamin concludes that eradicating the capitalist economic base and liberating society from the existing, old means of production could concretise the utopian core of the 'Wunschbilder' into something capable of the construction of a new order, but this represented a sizeable task.⁷⁰ Instead, he turns to the work of Charles Baudelaire, specifically

⁶⁹ Benjamin, *PW*, pp. 502–503 [original in French]; translation taken from *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland & Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 26. Susan Buck-Morss adds that the blind utopianism of the 'Wunschbilder' makes them 'only reified dream images of that promise' – Buck-Morss, p. 143.

⁷⁰ Benjamin, *PW*, p. 481.

Les fleurs du mal (*The Flowers of Evil*), in which he observes an attempt to confront the problem of the ‘Wunschbilder’ by pulling them apart, reassessing them from a new perspective, excavating their salvageable utopian core, and recasting them dialectically. In the exposés and his essay on Baudelaire, Benjamin identifies the poet as possessing a unique means of reading his surroundings – the Paris of the late nineteenth century – from an alienated, outsider’s point of view:

Es ist der Blick des Flaneurs, dessen Lebensform die kommende trostlose des Großstadtmenschen noch mit einem versöhnenden Schimmer umspielt. Der Flaneur steht noch auf der Schwelle, der Großstadt sowohl wie der Bürgerklasse. [...] In keinen von beiden ist er zu Hause. Er sucht sich sein Asyl in der Menge. [...] Die Menge ist der Schleier, durch den hindurch dem Flaneur die gewohnte Stadt als Phantasmagorie winkt.

(*PW*, p. 480)

That the figure of the flâneur regards these images from an alienated perspective means that he retains an exteriority when the ‘Wunschbilder’ rely on the isolation of the interior (the arcades as ‘eine Stadt, ja eine Welt im [K]leinen’, *PW*, p. 471). For Benjamin, Baudelaire interrogates the phantasmagorias and pulls them apart, incorporating any salvageable utopian material and discarding remnants of the old, pre-revolutionary means of production in them. As an outsider, the flâneur does not, therefore, overcome the systemic problem behind the ‘Wunschbilder’ as guarantors of their own targets. Instead, he oversees an artistic process of sorting, separating, discarding, retaining, and recycling that differs from the repetitive and stabilising structure of the original ‘Wunschbilder’ (whose ‘Schein des Neuen reflektiert sich, wie ein Spiegel im andern, im Schein des immer wieder Gleichen’, *PW*, p. 481), since they in practice had little to do with utopianism and much to do with regurgitating the old in an unconvincingly ‘new’ guise.

The 'Flaneur', as a result, reworks the 'Wunschbilder' into allegorical images, dialectically constructed out of new material and of the failed phantasmagorias of nineteenth century Paris: "Baudelaires Ingenium [...] ist ein allegorisches. [...] [Baudelaires] Dichtung ist keine Heimatkunst, vielmehr ist der Blick des Allegorikers, der die Stadt trifft, der Blick des Entfremdeten[, ...] der Blick des Flaneurs" (*PW*, p. 480). Moreover, Baudelaire's interaction with the 'Wunschbilder' in Benjamin's analysis is of a nature that is not destructive but allegorical:

Das Herausreißen der Dinge aus den ihnen geläufigen Zusammenhängen – das bei den Waren im Stadium ihrer Ausstellung normal ist – ist ein für Baudelaire sehr kennzeichnendes Verfahren. Es hängt mit der Zerstörung der organischen Zusammenhänge in der allegorischen Intention zusammen.

(*CB*, p. 606)

Taking fragments from the past and citing them in the present, this process allows new constellations and insights appear in the same way that Benjamin's allegory unlocks a hidden reserve of meaning in its objects. This 'heroisch' practice earns praise from Benjamin because Baudelaire produces a valiant attempt at allegorisation, i.e. 'an der Ware die ihr eigentümliche Aura zur Erscheinung zu bringen' (*CB*, p. 607).

Much like the failure of the baroque 'Trauerspiel' to realise its allegorical potential, however, all of Benjamin's objects of study in the *Passagen-Werk* are imperfect. Whereas the arcades, like the other 'Wunschbilder', ultimately reproduce precisely the object that they sought to become, making them sources of reaffirmation rather than revolution, in the poems of *Les fleurs du mal* the poems deal with or present a Parisian reality bound up with phantasmagorias, such that they interact with and negotiate material that they ultimately desire to overcome. Doing so with an alienated perspective should break the cycle of mimetic fetishism for which

Benjamin discards his other, physical objects; but Baudelaire's work on Paris is so unique and so affected by a loss of stability in the allegorical structure itself that: "Baudelaire ist als Allegoriker isoliert gewesen" (CB, p. 626). In contrast to the Baroque, the 'Moderne' had fallen foul of the death spiral of commodity fetishism, wherein the technical reproducibility of the commodity had exploded into other areas of experience, including hopes for a changed future. For Benjamin, Baudelaire believed that he could overcome this domination in the sacred, autonomous artistic realm, a space independent from 'the use value of the commodity' (PW, p. 497; *The Arcades Project*, p. 22). It was Benjamin's view that: "Die Scheinlosigkeit und der Verfall der Aura [...] identische Phänomene [sind]. Baudelaire stellt das Kunstmittel der Allegorie in ihren Dienst" (CB, p. 606). But Baudelaire erroneously trusts in an artistic practice that, similar to the ultimate mistake of the 'Wunschbilder', mimics the commodity that it initially desired to evade. In actuality, the pursuit of newness failed to escape the pervasiveness of the commodity and *Les fleurs du mal* simply reproduced a practice from the realm of fashion, which must constantly renew itself in order to stay relevant in the same way that the commodity endlessly copies itself: "[Newness] is the source of that illusion of which fashion is the tireless purveyor. The fact that art's last line of resistance should coincide with the commodity's most advanced line of attack – this had to remain hidden from Baudelaire" (PW, pp. 497–8; *The Arcades Project*, p. 22). The pervasiveness of the commodity by Baudelaire's time meant that the reader's ability to distinguish the allegorical lens had become blurred.

Allegory, the Arcades, and the *Aufbau*

Nevertheless, Benjamin did not discuss the potential of 'Wunschbilder' or of similar utopian structures of thought in a socialist context, in which the proliferation of the commodity posed less of a threat. By translating the remnants of this theory to poems by Sarah Kirsch,

Bernd Jentzch, and others through the lens of montage, I now explore how Benjamin's methodology helps to read the poems as more successful 'Wunschbilder' that, despite their unpublished and unpublishable status, exhibit a utopian mode of thinking as a constructive political tool in the early GDR. 'Konvolut' F from the *Passagen-Werk* already identifies the use of individual wrought-iron components (for example in the Eiffel Tower) as a form of montage (*PW*, F 4a, 2), and Benjamin seems to apply the term somewhat liberally – if not allegorically – to aesthetic, sociological, and architectural structures. Reading montage as allegorical equally has a precedent in the *Passagen-Werk* and in Benjamin's work on Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre.⁷¹

In his energetic poem 'Kommt uns nicht mit Fertigem' (1962[?]) from the 'Lyrikabend', Volker Braun, for example, seems to pick up on the more prosaic style used for example by the Expressionist poet Ernst Stadler, which in the strictest sense would have equated to formalism. The energetic poem, spread across eighteen prosaic but fragmented lines, adopts an informal tone to defend the desire of an implied group (e.g. the author's generation or, as Biermann suggests, the FDJ brigades working to drain the 'Rhin-Havel-Luch')⁷² to discover and invent their reality themselves, rather than have it spoon-fed in a pre-prepared formula that numbs their thinking capacity and pacifies them:

⁷¹ See for example Benjamin, *PW*, p. 625 (N1, 10) and Chapter Five.

⁷² Wolf Biermann, *Warte nicht auf bessere Zeiten! Die Autobiographie* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2016), pp. 100–101.

Kommt uns nicht mit Fertigem! Wir brauchen Halbfabrikate!
Weg mit dem Rehbraten! Her mit dem Wald und dem Messer!
Hier herrscht das Experiment und keine steife Routine.
Für uns sind die Rezepte noch nicht ausgeschrieben, mein Herr.
Das Leben ist kein Bilderbuch mehr, Mister, und keine peinliche Partitur, Fräulein,
Nix zum Herunterdudeln! Hier wird ab sofort Denken verlangt!⁷³

Whilst the ‘Herr’, ‘Mister’, and ‘Fräulein’ suggest the speaker’s interlocutors as ‘ordinary’ citizens to whom he gives advice, the poem and its imperatives appear to have an institutional audience in mind with the reference to stars that adorned military – or Party – tunics: “Ach, Kollege Neureich, putz dir die Schultersterne – / Unsere Schultern tragen einen Himmel voll davon.” Bereft of a recognisable form or metre, the poem embodies (like Braun’s other poems from the ‘Lyrikabend’) the freedom of expression for which it rhetorically argues, as it formulates a plea to authorities to loosen their rigid grip on a kind of coming of age or accession to adulthood, when the individual’s desire for adventure and self-discovery is most urgent, but seemingly most at risk in the young GDR.⁷⁴ This gesture has much in common with the motives of the Expressionists, whose urgency and solipsism is echoed in the poetic voice here, leading to the rhythm of imperatives addressing an unnamed group of people. More than this, the historically recognisable tone and contemporary and politically charged themes in the poem combine into a montage, projecting not a hypostasised routine but the constant experiment of the socialist state: “Hier ist der Staat für Anfänge – Halbfabrikat auf Lebenszeit!” Since this hope for greater individual determination also contains a desire for

⁷³ Volker Braun, ‘Kommt uns nicht mit Fertigem’, in ‘Veranstaltung “Junge Lyrik – unbekannt und unveröffentlicht” am 11/12/62’, AdK-O 312:1, pp. 31–2. The poem later appeared in *Auswahl 64: Neue Lyrik, neue Namen* (Berlin: Neues Leben, 1964).

⁷⁴ See also Rainer Kirsch’s poem ‘Meinen Freunden, den alten Genossen’ (1962) from the ‘Lyrikabend’.

change from the stagnation and exclusivity perceived by the speaker, that montage also reflects the structure of the ‘Wunschbilder’ – but set in the young GDR.

Reitnauer’s poem ‘Vorsicht, nicht vergessen’, written before 1961, also brings an old form together with a retrospective theme – the horrors of the Second World War:

Vergesse nie, gequältes Volk,
getrieben in den tiefsten Kolk
des Stromes der Geschichte,

die Mörderphysiognomie
von Hitler A. & Kompagnie!

Vergesse nicht und richte!

[...]

Fort aus dem politischen Leben

Mit den braunen Spinnweben

einstiger Parteigenossen.

Deutschland, du hast bessere Kräfte,

junge, frische Lebensäfte;

schöpfe nicht aus faulen Gossen!⁷⁵

Across a total of eighteen regular stanzas, the poem warns of a discursive narrowing in the GDR by comparing it with patterns that emerged in the time of National Socialism. As in ‘Kommt uns nicht mit Fertigem’, the speaker here repeatedly uses imperatives to urge the

⁷⁵ Paul Gerhard Reitnauer, ‘Vorsicht, nicht vergessen’, in *Hundert Private Gefühlsausbrüche*, BStA, AUL, Paul Gerhard Reitnauer, I.

‘gequältes Volk’ to remain ‘wachsam’ against Nazi supporters encroaching into the new state. Despite its historical perspective casting back to the Third Reich, the constant implication of the endangered *Aufbau* present in the poem constitutes its critical utopian element. Freed of the capitalist context in the Benjaminian ‘Wunschbilder’, this utopian vision still finds fault in the recent past but seeks to overcome it in a different manner – a dialectical montage in which the clash of references to Nazism with the jeopardised present becomes genuinely dialectical rather than surreptitiously reactionary. The author’s decision to avoid the poetic tropes of his own present also implies a disregard for the contemporary artistic model, just as the very use of, for example, the sonnet form by Kirsch does not verify some perpetual value in it, but rather takes it as fragment into a constellation in order to remould it allegorically:

[E]ine Bedeutung, einen Sinn auszustrahlen, ist [der Gegenstand] von nun an ganz unfähig; an Bedeutung kommt ihm das zu, was der Allegoriker ihm verleiht. Er legt’s in ihn hinein und langt hinunter: das ist nicht psychologisch sondern ontologisch hier der Sachverhalt.

(*UDT*, p. 373)

That Reitnauer’s original self-published collection of 1961, *Hundert private Gefühlsausbrüche*, was seized from the printers by the Stasi denotes both its unpublished status and the unpublishable quality of, for example, the speaker’s allusion in ‘Vorsicht, nicht vergessen’ to the danger of fascist leadership returning in the GDR present; the fourth stanza reads: “Sei wachsam, wachsam und vergleiche; / es könnte sein, dass sich im Reiche / der Deutschen manches wiederholt!”⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Ibid; Reitnauer, *Mein verbotenes Buch*, p. 8.

But ‘Zerstörung’ (‘der organischen Zusammenhängen in der allegorischen Intention’, *CB*, p. 606) in Baudelaire, for example, does not tell the full story of allegory, which both carries fragments through the process of allegorisation *and* recognises or reforms their constellation, meaning that: “Das von der allegorischen Intention betroffene wird aus den Zusammenhängen des Lebens ausgesondert: es wird zerschlagen *und* konserviert zugleich” (*CB*, p. 602; my italics). By extension, the critical commentary and the utopian affirmation found in these GDR poems are not – or at least not only – bound up with a unilaterally destructive impulse, since the desire to overcome always accompanies it. Another text from the ‘Lyrikabend’, Sarah Kirsch’s ‘Vom Brotbacken’ (n.d.; published in 1964), takes aim at those who ‘eine neue Brotsorte erfinden; / einen Ministersessel erklimmen; / über Nacht berühmt werden’, threatening:

Die Zeit hat ein großes Sieb,
ein großes Sieb.
[...]
sie alle
fallen, fallen
samt ihren Broten
durch das Sieb,
das große Sieb.⁷⁷

The poem ends: “Die Zeit ist unsere Zeit – / lasst uns am Sieb schütteln / und gutes Brot backen.” Whilst the metaphor of bread and the apparent simplicity of baking indicate a tendency to traditionality and even conservatism, the final lines constitute a provocation to

⁷⁷ Sarah Kirsch, ‘Vom Brotbacken’, in ‘Veranstaltung “Junge Lyrik – unbekannt und unveröffentlicht” am 11/12/62’, AdK-O 312:1, pp. 16–17. For this and several other texts analysed in this chapter, dates of composition could neither be derived from manuscripts in archival documents relating to the ‘Lyrikabend’ nor from other holdings of the AdK. The poem was, however, published in Gerhard Wolf’s 1964 volume *Sonnenpferde und Astronauten: Gedichte junger Menschen* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1964).

those enamoured with empty action for private gain, whose attempts at establishing their own legacy will fall into oblivion. ‘Vom Brotbacken’ is highly ambiguous in its themes – not least because of a specious reading that would have Kirsch, as a female author, commit herself to depoliticised matters of the home – but the speaker obscures criticism through this ambiguity. That a political provocation occurs in parallel with a more settled and familiar set of images means that any critique becomes softened and that the poem bears no purely destructive intention, as with Baudelaire: “De[r] destruktiv[e] Impuls Baudelaire[s] ist nirgends an der Abschaffung dessen interessiert, was ihm verfällt” (CB, p. 602). ‘Abschaffung’ in allegory does not entail a destruction or critique without a construction, since every ruptured context and broken fragment becomes a new context and a new montage. Helga Geyer-Ryan similarly writes that: “[T]he allegorical form is not meant to be left dead and empty, as in the [B]aroque; instead it is to be woken up from its reified spell, and propelled into new sensuality.”⁷⁸

‘Vom Brotbacken’ does not become apolitical for its references to baking, nor do its words of warning effect a total critique, but rather these fragments or citations become integrated into a montage that balances these directions and moderates a path into the future. In this sense, the image of baking becomes a kind of productive allegory in itself, as the distinct ingredients are combined every day into a new loaf of ‘gutes Brot’. Reading the poem as allegorical makes it possible to comprehend these ambiguous and even opposing strands as a dialectical structure that cradles what Berendse calls ‘heiße Themen’; addressing controversial topics thus becomes possible without simply replicating *Aufbau* political discourse mimetically or undertaking its destruction.⁷⁹ Kirsch’s poem enacts a destruction of

⁷⁸ Geyer-Ryan, *Fables of Desire*, p. 201.

⁷⁹ Berendse, *Die ‘Sächsische Dichterschule’*, pp. 97–98.

unwanted personalities and behaviours, therefore, but retains a thematic anchor that lessens the blow of the political ‘Wunschbild’, thereby undertaking an ‘Abschaffung’ on the one hand and, on the other, a projection into a GDR future based on equity and modest political action.

Aesthetic Construction/Constructive Aesthetics

When writing on montage and allegory, Benjamin frequently has recourse to material descriptors that explain the physicality of the allegorical fragment and the trace that it leaves behind as new constellation emerges.⁸⁰ Benjamin writes in the ‘Konvolut N’:

Methode dieser Arbeit: literarische Montage. Ich habe nichts zu sagen. Nur zu zeigen.

Ich werde nichts Wertvolles entwenden und mir keine geistvollen Formulierungen aneignen. Aber die Lumpen, den Abfall: die will ich nicht inventarisieren[,] sondern sie auf die einzig mögliche Weise zu ihrem Rechte kommen lassen: sie verwenden.

(*PW*, N1a, 8, p. 627)

In the context of historical materialism, Benjamin notes that: “[Die Montage errichtet] die großen Konstruktionen aus kleinsten, scharf und schneidend konfektionierten Baugliedern.”

I propose reading the presence of fragments (both from the past and the GDR present) not just as objects whose source and trace are presented to the reader, but as the ‘Bauglieder’ that, slotted together into a new construction in each text, physicalise the aesthetic work and render it material ripe for usage. In the following, I suggest that emphasising the physicality of the allegorical fragment can, when translated into the GDR context, explain why this non-symbolic aesthetic practice had a specific resonance in the socialist context.

⁸⁰ Note also from the *UDT* the description of the allegorical object as rebus, hieroglyph etc., as well as the summary: “Äußerlich und stilistisch [...] drängt das Geschriebene zum Bilde. Kein härterer Gegensatz zum Kunstsymbol, dem plastischen Symbol, dem Bilde der organischen Totalität ist denkbar als dies amorphe Bruchstück, als welches das allegorische Schriftbild sich zeigt” – Benjamin, *UDT*, pp. 365–366). See also discussion in Chapter Five on accessing the fragment through terms such as citation.

In the GDR's aesthetic sphere, however, such a materialist approach fell into the category of formalism because its emphasis on formal elements detracts from a symbiosis between form and content. In an infamous article in the newspaper *Tägliche Rundschau*, an author, likely from the SMAD's cultural authority and writing under the pseudonym N. Orlow, noted that:

Die Anhänger dieser Theorie behaupten, die Hauptaufgabe des Bildhauers sei nicht die Schaffung einer künstlerischen Gestalt, sondern die Offenbarung des Steines als Stein, des Holzes als Holz usw., d. h. die Demonstrierung des Materials, aus dem das Bildwerk gemacht ist.⁸¹

The author concludes that this branch of formalism, which they describe with reference to sculpture, destroys any distinguishing content or form of a work and could lead to the 'Liquidierung' and 'Zerstörung' of art altogether.⁸² This early standpoint, which derives from the beginning of the anti-formalism campaign and the simultaneous propagation of socialist realism in the GDR, sets out a position for the creative arts, including the architectonic realm. The SED regarded buildings as part of a wider social vision that Boris Groys compares to Stalin's vision for a socialist society, in which collectively the ideologised elements of culture, society, politics, and more become a 'Gesamtkunstwerk'.⁸³ In the parties' intentions, both in the GDR and in the USSR, this agenda fell under the auspices of socialist realism as a unified and state-wide precedent, obfuscating the possibility of an architecture seen through its individual elements. An aesthetic theory that collates disunified fragments into a de/construction, as in allegory, immediately clashes with this unified and total programme.

Primarily from 1951, architecture became an object of increased Party-political attention through the ideological criterion that buildings should be 'schön im Sinne des

⁸¹ Orlow, 4.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalin: Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship, and Beyond* (London & New York: Verso, 2011).

Volksempfindens'.⁸⁴ Alexander Karrasch explains that this mandated perspective read socialist architecture as necessarily retaining a 'volksnah' character, meaning that it drew from traditional building styles referred to collectively as the 'nationale Bautradition' and thereby reflected the people that it housed.⁸⁵ Just as aesthetics participated in and influenced state direction, socialist architecture – in the definition of GDR architect Hermann Henselmann – concerned more than mere aesthetic or formalistic praxis, but rather these factors co-existed dialectically with the needs and desires of the people who lived in and used buildings.⁸⁶ Curtis Swope summarises this approach: "[B]uildings are not unchanging projections of architectural intent. Rather, they are characterized by mutual interaction with the human beings who make and use them and by their place in the ever-evolving physical, social, and psychic context in which they stand."⁸⁷ The 'Grundsätze der Architektur', formulated within the Party in July 1952, notes the core principle: "Ein Bauwerk wird nur dann zu einem Werk der Architektur, wenn es die Ideen unserer fortschrittlichen Gesellschaftsordnung verkörpert."⁸⁸

By 1956, however, the shift in political tenor that derived from the 'Tauwetter' in the Soviet Union instigated a reorientation of architectural policy, in which the historicism of the GDR's earliest architecture gave way to an industrial style characterised by the 'Neubauten'.⁸⁹ Karrasch links the so-called 'nationale Bautradition' that initially dominated GDR architecture to socialist realism, deeming its brief existence as necessary because: "[S]ie

⁸⁴ Toni Salomon, *Bauen nach Stalin: Architektur und Städtebau der DDR im Prozess der Entstalinisierung 1954–1960* (Berlin: Schiller, 2016), pp. 11, 105; Werner Durth, Jörn Düwel & Niels Gutschow, *Aufbau: Städte, Themen, Dokumente, Architektur und Städtebau der DDR* (Frankfurt am Main & New York: Campus, 1998), II; Alexander Karrasch, *Die 'nationale Bautradition' denken: Architektur und sozialistischer Realismus in der DDR der fünfziger Jahre* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 2015), p. 12.

⁸⁵ Karrasch, p. 46.

⁸⁶ Curtis Swope, *Building Socialism: Architecture and Urbanism in East German Literature, 1955–1973* (New York, London et al: Bloomsbury, 2018), p. 3.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁸⁸ [n.a.], 'Grundsätze der Architektur', 3 July 1952, BArch SAPMO ZPA IV 2/906/181; Durth, Düwel & Gutschow (eds.), II, p. 114.

⁸⁹ Karrasch, p. 181.

bemühte] die progressiven Kräfte älterer Traditionen, um eine neue Architektur zu antizipieren.”⁹⁰ The incorporation of historical stylistic elements served to further the development of progressive, socialist architecture – a gesture akin to that of the ‘Wunschbilder’. The state’s desperate grip on the ‘Erbe’ accordingly meant that the ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ of socialist realism relied on the precedent set by artistic movements from the pre-socialist system in the belief that this would advance the cause of the *Aufbau* movement. However, this logic failed to achieve a future focus because of the reliance on a political system that was already ideologically obsolete in the GDR – like the Baudelairean ‘Wunschbilder’ above. The stylistic departure in 1956 brought an end to this praxis, but it did not disrupt the central position of socialist realism in GDR architecture.

A further crossover between material and literature exists in Curtis Swope’s study *Building Socialism*, which describes space or architecture as a literary site in the GDR. The author explores the fictional thematisation of building and buildings as a litmus test for authors’ conceptions of and attitude to the state, as in Christa Wolf’s 1968 novel *Nachdenken über Christa T.* Swope notes that the protagonist’s idealism vis-à-vis her house, which she designs with her husband, represents a utopianism towards space that allows her some mental and geographical escape from the daily routine and, perhaps, from the ideology of collectivity and solidarity.⁹¹ The intersection of literature and construction in the GDR also has a considerable precedent in the so-called ‘Aufbauromane’, such as Maria Langner’s *Stabl* (1952), which documented the (re)construction as ‘Reportage’.⁹² Whilst this approach merits further analysis specifically within the *Aufbau* context, I am interested not in how literature

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 138.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 157.

⁹² Sylvia Fischer, *Dass Hämmer und Herzen synchron erschallen: Erkundungen zu Heimat in Literatur und Film der DDR der 50er und 60er Jahre* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2015), pp. 44–45. Hans Marchwitza’s *Robeisen*, which I analyse in Chapter Three, similarly deals with the parallel ideological and physical building enacted and experienced by construction workers at the *Eisenbüttelkombinat Ost*.

created spaces, but how it was employed by writers for a kind of metaphorical building that sought to assist the *Aufbau* itself. This materialisation of aesthetics chimes with an analysis of the literary work as material – via the fragment – since it regards the work as belonging to the world of things (what Benjamin calls the ‘Dingwelt’) as much as construction material. This kind of metaphysical building can only work with an allegorical aesthetic model because allegory confronts its insufficiency to represent and to signify head-on, uncovering its own fragmented structure in order to offer it up for (re)construction by the audience, whereas its symbolic counterpart mimetically echoes reality in a falsified manner.

Wolf Biermann, whose songs first reached a large audience at the ‘Lyrikabend’ in 1962, provides a useful example in his ‘Kinderlieder’ (n.d.), which he performed himself whilst playing the guitar. The poet and musician received the greatest applause of all authors from the audience at the AdK, launching his career as a popular figure, but the same cannot be said of his relationship with the Party, which plagued his work in the GDR for the next fourteen years until the withdrawal of his citizenship (‘Ausbürgerung’) by the GDR authorities in 1976. Among other parts of the ‘Kinderlieder’ cycle, Biermann performed ‘Der Hausarzt’:

Unser Hausarzt hat eine Praxis hier im ersten Stock im Haus,
 die berühmt ist in der Gegend. Er kuriert die Leute aus.
 Er macht manche lange Schicht, Freizeit kennt er fast nicht.
 Aber doch, aber doch, säuft er abends wie ein Loch.
 Doch der Schnaps kann ihm nicht schaden, denn er lebt sonst sehr gesund.
 Jeden Morgen geht er baden. So kommt er nicht auf den Hund.
 Und obwohl er viel Geld hat, fährt er immer mit dem Rad,
 damit er, damit er immer wieder nüchtern werd'.
 Unser Hausarzt ist für den Frieden, für den Sozialismus auch,
 und er geht nicht nach dem Westen, wie's bei vielen Ärzten Brauch.⁹³

The work adheres to some extent to the 'Volksliedstrophe' template if one reads each couplet as four lines in a standard stanza, supported by the ABCB rhyme, 'Der Hausarzt' might instead be read with an AABCDD rhyme pattern. Reminiscent of the centuries-old 'Volksliedstrophe' but at the same time conscious of its association with the 'neue Zeit', the 'Kinderlieder' offer a structural clash from the outset. The refrain 'Das sind die guten Sozialisten, gut für eine neue Zeit', which occurs in the other songs of the cycle, lends the song a rhythm, though, and anchors it to the GDR present and the people that populate it, whom the speaker casts in a somewhat banal light. The predictable rhyme, regular structure, and comedically bland themes ('Wenn mal Butter knapp ist, dann führt sie sauber ihre Listen, / damit dann auch jedermann seine Butter kriegen kann' – 'Die Verkäuferin', p. 53)

⁹³ Wolf Biermann, 'Drei Kinderlieder: Wir loben die guten Sozialisten. Der Hausarzt', in 'Veranstaltung "Junge Lyrik – unbekannt und unveröffentlicht" am 11/12/62', AdK-O 312:1, 52–4 (p. 53); audio recording of the 'Lyrikabend', AdK AVM-31, 1617. Note that 'also' in line eight is missing from the text as provided in the protocol of the 'Lyrikabend' in the AdK's archive, but Biermann inserts it in performances elsewhere to retain the metre. Interestingly, the protocol notes this as one of 'drei Kinderlieder' performed by Biermann at the event, although the cycle otherwise contains at least four songs: 'Die Verkäuferin', 'Der Hausarzt', 'Der Verkehrspolizist', and 'Der Funktionär'. Material from the 'Lyrikabend' shows that he did not perform the last of these songs, although Biermann himself claims to have performed it – Wolf Biermann, *Wie man Verse macht und Lieder: Eine Poetik in acht Gängen* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer, 1997), p. 33.

exacerbate this sense of banality by hinting at the kind of ‘Ankunft’ heralded by Brigitte Reimann, which in socialist realist terms embodies a newfound ‘Volkstümlichkeit’.

First impressions deceive, however, as the characters deviate from the rules in a show of undogmatic flexibility that allows them to accommodate the hiccups of daily life with a satirical gesture: “Ist die Straße frei bei rot, geh‘ ich rüber, und er [der Verkehrspolizist] droht mit dem Finger nur stark, / schröpft mich nicht um eine Mark” (‘Der Verkehrspolizist’, p. 54).⁹⁴ These lines normalise daily life in the GDR, characterising it as imperfect but nonetheless socialist and ‘good’; the ‘Hausarzt’ ‘säuft [...] abends wie ein Loch’, for example, and is anything but the perfect socialist, but the speaker identifies him as a socialist regardless and tolerates his flaws, as if a strict adherence to the rules, whilst principally correct, does not and need not occur in GDR society. Not only does the normative Party role model empirically not exist, as per the ‘Kinderlieder’, but depicting reality in a realistic manner makes the *Aufbau* an achievable – instead of perpetually future and idealistic – ambition. Although Biermann’s title for the cycle suggests children to be the target audience, the songs actually offer a provocative challenge for adults to shift their perspective in favour of a substantial ideological reimagining of the state, shifting attention toward the lenient and valued cashier at the community’s *Konsum* and away from hyperbolic Party figures.

Contrasting predictability with a recognisable but officially unwanted portrayal of dysfunctionality in the GDR constitutes a subtly concealed montage in the ‘Kinderlieder’, which first appeared in print in 1991.⁹⁵ The dialectical clash of old structural and new

⁹⁴ For a discussion on the role of satire in the GDR see comments relating to Heinar Kipphardt’s ‘satirisches Lustspiel’ *Shakespeare dringend gesucht* in Chapter Five and Alfred Dorfer, ‘Satire in der DDR – ein Widerspruch?’, *Zeitschrift für Literatur- und Theatersoziologie*, 5:7 (2012), 40–62.

⁹⁵ Ng, p. 189.

thematic elements in the songs appears to fall within the ‘volkstümlich’ tradition in socialist realism, but the deviations both from the ‘Volkslied’ pattern (i.e. five-line verses, ellipsed stresses, occasional shorter lines) and the political expectations of authors’ depictions of the *Aufbau* reality reveal something more nuanced. The montage of temporal fragments in turn helps the reader to recognise the allegory at work in the cycle, since the collision of elements both retains a folksy and profane character close to the everyday and offers a new construction, in which the author speculates that good socialist citizens are imperfect, perhaps overly lenient, not scrupulously partisan, but still role models: “Kommt zu ihm ein Funktionär, diskutiert er mit ihm sehr. / Ihm missfällt dies und das, / diskutieren macht ihm Spaß” (‘Der Hausarzt’, p. 53). Biermann’s typecast characters speak to the divide between the SED’s programmatic and these authors’ more realistic vision for the *Aufbau*, as these poems disrupt the perceived contradiction between healthy criticism of Party activity and the identification of ‘die guten Sozialisten’. As such, the clash of this material with a reader (or listener) in the author’s immediate present provides the basis for these ‘Bauglieder’ to be used as a utopian impetus for the growing state. The ambiguity and fragmentation of allegorical art incites and invites the reader to collate the individual components of a work into a new form – a late-*Aufbau* reality in which idealism and symbolism are replaced with an authentic realism. The songs, therefore, interrupt and disrupt the normalisation of a flawed recent past or present by addressing and replacing the restrictive definition of a ‘good socialist’ but at the same time conserving some fragments by integrating them dialectically into a new constellation – thus avoiding the failed status of the ‘Wunschbilder’ and the dissatisfying affirmation of an insufficient status quo.

Similarly, Bräuning’s provocative unpublished poem ‘17. Juni 1953’ (written in 1953) alludes to the workers’ uprising only by its title, although the effects of the GDR’s first widespread

unrest ripple throughout the poem. These even take the speaker in their wake, as the run-on sentence – or complete lack of punctuation until the final full stop – is interrupted only by line breaks:

Wenn auch die Stadt schläft
es ist nicht mehr Nacht
Die Uhr lügt
und es lügen die Schatten im Zimmer
[...]
Denn der Irrtum hört auf
nur ein Irrtum zu sein
wo das Verbrechen
sich keinen Mantel mehr umhängt
wo das Unmenschliche
sich seiner Nacktheit noch brüstet.⁹⁶

Though the speaker's scepticism around the deceitful silence and the practice of concealing the truth generate fierce, conspicuous criticism, the lexicon of darkness and obscurity surrender to 'ein tagheller Himmel' at the end. Here, Bräuning's speaker emits a sigh of relief at the revelation of truth that the poem performs by naming the mistakes and errors and hoping to correct them. That said, a certain idealism marks this gesture given that the official response to the uprising consisted in a Party-initiated taboo of the events and a half-baked attempt to solve some of the workers' concerns, such that the poem casts ahead to a resolution that occurs only by allusion. A symbolic reading of '17. Juni 1953' might connote the transcendent accession to an alternative *Aufbau* reality unperturbed by the machinations

⁹⁶ Herbert Bräuning, '17. Juni 1953', *Zwischen Tag und Traum*, p. 82.

of an authoritarian SED, as if the poem itself can abrogate perceived issues in the GDR, but I understand the hint of idealism as a metaphysical construction of a more discursively liberal society able to confront its demons.

Rainer Kirsch's sonnet-like 'Meinen Freunden, den alten Genossen' confronts functionaries directly in a monologue, ending with a kind of manifesto in which 'we' (perhaps that generational body again) must 'die ganze Last der Wahrheit kennen. / Und die Träume ganz beim Namen nennen'. Critics rejected the 'Subjektivierung richtiger Fragestellungen' and warned of the 'Gefahr einer falschen Verallgemeinerung', but neither Kirsch's nor Bräuning's speakers confront the Party aggressively or even undertake a detached, transcendental projection for projection's sake, but rather issue a dialogical and constructive explanation of problems alongside a call for cooperation.⁹⁷ That the poem appeared in 1963 in *Sonntag*, a cultural newspaper edited at the time by harsh critic of the 'Lyrikabend' Bernd von Kügelgen, evidences the considerable shift required in Party perspective following the 1962 event, as literature that a number of months earlier had, among other things, cost Hermlin his position in the AdK soon could be published in the newspaper of the *Kulturbund*.⁹⁸ Both Kirsch and Bräuning integrate the Party into their poems and their montages, such that in the two examples here the SED remains anchored to their illustrations of the GDR present, but only fragments of it are retained in the future. Far from dissident or destructive, therefore, the two texts explicitly rely upon the Party to construct a socialist future – and insist on the participation of other, even imperfect, individuals as well.

⁹⁷ Schlenstedt, Schiller, Löser, et al, p. 71.

⁹⁸ Note, moreover, the pressure on the *Kulturbund* to shift from a democratic and cross-party identity conceived by Johannes R. Becher to one of many SED organs, a transformation that by this time had progressed considerably – see Heider, *Politik-Kultur-Kulturbund*.

Taking the metaphor of the *Aufbau* (as ‘Aufbau’, lit. construction) as a cue, I propose utilising the physicality of the fragment to read an aesthetic contribution to the movement based upon material, with the allegorical fragment forming the building blocks – echoed by the (re)construction across the state – that forged GDR socialism from the ruins. As the poems in the corpus demonstrate, this contribution did not always or immediately cohere with official state- and Party-led ambitions, but intellectuals had the platform to problematise aesthetic and political practices that did not serve the *Aufbau*. United by the objective of establishing socialism in the state, the poets here questioned the realm of Party-affirming art and posited works that digest errors in order to constellate a more successful future in its place, which I read as an allegorised version of the Benjaminian ‘Wunschbilder’. Benjamin’s *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* prefigures such a materialist reading of allegorical literature:

Weil aus den Trümmern großer Bauten die Idee von ihrem Bauplan eindrucksvoller spricht als aus geringen noch so wohl erhaltenen, hat das deutsche Trauerspiel des Barock den Anspruch auf Deutung. Im Geiste der Allegorie ist es als Trümmer, als Bruchstück konzipiert von Anfang an.

(*UDT*, p. 423)

The visual cue of the *Aufbau* thus invited intellectuals to contribute their own material by reclaiming fragments and reconfiguring them into foundations that might have supported the weight of the socialist project.

Volker Braun charts the need for some autonomy in intellectual endeavour to accede to the perspective outlined in the Introduction, in which I talk of a precarious dialectic between autonomy and affiliation. ‘Jazz’ (1962), which Braun submitted to Hermlin but which did not feature amongst the works performed during the ‘Lyrikabend’, is in essence not a poem about jazz – despite its references to saxophones, drums, and banjos – but about individual

creativity. Alluding to the instruments of a jazz band as having attained autonomy from the 'Knechtschaft des Orchesters' and 'Fessel Partitur', the speaker dictates:

Jeder spielt sein Bestes aus zum gemeinsamen Thema.

Das ist die Musik der Zukunft: jeder ist ein Schöpfer!

Du hast ein Recht, du zu sein, und ich bin ich,

Und mit keinem verbünden wir uns, der nicht er selber ist,

Unverwechselbar er im Hass, im Lieben, im Kampf.⁹⁹

From the 'Trümmer' of war-torn ruins and the stunted start to GDR socialism, the poem collates fragments and counterbalance them with the hope for the 'Musik der Zukunft'.¹⁰⁰ Intervening in *Aufbau* discourse aesthetically grants Braun the capacity for what I see as an allegorical – that is, non-transcendental, rather profane, structurally disharmonious, immanent – image, which in its clash with the reader and their reality results in the productive moment of 'Jetztzeit' that sets a precedent for what Ursula Heukenkamp describes as a 'Versöhnung zwischen dem Anspruch jedes einzelnen und einer Gemeinschaft, in der alle gleichwertig sind'.¹⁰¹ 'Jazz' allows the spontaneity of blues notes and improvisation to clash with the rigidity of SED structures to awaken the reader to the necessity for change, using the individual components of the literary work as material with which to construct a state.

Conclusion

As works of literature that remained unpublished in the immediate moment of their conception, the poems in this corpus found no tangible audience in that moment, thus their reach or efficacy cannot easily be quantified. Yet the texts demonstrate both aesthetic and

⁹⁹ Volker Braun, 'Jazz', in 'Veranstaltung "Junge Lyrik – unbekannt und unveröffentlicht" am 11/12/62', AdK-O 312:2, p. 107.

¹⁰⁰ The phrase 'Musik der Zukunft' itself intends to provoke in light of the uncertain and controversial status of jazz as a musical genre in the GDR – Hartung, p. 102.

¹⁰¹ Ursula Heukenkamp, 'Zwischen Heimatsinn und kaltem Blick. Lyrik der DDR in den 60er Jahren', *Der Deutschunterricht*, 5 (1996), 5–18 (p. 9).

political innovation in grappling with the reality of the burgeoning socialist state and the complexities entailed in radical systemic transition. The AUL corpus contains works whose authors could not seek publication or whose efforts were in vain, whilst the poems from the 'Lyrikabend' subsequently appeared in print thanks to a shift in cultural policy that contributed to the flourishing of new poetry in the *Aufbau*.¹⁰² To some extent the belated publication of some texts and, moreover, of Jentzsch's redacted *Alphabet des Morgens* signifies a degree of tolerance if not a change in stance, thus many of those authors who ultimately did find a publisher for their work, such as Sarah Kirsch and Volker Braun, later wielded much influence over GDR aesthetics and politics, albeit with considerable and constant challenges and interventions from authorities.

Unsubmitted, self-censored, or banned literature, which makes up the corpus of this chapter, more broadly represents a body of literature from the GDR that broke with political and, in some cases, aesthetic norms and expectations. Censored literature is distinct from the other, merely unpublished, works, but collectively the texts in this corpus exemplify an approach to writing poetry in socialism that, for all its criticality, aesthetic experimentation, and at times political obscurity, failed to cohere with official expectations. Identifying a common montage-based structure in these works and calling it allegorical helps to understand how these poems project an *Aufbau* apart from the SED's idealistic vision of a symbolic aesthetic model motivated by a kind of preservation fantasy. That none of these poems met an audience in the moment for which they were composed represents a crucial loss of potential and of fertile material for the development of the SED's political programme.

¹⁰² For the controversies in *Sinn und Form* and its relationship to the SED via the AdK, see Stephen Parker & Matthew Philpotts, *Sinn und Form: The Anatomy of a Literary Journal* (Berlin & New York: De Gruyter, 2009). For a list of the poems that were subsequently published, see Ng, pp. 185–190.

By exploring the intersection of this corpus with architecture and an allegorical analysis, I have understood these texts as material, thus arguing that they utilised the aesthetic platform for a kind of metaphysical building to parallel, influence, and expand the physical (re)construction ongoing in the newly founded state. The poems incorporate a problematised aspect of the past and combine it with a depiction of the present and an expectation of an improved future, and externally with an audience required to act. Read as ‘Wunschbilder’ in a socialist context, the texts adopted a utopian lens in the *Aufbau* present that allowed them to tolerate criticism and negativity because of their broader optimism toward the GDR’s path to socialism, which they achieve through constellative and integrative techniques, such as montage. Drawing from Walter Benjamin’s theory of allegory, I explore how the material conceived for the *Aufbau* audience constituted potential building blocks for the road ahead; that these building blocks remained unused in the early GDR evidences the political preference for an affirming rather than questioning aesthetics, despite the authors’ committed efforts to participate in an *Aufbau* that profited from diversity and commonality rather than artifice and exclusion.

This analysis has at least evidenced the singularity of the socialist system *a priori* as a home for a constructive aesthetics that participated in cultural policymaking through a dialectical and allegorical relation to the past, future, and present. For its spectral ambiguity and avoidance of intervention and responsibility, the censorship apparatus in the *Aufbau* wielded considerable influence over what and who enjoyed publication. None of the authors in question – even Bernd Jentzsch – succeeded in publishing all of their work in the GDR, meaning that the analysis thereof derives from texts that lacked the audience and reception desired because they remained hidden from the public eye or only premiered to a limited audience. At the same time, the system of review (‘Begutachtung’) remained lacunary and

evasive, whilst hindrances to publication were far more diverse than Party-sponsored censorship itself. The impeded route to the publication of these poems notwithstanding, their productivity remains undiminished, since the hoops through which GDR intellectuals had to jump became part and parcel of the autonomy-affiliation dialectic and, in many ways, motivated authors to innovate. The failure to publish these works for their intended contemporary audience fundamentally limited their discursive weight, verifying the boundaries of participation when authors insisted on their autonomy; yet these texts do not attack the existence of the state, but rather comment on the progress and direction of an *Aufbau* that they support.

Instead of reading the corpus as destructive or even ‘staatsfeindlich’, I suggest that an allegorical lens identifies in all of the poems a comprehensively applied fragmentation of structure and of political message, as the two are broken down into disparate elements and thereby lose coherence. The materialist interpretation offered in this chapter theorises this experimental approach not just as a non-symbolic gesture, but as more productive because of its dependence on a kind of receptive participation – on an audience that collates the fragments and derives something new from them. Whilst David Bathrick and others have established the importance of controversial figures – in some cases dissidents – for the GDR socialist project, this chapter paves a clear path toward appreciating *how* such figures achieved an engaged and participative stance on the *Aufbau* in their work.¹⁰³ The authors’ deviation from aesthetic and political norms figures as a form of metaphysical construction that served to steer the socialist project towards more open, dynamic, and polysemic modes of expression in conversation with the readership. The politico-cultural sphere in the GDR,

¹⁰³ Bathrick, p. 11.

however, had little place for this subversive praxis. As intimated by the growing scepticism on the part of intellectuals who stayed in the GDR, such as Braun, and the emigration or exile to the West – for example by Biermann, Jentzsch, and Sarah Kirsch – the dialectic of autonomy and affiliation always had its tipping point, at which point access to audiences and, more broadly, to the system of authority in the state could be rescinded. The productivity of this corpus notwithstanding, the SED's overreach cut short the potential of all of these works.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION: WRITING A NEW SOCIETY

The *Aufbau* period in the GDR ended sixty years ago, but its diminished presence in memories of the GDR, compared to the familiarity of subversive figures and events from the 1980s or images of reunification and the state's demise, does not do justice to the period. From 1949, the SED undertook radical and substantial reforms in a country riddled with infrastructural catastrophe, material suffering, and deep political wounds, which inspired years of profound political innovation and diverse cultural production. Numerous examples of literary works of different genres, forms, and theoretical frameworks have provided a broad overview in this study of the GDR's artistic sphere, stretching from the archetypal socialist realist novel to examples of a praxis that challenged norms of cultural production. This dynamic of increasing experimentation and political transparency structures the study and demonstrates that a diversity of practices and, indeed, of voices existed in this early period of the GDR's history. More than a decade ruled by Soviet-inspired cultural production that lacked innovation, political diversity, or aesthetic merit, the *Aufbau* years therefore invoked a body of literature whose most significant texts, some of which appear in this study, tell a very different story.

In the period, Party-guided intervention derived from initial processes developed by the SMAD that guided authors in their work and limited their expansion on the parameters of political acceptability. As the increasing distance from political and, indeed, aesthetic norms across this study indicates, however, it remained possible to adhere to conventions and expectations in part whilst experimenting in other respects. Artists working within and without those norms produced a considerable diversity of aesthetic and political approaches

to the GDR's early cultural production and its role in the socialist state, rendering a black and white understanding of cultural politics in the period problematic. In Chapter Four, for example, the authors demonstrate a certain fidelity to the Party-led, optimistic depiction of the state expected in socialist realism, yet their historical emphases and divergence from the typecast *Held der Arbeit* illustrate the possibility of combining more than one approach. Given that even texts identified as socialist realist – as in Chapter Two – failed to fulfil the criteria set out for the method, I uncover a spectrum of conformity and more autonomous creative output and thereby avoid designating all works as socialist realist or other. Indeed, more divergent politico-aesthetic approaches still entailed the partial application, mimicry, and ambiguous circumvention of norms, which blurs the contours of socialist realist characteristics.

As a means of exploring how such a non-conformist praxis functioned and to what extent it offered writers the opportunity to engage with the public, I have applied an allegorical structure derived from Walter Benjamin's theory, with which I measure the extent of authors' experimentation with political and, in some examples, aesthetic standards. Frequently, the means to define Benjaminian allegory consists in an exploration of its antithesis – the symbol – which I detect in socialist realist theory and which lays claim to both a defunct aesthetic totality and a capacity for signification. Allegory, by contrast, helps to identify artworks structured by fragments and collated into a montage that lacks the unity and coherence needed to produce a whole image. Insofar as each fragment retains some identity from that to which it, as a whole, previously belonged, its appearance in allegory relies upon integration into a new, collective body, which grants a new perspective. In this sense, allegorical works traverse the wall of illusion perceived as symptomatic of (symbolic) art and render aesthetics an open, if not incomplete, sphere that is semi-permeable to reality.

Necessarily dependent upon a public to receive it, allegory therefore wields considerable potential when exposed to a live audience, hence its heightened potency for the stage. More than an alternative to metaphor, Benjamin's allegory posits a path to some kind of presentation ('Darstellung') within an aesthetics devoid of signification, such that it becomes a framework for reaching and interacting with an engaged audience. The reception of fragments by a reader or spectator entails a clash, in which the structure of the artwork is renegotiated and reformed, yielding a new image and, perhaps, retrieving some glimpse of reserved meaning from within. For this reason, aesthetics is reconceived in Benjaminian allegory as an immanent – not transcendental – sphere that does not interrupt or escape reality, but rather – in a highly politicised society, for example – has the potential to influence the public.

However, as in Benjamin's initial object of analysis – the *Trauerspiel* – many examples in this study are flawed allegories. Either engulfed by the dominant artistic method of socialist realism, which I identify in Chapter Three with the symbol, or sullied by the overreach of cultural authorities, this corpus does not show the full potential of an allegorical aesthetics. Indeed, numerous texts exhibit a blend of symbolic elements alongside an allegorical direction. A goal of this study is not to measure the fulfilment of a fully allegorical benchmark, however, rather to explore the significance of both aesthetic categories in a range of literary works within the foldings of GDR cultural discourse. In this sense, I draw from what Benjamin called a 'Brechtian maxim': to recognise the potential not in the comfortable retreat of 'das gute Alte' but in 'das schlechte Neue'.¹ That the plays in Chapter Five, for instance, still engender a symbolic praxis does not negate an allegorical reading, especially as

¹ Benjamin, *Selbstzeugnisse*, chapter five.

several of the symbolic techniques result from intervention by authorities. Arguably, these changes had to be implemented so as to guarantee the survival of other experimental aspects, which I identify as allegorical and, therefore, as politically significant.

At the same time, I read *Aufbau* literature within the system for which it was written – rather than apply liberal democratic criteria – to yield an analysis beyond the generalised hermeneutic rejection of these works as opaquely political, revealing instead the characteristic ambiguity that allowed authors to copy, even mimic, Party discourse, whilst appearing critical and perhaps subversive. I have, therefore, attempted to avoid the reification of socio-political events (the June 1953 uprising, for example) and politico-cultural proclamations (that of socialist realism or, later, of the *Bitterfelder Weg*), as such an approach would give a misleading image of artists' dynamism and independence (or *Eigen-Sinn*). Whilst such historical landmarks were significant moments, even watersheds, in their own right, any attempt to apply them as standards for artistic creation would render political discourse in the GDR absolute and omnipotent. Similarly, given that socialist realism lacked a stable application and/or identity, its function as a concrete benchmark for aesthetic production in the *Aufbau* period and beyond would reify and fetishise a profoundly ambiguous and malleable method based on a collection of theoretical and impracticable criteria. I favour Benjamin's allegory and symbol for this reason.

***Aufbau* in GDR Literature – Research Findings and Contributions**

The research questions posed at the very beginning of this study laid the foundation for an interrogation of broad politico-aesthetic directions in the GDR's *Aufbau* period, for the possible contributions made by divergent literary works, and for a methodology that would explore how such contributions functioned. Specifically, I asked: whether evidence for

systemic – and therefore non-anomalous – attempts on the part of intellectuals to look beyond socialist realism toward a more productive, tolerant, and polysemic aesthetic discourse could be found in *Aufbau* literature; to what extent authorities criticised this practice for its purported destructive tendency and thereby disregarded the authors' pro-socialist orientation; how the non-conformist elements of this corpus actually present a constructive contribution to the *Aufbau* movement; how censorship or similar processes of revision impacted the texts and their potential for influencing political discourse; and whether Walter Benjamin's theory of allegory offers a viable tool for understanding the means by which works that contradicted elements of a monosemic system expanded upon it positively.

The disregard or critique aimed by functionaries, critics, and academics in the GDR at many of the works in this study illustrates how widespread the theoretical preference was for a state aesthetics that underpinned core political principles, as divergent works typically encountered a higher degree of suppression according to their greater distance from such criteria. This reality confirms the thesis that the praxis of 'Begutachtung' or, indeed, censorship criticised and even impeded critical voices, thereby narrowing cultural discourse and its development. Nonetheless, Chapter Three illustrates how socialist realist works themselves were not free from contradiction or criticism, nor does any absolute rule apply for the texts from subsequent chapters that would help to predict reliably whether state intervention would occur and in what form, which was complicated by the lack of archival material about individual cases. Authorities, therefore, consisting both of Party functionaries and of individuals in related organs, organisations, and other outlets (such as newspapers or literary magazines), criticised practices that deviated from the norms in place from the early

1950s by bemoaning formalistic elements in artworks, for example, or by problematising their political content as deviant, destructive, and even anti-socialist.

In order to ascertain how authors undertook to retain the political character of their work, I have applied a methodological framework based on Benjamin's theory of allegory. Evidence from several works suggests that even isolated similarities to Benjaminian allegory suffice to have an impact; indeed, the corpora in this study elicit a tendency towards combining symbolic and allegorical elements. Techniques identified as symbolic, which are most prevalent in the novels analysed in Chapter Two, tend to conform to critical expectations from the period, especially from the socialist realist method. A blended approach, which combines conforming (symbolic) and disruptive (allegorical) features, dominates and likely emerged as authors sought to uphold a degree of conformity so as to guarantee themselves a degree of standing in the cultural sphere alongside their intellectual autonomy. Because of a tendency towards structural disintegration and fragmentation rather than internal unity, these blended works typically promote a more disharmonious and fractured political consciousness, even if they still depict a broadly optimistic picture of the GDR present. Nevertheless, examples from Chapters Four and Five show how even individual allegorical elements wield considerable potentiality with regard to audience interaction. Particularly in an aesthetic sphere dominated by a symbolic method, the presence of fragments and disunity in a work encourages a greater interrogation of the text and its components by the audience, resulting in a participatory aesthetics.

The analysis particularly across Chapters Four and Five highlights the applicability of Benjaminian allegory in order to explain how non-conformist elements present a constructive contribution to the *Aufbau* movement in the clash of 'Jetztzeit' between (live)

audience and work. The collation of fragments in an allegorical image cannot yield a coherent image or meaning, however, as Benjamin delineates the dereliction of linguistic signification after the Fall and expands its relevance to other realms. Nonetheless, the resultant new constellation is more than the sum of its individual components, thus it at least yields some newness, if not meaning. Samuel Weber crucially recognises that allegory depends on its own reception because ‘the being of what it represents can be determined only by virtue of its being placed before (vorgestellt) someone else’.² Whilst a symbolist aesthetics consists in direct representation in the sense of a mimetic recreation of an actual image, hence its claim to a hermetic totality that perfectly mirrors reality, allegory gathers its effects and presents them for examination.³ Insofar as *Aufbau* authors utilised techniques such as a relational present, open-ended critiques, unfinished plots and structures, and a dialectical temporality, their aesthetic praxis functions as a performative invitation to the audience.⁴ This reading, moreover, rules out the authors’ apoliticism or their disregard for the GDR present, as discussed with regard to the corpus of Chapter Six, as the initial subversive and destructive effort inherent to Benjamin’s allegory necessarily precedes the unlocking of reserved meaning in the presentation of a new perspective.

Textual analysis, theoretical commentary, and other references from critical reception, however, have aided in constructing an understanding of the literary works in this study according to their universal support for the *Aufbau* project. Despite accusations raised against the plays of ‘didactic theatre’ or the supposedly ‘gelenkte Atmosphäre’ of the ‘Lyrikabend’, each author discussed in this study supported the *Aufbau*, at least at the time, and sought to

² Weber, pp. 154–155.

³ For further discussion see both Chapter Five and Machosky, p. 25: “Allegory [points] to itself as allegory, as able to be art but also uniquely able to present art (without representing it).”

⁴ For a characterisation of allegory as theatrical, see both Weber and Chapter Five.

express that in their literary œuvre.⁵ The cradle of an audience-orientated method redefined negativity as a tool for provoking in order to improve instead of relying on cultural production to affirm and celebrate an unrealised future. Rather than replace critical aspects in their political content with an idealistically optimistic portrayal of reality, the authors combine their harshest impressions with a determinedly pro-socialist outlook that should have dissuaded critics from lamenting their alleged hostility to socialism. In undertaking an allegorical reading, I have dissected the complicated relationship between intellectuals and the SED's policies in order to uncover an important but overlooked aesthetic movement from the early years of the GDR's history.

In summary, this study looks beyond a limited corpus of socialist realist literature to demonstrate how the state's early literary sphere was characterised by polysemism as much as by ideology. This more nuanced understanding should replace the continued trope of casting genres such as the 'Aufbauroman', 'Betriebsroman', 'Industrieroman', 'Produktionsroman' etc. as characteristic of all cultural production in the early GDR. The broad range of genres and approaches sampled in this study also demonstrates that the proximity to those supposedly archetypal examples from the socialist realist canon varied and that authors conceived of innovative and non-standard ways to interact with the *Aufbau* in their work. Not only should this analysis result in a broader conceptualisation of the state's early literature as more diverse than thus far supposed; the dominance of socialist realism in descriptions of cultural production of the period should also be moderated. As numerous examples in this study have shown, artists themselves did not consistently adhere to the model in its theoretical form, not least because it lacked absolute criteria and an absolute

⁵ Ng, p. 11.

application on account of ambiguities in its theory – which I regard as symbolic – and of a necessarily greater tolerance in artistic practice as a result. The method does represent a complete theory in its own right; however, the ultimate flexibility in its application both allowed and forced artists to experiment in order to satisfy basic expectations from authorities and to practise their own creative autonomy.

Across varying degrees of divergence from politico-aesthetic norms, the objects of study here illustrate the ambiguity that characterises both cultural production and Party-led processes of review and analysis. The much-discussed censorship apparatus, which authorities derived for the GDR from initial processes in the SBZ, exemplifies the SED's frequent authoritarian overreach – but also the ambiguity and contradiction in this praxis. That authors were subjected to an often opaque and dynamic negotiation, one frequently initiated by the author themselves in a form of self-censorship, should not act as a surrogate for an analysis of the negotiation between artists and publishers, publishers and authorities, and artists and authorities, nor for an awareness of the ways in which certain expectations could be met to gain concessions in other areas. That several texts in this study, such as the plays in Chapter Five, were met with criticism from Party representatives and affiliated critics even after a process of reflection and rewriting underscores the need to look beyond the system of review ('Begutachtung') as a one-way street and of socialist realism as an absolute in these early years, as the appearance of such works on a public stage implies that certain conditions had, at that point, been met. This ambiguity worked in each of these ways, as the rejection or suppression of other texts by authorities did not immediately mean a violation of such criteria. The poems in Chapter Six, for example, univocally support the *Aufbau des Sozialismus* even if they embody a constructively critical approach to it. Any evaluation of

cultural production in the state exclusively according to Party discourse thus inevitably misrepresents and underestimates the reality.

The examples in this study also demonstrate the obligations and freedoms enjoyed by intellectuals, whose material and discursive privileging occupied authorities from the beginnings of the *Aufbau*. A correlation existed between an increasingly autonomous mode of creation that deviated from Party expectations and decreased access to an audience, personal success, and an impact on political discourse. In the Introduction, I describe this dynamic as an ‘authority trap’ on account of intellectuals’ obligation to the system of authority if they desired a certain standing; though their behaviour need not have been entirely consistent, a benchmark of participation in authority still applied, consisting of a mutually designed system of values that both benefited and limited figures such as intellectuals, who at once maintained the system and were influenced by it. This reading comes with two caveats, however; firstly, the SED’s authoritarianism ultimately controlled and guaranteed the GDR’s system of authority, such that intellectuals, paradoxically, had to participate and in order to gain autonomy; secondly, an excessive penchant for autonomy could lead towards a tipping point that would irrevocably harm an intellectual’s authority and autonomy, as Biermann and others experienced.

Far from being subjugated by a total system of Party-led authority, however, intellectuals participated in and belonged to a system that they themselves helped to steer, hence their acquisition of sufficient socio-political standing to facilitate the publication or performance of their works according to a dialectical balance of autonomy from and affiliation to the Party. Some authors, for example, applied aspects of the Party-mandated method and thereby assured themselves a certain standing in critical circles, whilst others forewent most

of its criteria but accordingly invited a much more negative reception on account of, for example, their adverse comments on political affairs. The stark contradictions in cultural policy and significant deviations from Party-led norms, which frequently appear in academic discourse around the GDR's later years, therefore belong equally in research on the *Aufbau* period.

Ambiguity through Allegory: Four Corpora and their Political Contributions

Since the objects of study in Chapter Six were described as the 'Baumaterial' with which the GDR state and its ideological future were to be constructed, in the following I reflect on the fragments and allegories located across the four literary-analytical chapters of this study and set out the evidence for these contributions and the relevance of the methodological approach applied to them. In addition, I note other, alternative texts for each chapter to illustrate hitherto overlooked works available for future study. Following the theoretical chapter (Chapter Two), Chapter Three deals with novels identified in critical reception as socialist realist. *Menschen an unsrer Seite* and *Robeisen* use techniques such as stylised mimicry and ideologically motivated concealment of the contradictions and paradoxes in the GDR. According to socialist realist theory, literature should capture society in a positive light for the benefit of an ideological project aimed at promoting unity around socialism; but this approach can only pervert and distort reality for such ends, thus failing to achieve its primary ambition. Eduard Claudius' and Hans Marchwitza's novels are realist and politically optimistic, for example, yet they misrepresent the lived *Aufbau* reality with an idealist slant. Despite their intentional conception for political ends, the tenets of socialist realist theory thus emerge artificial and impossible.

This chapter forms an important step in the methodology of this study not only because it denotes the symbolism in socialist realism, but also because uncovers the incoherence of the Party-mandated method by dint of its fundamentally deficient symbolic core. When I identify a gulf between theory and praxis, therefore, I attribute it to the symbolic character of the Party-mandated method. Whilst socialist realism did not represent an absolute as far as its implementation was concerned, artists could, did, and even had to remould its concrete criteria to produce their work because of their inexorable ambiguity. Aside from the lacunary appraisal of works by officials and critics, therefore, the SED's favoured method could only ever enact a perversion of reality and fail to achieve its own tenets. Nevertheless, both Eduard Claudius and Hans Marchwitza benefited from the identification of their works with the model, earning national prizes and continued success in the GDR, which demonstrates the centrality of intellectuals in public and political life, as well as the benefits that they derived by participating. Similarly, August Hild's *Die aus dem Schatten treten* (1952), Maria Langner's *Stahl* (1952), and Karl Mundstock's *Helle Nächte* (1952) count as some of many other novels that illustrate the working reality in the early GDR through a normatively socialist realist lens and could have served as examples here.

In Chapter Four, I analyse a selection of novels described as semi-allegorical on account of their historical reference to the experience of flight and expulsion. The selection of 'Umsiedlerromane' for this corpus resulted from a lengthy literature review of texts that draw upon minority experience, as this perspective would likely entail or yield a widening of *Aufbau* identities and norms as to who could and would participate in political reforms. In contrast to the corpus in the previous chapter, the four novels here deviate from some core socialist realist principles, for example in their distraction from an optimistic projection into the future by incorporating flashbacks and frequent reminders of the characters' traumatic pasts,

which diversify the works temporally, emotionally, and politically. Of all authors featured in this study, Annemarie Reinhardt, Benno Voelkner, Edith Müller-Beeck, and Hildegard Maria Rauchfuss had the least public exposure and critical interest, despite their novels seeing, in some cases, numerous print runs. Evidence from critical reception signals an unease, however, with the manner in which the four novels remould normative socialist realist characterisation in their emphasis on the past rather than the future. All four authors continued to write thereafter, albeit without major success, which does not apply equally to all refugee authors gathered in an inexhaustive list by Bill Niven.⁶

Very few studies investigate GDR literary texts by and about the experience of refugees and expellees, particularly in the early years. Further and substantial research is still required to locate other texts that have been systemically overlooked in popular, critical, and scholarly reception since their composition, including those that highlight other minority or historical perspectives, which could have complemented this corpus. As for the four novels analysed in this chapter, a concrete connection between their politico-aesthetic deviancy and the overall prominence of their authors remains uncertain, although I read a dual application of symbolic and allegorical techniques in the corpus as evidence for the complex negotiation of autonomy and affiliation that confronted intellectuals in the GDR. A dialectical temporality

⁶ Niven's list refers to the following authors: Alexander Abusch, Helmut Baierl, Rudolf Bartsch, Horst Bastian, Jurek Becker, Friedemann Berger, Reinhard Bernhof, Jürgen Bernt-Bärtl, Kurt Biesalski, Hartmut Biewald, Johannes Bobrowski, Gertrud Bradatsch, Peter Brock, Hans Cibulka, Walter Conrad, Gerhard Dallmann, Gerhard Desczyk, Friedrich Dieckmann, Walter Flegel, Franz Fühmann, Hans-Jürgen Geerdts, Harald Gerlach, Gotthold Gloger, Günter Görlich, Paul Gratzick, Richard Groß, Peter Hacks, Otto Häuser, Werner Heiduczek, Christoph Hein, Ursula Höntsch-Harendt, Bernd-Dieter Hüge, Albert Hurny, Karl-Heinz Jakobs, Uwe Johnson, Heinar Kipphardt, Ralph Knebel, Jan Koplowitz, Ulrich Komm, Erich Köhler, Vilmos Korn, Erich Kriemer, Alfred Kröger, Hanna Künzler, Alfred Kurella, Rudolf Leonhard, Hans Marchwitza, Georg Maurer, Armin Müller, Gert Neumann, Margarete Neumann, Herbert Otto, Jochen Petersdorf, Siegfried Pitschmann, Walter Püschel, Werner Quednau, Hildegard Maria Rauchfuß, Helmut Richter, Helmut Routschek, Günther Rücker, Herbert Schauer, Jutta Schlott, Egon Schmidt, Rudolf Scholz, Stefan Schoblocher, Elisabeth Schulz-Semrau, Helga Schütz, Stefan Schütz, Hans Skirecki, Werner Steinberg, Kurt Steiniger, Hans-Jürgen Steinmann, Rudi Strahl, Harry Thürk, Benno Voelkner, Franz Carl Weiskopf, Alfred Wellm, Paul Wiens, Christa Wolf, Christine Wolter, Hedda Zinner, and Arnold Zweig – Niven, *Representations of Flight and Expulsion*, p. 44.

and more fragmented characterisation and structures, for example, are some aspects that I read as allegorical and that disintegrate the symbolic wholeness of a work into a collection of fragments. Despite the limitations to the potential of this blended approach, its identification explains the complex game of negotiation faced by intellectuals in upholding their affiliation to the state method but ensuring their own creative autonomy, all the more so when the artists had limited authority. The texts thus remain significant in this study even if they do not embody a comprehensive allegoricism.

The burden on intellectuals to uphold their own autonomy and the expected affiliation to the Party particularly comes to the fore in plays by Inge and Heiner Müller, Helmut Baierl, and Heinar Kipphardt, which I analyse in Chapter Five. The version history of the Müllers' *Die Korrektur* and of *Die Feststellung* by Baierl testifies to the political and aesthetic confines of theatre production in the early GDR, as theatres, Party representatives, and cultural functionaries responded to the plays with refusals to print scripts and sanction performances. As a result, critical elements were replaced with more acceptable and conforming lines that not only distanced the final texts from those proposed initially by the authors, but also resulted in plays that converged towards a passive theatre. Ironically, the plays became examples of what critics at the time called a 'didactic theatre', by which they meant non-socialist drama that (forcibly) exposes the audience to a negative, challenging, and unsettling image of the GDR reality. In fact, I demonstrate how the playwrights gesture towards a more autonomous style of theatre, as in Heinar Kipphardt's *Shakespeare dringend gesucht*, which encapsulated a break from the ideologically didactic socialist realist drama in favour of fragmentation, openness, and a reliance upon spectator engagement. In disintegrating the fourth wall but also rupturing the pedagogical unity of the artwork to elicit its dependence on audiences to participate in order to reach something close to presentation ('Darstellung')

and meaning, these plays demonstrate the potential of an allegorical – a dialectical – theatre for a participatory, collective politics.

The experimentation in all three works, however, led towards a tipping point: if the intellectual transgressed the expectation of affiliation and pursued their critical-reflexive activity to the point of disregarding certain political norms, interventions from cultural authorities could prevent their work from finding a public in its original form. In Kipphardt's case, figures in and around the *Politbüro* contributed to his exclusion from theatre-making in the GDR altogether. Intellectuals could enjoy a certain political influence through their integration into the body politic if their activity corresponded to certain criteria; but when these criteria were not upheld, the voice of authoritarian ideology predominated. That said, examples of divergence and subversion exist despite the claim that socialist realism is the sole aesthetic method. All three of these plays retain non-standard elements that I identify as allegorical and that had the potential to influence their audiences, despite the addition of more conforming, symbolic elements in the texts by Baierl and the Müllers. A similar praxis also emerged in early plays by Peter Hacks and in *Die Kipper* by Volker Braun, and in other plays attributed to 'didactic theatre', but the three plays analysed in this chapter present, to my knowledge, the earliest examples of what became a significant approach to theatre-making later in the GDR's history.

The final chapter explores the process of censorship as a further example of the GDR's ambiguous structures and the power of influence enjoyed by intellectuals and intellectual-functionaries. Analysing a corpus of poems from the 'Lyrikabend' of 11 December 1962, Bernd Jentzsch's original *Alphabet des Morgens* cycle, and the holdings of the *Archiv unterdrückter Literatur in der DDR*, I explore how these unpublished texts fulfil allegorical

rather than symbolic characteristics, but exhibit the same expansive tendencies as, for example, the plays in Chapter Five. Censorship and the criteria applied as part of it lacked clear definitions in the GDR from the start, meaning that the process consisted of negotiations between publisher, for example, and writer, before a reviewer decided whether an author would receive a printing license. The poems in this chapter were variously rejected for publication, suppressed by authorities directly or indirectly, or initially counted as unpublishable, like the poems read at the ‘Lyrikabend’. To collate these texts, I identify how they combine old and new themes, styles, rhythms, images, and other techniques into a montage that I read as allegorical through Benjamin’s analysis of the ‘Wunschbild’.

The poems offered substantive and constructive input to the *Aufbau* effort even while deviating substantially from the political – and in part aesthetic – standards in place, meaning that their subsequent publication was predicated on textual revisions and/or in changes to the political climate. As with the corpus of Chapter Five, I argue that the critical stance embodied by these poems, once embedded in montage, does not merely express a negative or destructive impulse, but rather provokes the reader to interact with and remould the fragmented material in the texts. Benjamin himself alludes to a materialist reading of aesthetics in references to the ‘Trümmer’, ‘Bruchstücke’, and ‘Bauglieder’ that structure works of art, assembling a montage that retains a dialectical fragmentation and unsteady foundation. The suppression of these poems and their authors evidences the Party-instigated position that such an aesthetics would damage and derail the development of the state because of citizens’ unpreparedness to grapple with such challenging political questions.

An allegorical reading instead helps to discern the constructive contribution to political discourse in the presentation of ‘Baumaterial’ with which readers could participate in the

Aufbau des Sozialismus collectively. Whilst the literary text consists of material in this sense, aesthetics becomes a means to offer up material to political discourse; in Chapter Six, that materialist characterisation of aesthetics consists of a reappraisal of poetry as a platform for reflecting on and remoulding the *Aufbau* present based on an intradiegetic clash of old and new elements. Understanding these texts as material not only emphasises their structural composition, but also highlights the theatricality of their relationship to an audience, as the presentation of disharmonious, broken, and symbolically incoherent material to the public encourages a process of reflection that itself develops the work – the final stage of the allegorical process, which I discuss in Chapter Five. Its arrival at a new constellation, therefore, distances the work from the artist, but also entails the possibility of it effecting influence and change. Severed from its origin, this aesthetic material becomes political and ripe for use in its new context. Very few lyric alternatives to this corpus emerged on account of lacking archival evidence for works that were rejected for publication, though the banned 1947 collection *Terzinen des Herzens* by Annemarie Bostroem could offer one example. One might also consider other literary forms, such as the novels *Ingrid Babendererde: Reifeprüfung 1953* by Uwe Johnson and *Der Tag X* by Stefan Heym.

Perspectives for Future Research

In light of the literary-analytical focus of this study, only limited space remained for exploring the connections between politico-aesthetic deviancy and experimentation, authors' intentions and ambitions for the political sphere, and the actual reach of their works. Such work, especially on reception history, would further underpin an approach to GDR literature that eschews the absolute application of politic-aesthetic norms, including socialist realism and processes of review and censorship, to cultural analysis. As I note in Chapter Six, a much less targeted review of material in the *Bundesarchiv*, the archive of the *Akademie der Künste*,

Berlin, and the *Stasi-Unterlagen-Archiv* could yield more results as to correspondence between authors and authorities, outcomes of the review process, and oblique interventions from political figures, but results are far from guaranteed. Such research already exists for later GDR cultural production and for high-profile figures such as Stefan Heym, but similar material on the *Aufbau* generally remains undiscovered. The structural and systemic limitations to discovering more about the artistic process have created blind spots and absences occasioned by self-censorship, a lack of paper trails, and shifting praxes. However, applying different methodologies – such as the allegorical lens applied in this study and another approach discussed below – could potentially unlock more about cultural production in the GDR.

A further aspect for development consists in investigating the impact of these works on GDR political discourse. Although challenging to corroborate, such evidence could build on this study, which explores *how* intellectuals sought to steer political developments, by signalling the concrete repercussions of their actions. Material could derive from reception histories, such as reader responses to the texts themselves, although the reality that Party-affiliated voices dominated journals, magazines, newspapers, and minutes from official meetings might limit the yield. In the few exceptions considered in the preceding chapters that feature audience responses – the ‘Lyrikabend’ transcript, the discussion at *Schwarze Pumpe* regarding *Die Korrektur*, and readers’ reports in *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, for example – I could not immediately discern the authenticity of authors’ voices from the ‘official’ line on the matter. Moreover, the decision as to which comments appeared in a Party-sanctioned literary journal, for example, ultimately came down to an editor whose own position depended in

part on the good will of the Party.⁷ The dismissal of Peter Huchel from the editorship of *Sinn und Form*, discussed in Chapter Six, demonstrates the intellectual's reliance on SED approval in order to stay in post, as overly autonomous behaviour appears to have triggered his removal. The scope of this study extends only to the question of whether and how literary works from the *Aufbau*, with varying degrees of conformity to politico-aesthetic norms, still offered substantial and constructive contributions to the systemic development of the state, thus research into the actual reach of such literature is lacking.

Future research will have to rely to some extent on the practices of Party organs and offices in order to comprehend individual artworks; crucially, though, these Party-political directions should be regarded still as ambiguous and dynamic frameworks that were open to contradiction. Not just canonical works of socialist realism and of divergent movements, groups, genres, and styles merit further attention in this light, but – and above all – texts that remain hidden and overlooked both because of limited critical attention at the time and of the structural inequalities that have prevented their documentary and/or archival preservation since. Despite best efforts to locate a corpus for this study that bears witness to a more diverse authorship and range of characters, themes, and perspectives from the early GDR, for example, this task remains particularly challenging. Pioneering work has begun to reorientate GDR Studies in this respect; very little of it, however, concerns the early years. The ideology of the *Aufbau* appears to have been constructed upon the typecast of the white, able-bodied, male worker-cum-hero, exemplified in the numerous literary likenesses of the *Held der Arbeit*, which affected both the sociological perception of the ideal *Aufbau* citizen,

⁷ These events are also mentioned amongst Stephan Hermlin's motivations for organising the 'Lyrikabend', which I discuss in Chapter Six.

regulated the breadth of the literary and cultural spheres in the GDR, and has made its mark on research ever since.

Future Methodologies: Linguistification

Whilst evidence from the previous chapters has made it possible to answer the research questions posed in the Introduction to this study, much work remains to appraise the aesthetic, political, social, and other legacies of the state's early literary sphere. The theory of linguistification developed by Boris Groys, whose reflections on the Soviet Union I have cited numerous times throughout this study, represents one key approach that has, to my knowledge, yet to be applied comprehensively to GDR literary history. Eschewing this theory thus far, in spite of its relevance for my own methodological approach, has made it possible to retain the literary-analytical focus that I emphasised in the Introduction, supported by Benjamin's allegory. In order to appraise the wider political potentiality of allegoricism in the socialist context, I now turn to linguistification and suggest its applicability for future studies of the period, but equally highlight in what ways it has accompanied this study from the edges.

Proposed in Groys' short work *The Communist Postscript*, the term linguistification describes both the privileging of aesthetics in communism and a dialectical materialist framework for discerning the ideological replacement of the economy with language as the guiding thread of a communist state.⁸ In contrast to the 'sophist' tradition, i.e. a classical model of teaching that regards rigorous philosophical and rhetorical exercise as a path to wisdom, what Groys calls the 'linguistic turn' negates any possibility of achieving enlightenment – something that

⁸ Groys, *The Communist Postscript*, pp. xv, xx; Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism*, p. 74.

I have discussed throughout this study in Benjaminian terms as symbolic. This linguistic rupture, on the one hand, describes that same loss of semantic potential after the Fall as Benjamin theorises, meaning that the connection between sign and signified has been irrevocably broken. Both Groys and Benjamin cast their conceptions of language in its fragmented, ruptured state as positive, however, because they thereby refute the symbolic reverence around philosophy as a path to knowledge. Philosophy thus cannot enlighten if or because symbolic, i.e. semiotic, coherence can no longer occur. The turn to language as the ‘currency’ of communist statehood disavows the reign of money and thereby demonstrates the substantial systemic shift entailed in a move to communism, in which cultural production, as the source of the ‘Word’ as a new kind of currency capitalised to reflect its status, influences and regulates the state.

This linguistic shift – linguistification – also applies outside the philosophical realm in reading the communist system as one based on and cognisant of contradictions at its core, rather than clinging to the supposed unity upon which capitalism, for example, is constructed.⁹ Groys’ theory pertinently captures and collects the symbolic hinterland of capitalist and neoliberal societies, which the pursuit and direction of money primarily govern and which at best retain ‘culture’ as a cornerstone of social existence, a path to epistemological, hedonistic transcendence, and a speculative source of capital. The financial economy, in Groys’ view, provides a false sense of security for citizens by papering over the cracks and tears in the fabric of a society governed by the symbol; capital ‘can profit from A as well as from not-A’ because it pulls the strings of a deeply paradoxical world to its own advantage, seen for

⁹ Groys, *The Communist Postscript*, p. 29.

example in the financial benefits of war for weapons companies but of peace for stability-dependent enterprises.¹⁰

By contrast, merely admitting the brokenness of language is itself a liberation for citizens, for whom the otherwise unspeakable paradox becomes an admission from the heart of the state's political system. Contradictions in communism prevail but are no longer a 'diabolical subject' that lingers 'in the dark', but rather dragged into the light and made a central characteristic.¹¹ Volker Braun recognises this paradoxical core in relation to the GDR, which he describes as a 'Gesellschaft, die an Widersprüchen interessiert ist'.¹² In the communist state, the human Word becomes the currency and citizens, in full knowledge of this post-Fall truism, benefit from what Groys calls 'genuine philosophical achievements, which empower the philosophers to rule'.¹³ Rather than the sophist notion of philosophy as the path to transcendence, Groys here understands it as an aesthetic exercise open to all, built on paradox, and free from symbolic illusion – thus leaders such as Lenin and Stalin, considering themselves philosophers, laid claim to power to propagate communism as a world system:

[T]he communist state can be distinguished from the Platonic state insofar as in the communist state it was the duty of every individual to be a philosopher, not just the duty of the governing class. The Soviet citizen could only satisfy [their] basic needs if [they were] recognized by the state as a philosophical thinker. This entailed that, every day, the citizen had to take the temperature of the whole of language in order to survive that day and the following night.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 46.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 24–25.

¹² Volker Braun, 'Über die Bauweise neuer Stücke', in *Es genügt nicht die einfache Wahrheit: Notate* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1975), pp. 139–146 (p. 145).

¹³ Groys, *The Communist Postscript*, pp. 29–30.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 69.

Like Benjamin, Groys links the replacement of the commodity to the rise of dialectical materialism, through which citizens actively participate in the affairs of state. Sociologically, linguistification thus degrades symbolic boundaries to working class participation in cultural policymaking and ideologises the ‘philosophical’ Word as key to such a political transition. Moreover, Groys professes the effective participation of citizens in the philosophical mode through the systemic promotion of cultural production. In this way, his theory explains why cultural practitioners in the Soviet Union wielded considerable authority vis-à-vis their role in capitalism through specific discursive and material privileging, as did intellectuals in the GDR’s *Aufbau*. Through the centralised role for art and artists in state politics, aesthetics becomes a revolutionary force for overcoming the symbolic falsehood of the commodity and replacing it, word for word, with a society governed by all – granting the intellectual, among others, the literal capacity to write a new society.

A materialist aesthetics in a linguistified society holds considerable potential because of the broader discursive privileging of the aesthetic Word, a product of intellectual activity. More than just the currency of the day that serves to direct political action, the Word establishes an interactive praxis that incorporates readership and audiences into political discourse by depending on their negotiation of the material into a constellation that reflects its clash with the present. In this light, the *Aufbau* did not merely serve as a backdrop or general mission for the state, but a literal construction effort based on the physical negotiation of the ruins and rubble of war, on the ideological negotiation of the National Socialist legacy and the Soviet paragon of socialism, and on the aesthetic mediation of material from artists who often incorporated historical, critical, subversive, and other elements into the montage of their works. That many authors’ efforts were dismissed as destructive and subversive because

of their more heterogeneous approach in the early GDR evidences the SED's disregard for the materialisation of aesthetics, even if a linguistified system per se existed in the state. As a result, censorship and similar processes of revision limited the impact of cultural production on political discourse and the building blocks never reached the public who could be tasked with utilising them for the betterment of the state.

Though examples in this study have suggested the possibility of sidestepping the dominance of state-mandated criteria and expectations of cultural production, policies such as socialist realism doubtless restricted the pervasiveness and efficacy of linguistification in the GDR. The authorities' neglect of the polysemic and innovative praxes of authors during these early years, as well as their propagation of a symbolic aesthetic method, contradicted the tenets of a society built on words over money. Although this lost potential cannot be quantified, the heightened fragmentation that may have exacerbated the paradoxical core that Groys describes in relation to the communist system. The prevalence and significance of other directions and perspectives by countless artists during the *Aufbau* period may have emerged as a result of this ideological blind spot and, therefore, highlight the import of a materialist aesthetics for the socialist system, in which the hegemony of capital cedes to the will of the Word.

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