

**East German Intellectuals and Public Discourses in the 1950s**

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To the memory of my parents

# **Table of Contents**

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Publications arising from this thesis</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>9</b>
1. Selection of authors and source material	10
2. The contested memory of the GDR	13
3. Debating the role of intellectuals in the GDR	21
4. The 1950s: debates, events, stages	37
5. The generational paradigm	53
<b>2. Wieland Herzfelde: Reforming Party discourses from within</b>	<b>62</b>
1. Introduction	62
2. Ambiguous communist involvement before 1949	67
3. Return to an antifascist homeland	72
4. Aesthetics: Defending a legacy	78
5. Affirmative stances in the lectures	97
6. The June 1953 uprising	102
7. German Division and the Cold War	107
8. The contexts of criticism in 1956-1957	126
9. Conclusion	138

<b>3. Erich Loest: Dissidence and conformity</b>	<b>140</b>
1. Introduction	140
2. Aesthetics: Entertainment, positive heroes, factography	146
3. Narrative fiction	157
4. Consensus and dissent: 1953	183
5. War stories	204
6. Political opposition	216
7. Conclusion	219
 <b>4. Peter Hacks: Political aesthetics</b>	 <b>222</b>
1. Introduction	222
2. Political affirmation	230
3. Aesthetics: A programme for a socialist theatre	250
4. Intervening in the debate on didactic theatre	270
5. Two ‘dialectical’ plays	291
6. Conclusion	298
 <b>5. Conclusion</b>	 <b>301</b>
 <b>Bibliography</b>	 <b>313</b>

## **Abstract**

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to a differentiated reassessment of the cultural history of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), which has hitherto been hampered by critical approaches which have the objective of denouncing rather than understanding East German culture and society.

Approaches such as these rely on schematic black-and-white oppositions, e.g. the dichotomy of conformity and dissidence, and present the East German cultural public spheres in a top-down way as a closed space in which a supposedly monolithic and deceitful Party ideology dictates what can be said or written.

In order to reconceptualise these oversimplifying models, this thesis analyses public discourses from below, focusing on case studies of three public intellectuals with very distinct profiles: Wieland Herzfelde (1896-1988), Erich Loest (1926-2013), and Peter Hacks (1928-2003). Based on published as well as archival sources, this thesis examines their contributions to the plurality of public discourses in East Germany, concentrating on the 1950s as the most heavily contested decade of German division and the Cold War, both of which put great pressure on intellectuals. Whereas research has traditionally regarded these three intellectuals as having either a dissident or a conformist profile, this thesis argues that their attitudes were too ambiguous and the dilemmas they faced too complex to be reduced to such a clear-cut, schematic template.

## **Publications arising from this thesis**

“‘Diese Junggenossen gingen in sich...’: Antifascism and Generational Experience in the Early GDR’, *Forschungsberichte aus dem Duitsland Instituut Amsterdam*, 5 (2009), 190-196.

‘Konsens und Dissens: Drei Publikationen Erich Loests aus dem Jahr 1953’, in *Geschichte, die noch qualmt: Erich Loest und sein Werk*, ed. by Carsten Gansel & Joachim Jacob (Göttingen: Steidl, 2011), pp. 62-72.

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# 1. Introduction

This thesis focuses on the 1950s, which constituted a period of extreme pressure on intellectuals in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Using three case studies, it investigates various ways in which East German intellectuals positioned themselves in the public spheres, the strategies they employed in their self-positioning, and the opportunities they had to influence or to contribute to public discourses. The 1950s witnessed arguably the harshest cultural political measures in the four decades of the GDR's existence, particularly the 1951 formalism campaign and the 1957 trials against critical intellectuals. Confronted with the devastating legacy of the Second World War and Nazi atrocities, as well as the dynamics of German Division, the Cold War, and the ensuing cultural rivalry, intellectuals were encouraged, obliged even, to dedicate their efforts to the new antifascist, socialist order the young state claimed to build.<sup>1</sup>

The majority of East German intellectuals assumed this task willingly, leading to astonishment and even condemnation by post-1990 research stemming from a denunciatory discourse which has become dominant in research on East Germany since unification, as I will argue in section 2 of this chapter.<sup>2</sup> In an attempt to depart from the ensuing models presenting the relationship between intellectuals and the state in East Germany in a top-down way, this thesis sets out to consider the active role intellectuals played, and their opportunities to position themselves in and of influencing public

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<sup>1</sup> David Caute proposes regarding the Cold War as a cultural struggle, complementing the political conflict. See David Caute, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 1-5.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2000), p. 43.

discourses. The supposition that intellectuals had these opportunities, does not mean a denial of state repression in the cultural public spheres, nor of the damaging effects of repressive measures on writers and literature. On the contrary, my approach of analysing individual intellectuals' self-positioning in the public spheres sheds light on questions denunciatory approaches fail to address. It allows a more accurate analysis of intellectuals' motivations for participating, and a more differentiated assessment of the ambiguous, complex ways in which they engaged with discourses in the public spheres. Moreover, this approach can reveal the various ways in which their engagement tied intellectuals to the limitations set by the very discourses they participated in.

### 1. Selection of authors and source material

The complexities and ambiguities of the relationships between political authorities and intellectuals in the GDR can best be examined by focusing on the self-positioning of individual intellectuals.<sup>3</sup> The focus on three individual intellectuals with distinct profiles will enable me to examine a variety of positions, their complex interactions with official Party as well as dominant public discourses, and how these relationships fluctuated and changed over time. Restricting myself to three intellectuals makes a detailed investigation of their positions possible within the limits of this project. In order to capture a broad spectrum of possible positions, I have selected three socialist intellectuals with different biographical backgrounds, different institutionalised roles in the public spheres, working with different genres of literature: Wieland Herzfelde (1896-1988), Erich Loest (1926-2013), and Peter Hacks (1928-

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<sup>3</sup> Sara Jones also takes an approach centered on individual intellectuals. See Sara Jones, *Complicity, Censorship and Criticism: Negotiating Space in the GDR Literary Sphere* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), pp. 19-20.

2003). At first glance, the selected intellectuals can additionally be regarded as representing three distinct positions in relation to the authoritarian regime: respectively the silent (or silenced) critic, the dissenter, and the partisan.<sup>4</sup> On closer examination however, these positions were not as clear-cut as they may have seemed, as the following chapters will show.

Herzfelde came to East Germany from exile in New York in April 1949. After his return, he worked as a literature professor at the prestigious Leipzig University, as a poet and critic, and from 1956-1958 he was also editor of the journal *Neue deutsche Literatur* (NDL). The discussion of his case draws attention to the problematic position of returnees from Western exile in the East German public spheres, and additionally to continuities between cultural political discourses in East Germany and aesthetic debates from the Weimar and exile eras. Herzfelde's past as a member of Dada and exponent of the Weimar avant-garde, a far cry from the propagated aesthetics in the 1950s, complicated his position in East Germany considerably. It is striking that Herzfelde is largely overlooked in academic debates on East German intellectuals, as I will show in the introduction to Chapter 2.

Loest, a former Hitler Youth leader and Wehrmacht soldier, rose quickly to prominence as a writer of socialist realist novels and short stories. In the early 1950s, he was chairman of the Writers' Union in Leipzig, and a contributor to *NDL*. Nevertheless, as I will argue in the introduction to Chapter 3, he is mostly noted for his criticism of the regime after the 1953 uprising and

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<sup>4</sup> This thesis uses the terms partisan and partisanship to refer to intellectuals or works of art and literature which are supportive of the Party line. This is the most common translation of the German term 'Parteilichkeit', a central requirement of socialist realism, and must not be confused with the German term 'Partisan', which refers to a more critical position (e.g. in Wolfgang Engler, *Die Ostdeutschen: Kunde von einem verlorenen Land* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1999), pp. 118-119).

during the 1956-1957 crisis, for which he was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment in 1957. My discussion of Loest's positions of the 1950s will problematise the simultaneity of his affirmative and critical stances, and challenge the dichotomist tendency to distinguish the loyalist from the dissident, dismissing the former while celebrating the latter.

Hacks, who fled from his hometown Breslau in 1944, moved from Munich to East Germany in 1955 to contribute to the development of a socialist culture as a playwright and theatre critic. He collaborated with the Deutsche Theater and the Berliner Ensemble, and was a member of the editorial board for the journal *Theater der Zeit*. In debates before 1960, Hacks championed the Brechtian method of 'dialectical theatre', which brought him into a controversy with intellectuals and Party functionaries who advocated a more traditional aesthetic. Still, he was a strong advocate of government policies and refrained from criticising its lack of reforms. My discussion of the case of Hacks seeks to connect his partisan stances with his more contested aesthetics.

All three cases studies break through the dichotomies and schematic representations of GDR intellectual life, presented by models conceiving of the functioning of the East German cultural spheres in a top-down way, which will be discussed in section 3 of this introduction.

Although Herzfelde, Hacks and Loest had distinct backgrounds and past experiences, I do not regard them as representatives of generations. Initially planning to use the generational perspective in my investigation, studying the paradigm made me suspicious of its generalising consequences – presenting difference and belonging as natural – and reluctant to regard

intellectuals as representatives of their generations. Section 5 of this introduction discusses the problematic generational paradigm.

## 1.2 Source material

The aim of my thesis is not to carry out a purely literary analysis, nor to present biographical sketches, but to undertake a historical discourse analysis of the possibilities open to intellectuals of positioning themselves within discourses in the East German public spheres of the 1950s. Therefore, my thesis primarily examines texts that were made public in the 1950s, through print or speech. Specific works of literature are analysed for the ways in which the narratives and images they convey relate to contemporaneous debates. In the case of Herzfelde, I have investigated his lectures as a literature professor and his public addresses, as well as in the institutionally restricted spheres of Writers' Union and Party meetings, in addition to his essays, poems, and 1949 memoir. The chapter on Loest is based on material published in the 1950s: his novels and short stories, as well as essays and reportages. In the case of Hacks, I have looked mainly at aesthetic essays and political commentaries, but also at poetry and theatrical texts.

## 2. The contested memory of the GDR

Since the GDR ceased to exist in 1990, its legitimacy in the past and its legacy for the present have been contested. As Stefan Neuhaus points out, the 1990s witnessed the key debates in which the memory of the East German state constituted new identities.<sup>5</sup> In these politicised debates, a denunciatory

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<sup>5</sup> Stefan Neuhaus, "‘Kritik einer abstoßenden Welt’? Probleme des literarischen Diskurses über die DDR", in *Rhetorik der Erinnerung: Literatur und Gedächtnis in den 'geschlossenen*

discourse emerged which is still dominant today. For instance, as Nick Hodgkin and Caroline Pearce argue, the official narratives as presented at the 2009 celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall concentrated on the defeat of communism by the very democratic values ‘inherent in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) since 1949’.<sup>6</sup> In the same year 2009, Wolfgang Emmerich noticed a growing indifference and ignorance, especially in West Germany, towards the history and literature of the GDR. As we will see, the 2000 edition of his *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* is critical of East German literature’s complicity with the regime, but in a debate at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid in 2009 he disapproved of efforts to belittle the East German legacy: ‘es sind Strategien da, die bestimmte Dinge möglichst klein und runtermachen wollen’.<sup>7</sup> His remarks highlight the dominance of a denunciatory discourse about the East German legacy, but the discrepancy to his stance in 2000 also suggests that the perspectives of its proponents might change over time and depending on the contexts of speech.

In opposition to the denunciatory discourse, an equally one-dimensional image of the GDR as a ‘failed experiment’ developed, which, as Konrad H. Jarausch puts it, ‘seeks to recover the noble aims of socialism from the debris of its admittedly imperfect realization’.<sup>8</sup> The period this thesis

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*Gesellschaften’ des Real-Sozialismus*, ed. by Carsten Gansel (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2009), pp. 317-332 (p. 319).

<sup>6</sup> Nick Hodgkin & Caroline Pearce, ‘Introduction’, in *The GDR Remembered: Representations of the East German State since 1989*, ed. by Nick Hodgkin & Caroline Pearce (Rochester NY: Camden House, 2011), pp. 1-18 (p. 1).

<sup>7</sup> David Bathrick, Wolfgang Emmerich, Therese Hörnigk, Frank Hörnigk, Ana Perez Lopez, Manuel Maldonado Aleman & Jean Mortier, ‘Gespräch zur DDR-Literatur in der Auslandsgermanistik’, in *20 Jahre Mauerfall: Diskurse, Rückbauten, Perspektiven*, ed. by Marta Fernandez Bueno & Torben Lohmüller (Berne: Peter Lang, 2012), pp. 279-297 (p. 296). The discussion took place at the 2009 conference in Madrid, from which this volume emerged.

<sup>8</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch, ‘Beyond Uniformity: The Challenge of Historicizing the GDR’, in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn, 1999), pp. 3-14 (p. 4).

focuses on, the 1950s, figures in this counter-discourse as the crossroads at which GDR socialism went the wrong way, as exemplified by a title such as Siegfried Prokop's *1956 – DDR am Scheideweg*.<sup>9</sup>

Especially since 2000, a number of historians have presented more differentiated accounts of aspects of East German society and culture, challenging dominant denunciatory discourses. Whereas their introduction of new concepts has led to the emergence of an 'increasingly complex picture of East German society and SED rule',<sup>10</sup> I will argue in section 2.2 of this chapter that such models have until now been unsuccessful in breaking the dominance of denunciatory discourses governing top-down models which disregard the pluralities and complexities of East German culture and society.

## 2.1 The denunciatory discourse: top-down models

In 2009, the historian Manfred Wilke called the GDR 'ein Kunstprodukt ohne Legitimität'.<sup>11</sup> Claiming that the East German state was an artificial and totalitarian construction, imposed and kept alive by the Soviet Union, his thesis demonstrates the persistence of denunciatory models in historical research on East Germany, which developed after unification.

As Jürgen Habermas noted in 1995, the debates on the GDR came down to an asymmetrical evaluation of the supposedly inferior East by the self-assured West.<sup>12</sup> In this context, as Michael Brie criticised in 1994, the varied

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<sup>9</sup> Siegfried Prokop, *1956 – DDR am Scheideweg: Opposition und neue Konzepte der Intelligenz* (Berlin: Kai Homilius, 2006); see also Siegfried Prokop (ed.), *Zwischen Aufbruch und Abbruch: Die DDR im Jahre 1956* (Berlin: Kai Homilius, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Jones, *Complicity, Censorship and Criticism*, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Manfred Wilke, 'These 2: Die DDR war keine deutsche Diktatur, sondern eine Diktatur auf deutschem Boden – ein Kunstprodukt ohne Legitimität' (2009), <[http://www.sed-staat.de/texte/20091209\\_These\\_zwei\\_KAS\\_Publikation.pdf](http://www.sed-staat.de/texte/20091209_These_zwei_KAS_Publikation.pdf)> [accessed: 1 June 2012].

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Patrick Stevenson & John Theobald, 'A Decade of Cultural Disunity: Diverging Discourses and Communicative Dissonance in 1990s Germany', in *Relocating Germanness*:

range of models and concepts applied to East German society before 1989/1990 were reduced to narrow terminology which obstructed a discussion of its complexities: ‘the terms “unjust state,” “totalitarian society,” or “SED dictatorship” for the GDR have become [...] dominant’.<sup>13</sup>

Despite opposition demanding a more differentiated approach, these labels have constituted the dominant images of the GDR in historical research. As Mary Fulbrook notes in 1997, research on the GDR has been determined by such assumptions, to the effect that its ‘general thrust [...] has been to denounce the East German dictatorship, to describe it in black and white terms of oppressor and oppressed’.<sup>14</sup> Demonstrating the persistence of these models, Lothar Fritze makes the same point in 2006. He criticises the ‘sogenannte Aufarbeitung der DDR’ for being guided by the objective of deprecating East German socialism and presenting the GDR as an illegitimate state. He goes on to argue that this ‘Delegitimierungsansatz’ narrows down the discussion to ‘die Alternative “Akzeptanz oder Ablehnung”’, and hence incites a ‘Tendenz zum dichotomischen Denken’ and ‘Schwarzweißmalerei’.<sup>15</sup> Apart from the dichotomies and black-and-white schemes Fritze and Fulbrook point at, these models rely on a narrow notion of power: it is apparently exercised solely by the state over its citizens. Jonathan Grix and Charley Jeffery argue in 2000 that such top-down models limit our understanding of the complexities of what

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*Discursive Disunity in Unified Germany*, ed. by Patrick Stevenson & John Theobald (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 1-22 (p. 4).

<sup>13</sup> Michael Brie, ‘The Difficulty of Discussing the GDR’, in *Understanding the Past, Managing the Future: The Integration of the Five New Länder into the Federal Republic of Germany: Selected Papers from the Eighteenth New Hampshire Symposium*, ed. by Roger Woods & Margy Gerber (Lanham: University Press of America, 1994), pp. 1-24 (p. 7).

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Stevenson & Theobald, ‘A Decade of Cultural Disunity’, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Lothar Fritze, ‘Delegitimierung und Totalkritik: Kritische Anmerkungen nach fünfzehn Jahren Aufarbeitung der DDR-Vergangenheit’, *Sinn und Form: Beiträge zur Literatur*, 58 (2006), 643-659 (pp. 643-646).



they call a dictatorship like the GDR, as these models leave ‘society’s inherent pluralism [...] out of consideration’.<sup>16</sup>

A key denunciatory classification of the GDR is ‘unjust state’ (‘Unrechtsstaat’). This pseudo-legal term declares injustice as the main characteristic of the East German state.<sup>17</sup> Because any societal engagement is condemned as complicity with an unjust state, this notion fails to contribute to an understanding of how SED rule worked in practice and of its foundation in East German society. Such a dismissal disregards the complexities of East German society and culture.<sup>18</sup>

The totalitarianism thesis and the notion of a second German dictatorship, both likening the GDR to Nazi Germany, also carry this denunciatory effect, which hampers a better understanding of East German history. In line with foreign minister Klaus Kinkel’s 1991 phrase of ‘Auschwitz und Bautzen’,<sup>19</sup> scholarly as well as journalistic publications refer to the GDR as the second German dictatorship to explicitly assert its continuity with Nazi Germany.<sup>20</sup> In order to delegitimise the GDR, the phrase of ‘zwei Diktaturen’ negates the singularities of both the Nazi dictatorship and the

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<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Grix & Charley Jeffery, ‘The Social Dynamics of Dictatorship: Re-evaluating the Third Reich and the GDR “From the Bottom Up”’, in *The Challenge of German Culture: Essays Presented to Wilfried van der Will*, ed. by Michael Butler & Robert Evans (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 187-198 (p. 188).

<sup>17</sup> The GDR was never a ‘Rechtsstaat’ with a separation of powers, but its suggested semantic opposite ‘Unrechtsstaat’ actually carries a different meaning (as Brie notes, a ‘Rechtsstaat’ can be unjust as well) and hence cannot be used to refer to the GDR’s lacking an independent judiciary. See Brie, ‘The Difficulty of Discussing the GDR’, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Fritze, ‘Delegitimierung und Totalkritik’, pp. 651-656.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Fritze, ‘Delegitimierung und Totalkritik’, p. 643.

<sup>20</sup> e.g., Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte 5: Bundesrepublik und DDR 1949-1990* (Munich: Beck, 2008), p. 23. This book by the prominent historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler sparked a debate amongst historians because of his wholesale denunciation of the GDR as a ‘linkstotalitäre Diktatur’ and a mere footnote in world history. See *Bundesrepublik und DDR: Die Debatte um Hans-Ulrich Wehlers ‘Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte’*, ed. by Patrick Bahners & Alexander Cammann (Munich: Beck, 2009); see also Donna Harsch, ‘Footnote or Footprint? The German Democratic Republic in History: 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Lecture of the GHI, Washington DC, November 12, 2009’, *Bulletin of the GHI*, 46 (2010), 9-25.

GDR, and plays down the horrors of Nazism.<sup>21</sup> The same goes for totalitarianism,<sup>22</sup> which became paradigmatic in the 1990s.<sup>23</sup> As Andrew Beattie argues in his critical 2008 book about the Bundestag inquiries into the GDR, the advocates of a totalitarianist reading of twentieth-century German history continue to be on the offensive.<sup>24</sup>

Critics of the totalitarianism model argue, like Fritze, that it is symptomatic of an effort to denounce the GDR rather than to come to a better understanding of its history.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Fulbrook states critically (2005) that the ‘highly politicised model’ of totalitarianism ‘simply does not capture adequately the empirical realities of life in the GDR’.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, apart from establishing a continuity between Nazi Germany and the GDR,<sup>27</sup> the totalitarianism model constructs a simplistic top-down notion of the exercise of

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<sup>21</sup> In 2008, Gerhard Zwerenz, self-proclaimed ‘leidgeprüfter Kenner beider Diktaturen’, argued that associating the GDR with Nazi Germany disregards historical differences between the two regimes: ‘Jetzt gerät Bautzen so in den medialen Focus, daß Auschwitz dahinter zum Klischee erstarrt, weil die Rede von den “zwei Diktaturen” die Differenzen minimalisiert, um die Parallele maximalisieren zu können.’ Gerhard Zwerenz, ‘Die Differenz zwischen Auschwitz und Bautzen’, *Ossietzky: Zweiwochenschrift für Politik, Kultur, Wirtschaft*, 2008.13, <<http://www.sopos.org/aufsaetze/48923ed81f9f6/1.phtml>> [accessed 14 May 2012]. An example of this tendency to liken the GDR to Nazi Germany is the author Klaus Harpprecht’s warning – in the 1996 discussion on Günther Grass’ novel *Ein weites Feld* – not to judge the GDR and FRG with the same ‘moralische Äquidistanz’. Whereas it is doubtful if his moralising against the GDR is enlightening, he clearly disregards the singularities and different historical realities of Nazi Germany and the GDR when he argues that the President of the East German Writers’ Union, Hermann Kant is complicit in the same way as Hanns Johst, the president of the Nazi ‘Reichsschrifttumskammer’. See Paul Gerhard Klussmann & Frank Hoffmann, ‘Neue Leben? Kulturpolitische Transformationen von “Leseland” zum “literarischen Markt”’, in *Weiterschreiben: Zur DDR-Literatur nach dem Ende der DDR*, ed. by Holger Helbig (Berlin: Akademie, 2007), pp. 9-24 (p. 14).

<sup>22</sup> For a concise overview of concepts of totalitarianism that have been applied to the GDR, see Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR* (London: Arnold, 2002), pp. 20-25.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Ahbe, ‘Two Rival States and Two Competing Master Narratives: *Geschichtspolitik* in the 1950s and 1960s’, in *The GDR Remembered: Representations of the East German State since 1989*, ed. by Nick Hodgkin & Caroline Pearce (Rochester NY: Camden House, 2011), pp. 221-249 (p. 223).

<sup>24</sup> Andrew H. Beattie, *Playing Politics with History: The Bundestag Inquiries Into East Germany* (New York: Berghahn, 2008), pp. 194-195.

<sup>25</sup> Fritze, ‘Delegitimierung und Totalkritik’, pp. 645-646.

<sup>26</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2005), p. x.

<sup>27</sup> Beattie, *Playing Politics with History*, p. 195.

power.<sup>28</sup> Corey Ross is less critical as he finds totalitarianism useful to describe ‘the techniques of rule among a wide variety of twentieth-century dictatorial regimes that were shared by the GDR’, but concedes that this is a superficial approach which only focuses on rule and brackets out ‘serious consideration of social and cultural developments’.<sup>29</sup> Such denunciatory models do not account for the motivations, efforts, dilemmas, hardships, or disappointments, of those who lived in East Germany and contributed to its economy, society, or culture.

## 2.2 Challenging top-down models

In historical research on East Germany, the years around 2000 witnessed a reaction to the dominant models’ inability to correspond to the experiences of many East Germans.<sup>30</sup> Alternative methods such as ‘Alltagsgeschichte’,<sup>31</sup> oral history, and social history gained new influence.<sup>32</sup> Although these approaches generated many interesting insights,<sup>33</sup> they are at times inherently dependent on the very top-down models from the dominant discourses they oppose, for instance when they focus on examining everyday life as relatively autonomous of political power instead of being part of a complex power relationship which

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<sup>28</sup> Ross, *Constructing Socialism at the Grass-Roots*, pp. 3-4. See also Fulbrook’s critical remarks in Mary Fulbrook, ‘Jenseits der Totalitarismustheorie? Vorläufige Bemerkungen aus sozialgeschichtlicher Perspektive’, in *The GDR and its History: Rückblick und Revision: Die DDR im Spiegel der Enquete-Kommissionen*, ed. by Peter Barker (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 35-53 (pp. 37-38).

<sup>29</sup> Ross, *The East German Dictatorship*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>30</sup> For a strong argument for a ‘bottom-up’ approach to better understand both the GDR and Nazi Germany, see Grix & Jeffery, ‘The Social Dynamics of Dictatorship’, pp. 187-198.

<sup>31</sup> e.g. Stefan Wolle, *Die heile Welt der Diktatur: Alltag und Herrschaft in der DDR 1971-1989*, zweite, durchgesehene Auflage (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1999).

<sup>32</sup> e.g. Konrad H. Jarausch (ed.), *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR* (New York: Berghahn, 1999).

<sup>33</sup> See Paul Betts, ‘The Twilight of the Idols: East German Memory and Material Culture’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 72 (2000), 731-765 (p. 733).

does not work in a top-down way alone.<sup>34</sup> Such an approach is doubly problematic: its critical tendency is disregarded by denunciatory discourses, or they inadvertently adopt denunciatory qualifications. For instance, discussing two such concepts, 'Eigensinn' and 'Nischengesellschaft', Hans-Jürgen Wagener and Helga Schultz do not revise their previous claim that the GDR was a totalitarian system, arguing that these concepts are 'typische Reaktionsformen auf Totalitarismus'.<sup>35</sup> This recent publication (2007) is an indication of the lasting influence of totalitarianist readings of GDR history. The contrast to Fritze's claim that none of the knowledge gained by historical research on the GDR justifies the use of the moralising concept of totalitarianism,<sup>36</sup> illustrates the different objectives of the dominant denunciatory discourse and its opponents.

The difficulty many models from social history have in breaking away from top-down models can be illustrated by their resulting characterizations of GDR society: from 'welfare dictatorship'<sup>37</sup> to 'durchherrschte Gesellschaft',<sup>38</sup> they regard the relationship between regime and society in an inherently top-down way.<sup>39</sup> Fulbrook's 2005 concept of the 'participatory dictatorship'<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> For example, Betts' statement that these methods, which he adheres to as well, seek to study the 'complex relationship between state and society, power and consent', indicates that he still links power exclusively to the state, whereas 'society' can merely lend or hold back consent to such power. See Betts, 'The Twilight of the Idols', p. 733.

<sup>35</sup> Hans-Jürgen Wagener & Helga Schultz, 'Ansichten und Einsichten: Einleitung', in *Die DDR im Rückblick: Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft, Kultur*, ed. by Helga Schultz & Hans-Jürgen Wagener (Berlin: Links, 2007), pp. 9-25 (pp. 14-15).

<sup>36</sup> Fritze, 'Delegitimierung und Totalkritik', p. 646.

<sup>37</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch, 'Care and Coercion: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship', in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-cultural History of the GDR*, ed. by Konrad H. Jarausch (New York: Berghahn, 1999), pp. 47-69.

<sup>38</sup> Jürgen Kocka, 'The GDR: A Special Kind of Modern Dictatorship', in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-cultural History of the GDR*, ed. by Konrad H. Jarausch (New York: Berghahn, 1999), pp. 17-26 (p. 17).

<sup>39</sup> See Fulbrook, 'Jenseits der Totalitarismustheorie?', p. 35.

<sup>40</sup> Fulbrook, *The People's State*, p. 12.

avoids this pitfall;<sup>41</sup> criticising top-down models,<sup>42</sup> she aims to conceptualise how people in the GDR ‘were active participants’ and how they ‘inhabited a more complex moral and political universe, than has frequently been posited’.<sup>43</sup> My approach to the role of intellectuals in East Germany in the 1950s can be seen as a parallel to Fulbrook’s proposal in the field of social history. I investigate how three intellectuals participated in the public spheres and in which ways their participation enabled them to take a distinct position or influence public discourses, and I also explore if this affirmation bound them to the limits of these discourses and contributed to their dominance.

### 3. Debating the role of intellectuals in the GDR

This thesis aims to contribute to a body of research on East German literature and the role of intellectuals in the GDR which is critical of denunciatory models. From the early 1990s onwards, in Germany as well as beyond, a range of scholars have proposed rethinking top-down models and dichotomous templates. In 1992, responding to the debate around Christa Wolf’s *Was Bleibt?*, Axel Goodbody and Dennis Tate deplored the ‘negativity of the instant judgements being passed on GDR literature as a whole’, especially the ‘undifferentiated accusation that writers in the GDR had never been more than

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<sup>41</sup> Fulbrook’s concept has met with considerable criticism. Thomas Großbölting appreciates Fulbrook’s achievement to generate a more complex image of the GDR, but critiques her tendency to encompass a whole range of quite varied modes of behaviour, with very different intentions and outcomes. See Thomas Großbölting, ‘Mary Fulbrook: Ein ganz normales Leben’, *Sehepunkte*, 9 (2009), <<http://sehepunkte.de/2009/07/15118.html>> [accessed 25 August 2012].

Adelheid von Salden stresses that Fulbrook’s hypothesis needs to be more thoroughly researched, and questions if participation is specific for the GDR or rather a characteristic of all dictatorships, including Nazi Germany. Adelheid von Salden, ‘Review of Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*’, *The American Historical Review*, 111 (2006), 1622-1623, <<http://ahr.oxfordjournals.org/content/111/5/1622.2.full>> [accessed 30 July 2012].

<sup>42</sup> See Jones, *Complicity, Censorship and Criticism*, p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, p. 12.

*Staatsdichter*, [...] subjecting themselves [...] to the will of the state'.<sup>44</sup>

Goodbody and Tate's plea for a 'more measured response',<sup>45</sup> can be related to a range of publications responding critically, and in various ways, to the judgements passed on GDR writers during the debates of the 1990s.<sup>46</sup> In recent years, the more differentiated picture emerging from these studies has been enhanced by a number of publications which analyse pre- and post-1990 autobiographies from East Germany,<sup>47</sup> by research on the roles of particular institutions,<sup>48</sup> or by analyses of intellectuals' engagement for socialism and interactions with the regime.<sup>49</sup> Some of these publications will be discussed in

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<sup>44</sup> Axel Goodbody & Dennis Tate, 'Preface', in *Geist und Macht: Writers and the State in the GDR*, ed. by Axel Goodbody & Dennis Tate (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), pp. 1-3 (pp.1-2).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> See David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Peter Davies, 'Johannes R. Becher and the Agony of Responsibility, 1945-1949', *German Life and Letters*, 53.2 (2000), 243-260; Peter Davies, *Divided Loyalties: East German Writers and the Politics of German Division 1945-1953* (Leeds: Maney Publishing, 2000); Carsten Gansel, *Parlament des Geistes: Literatur zwischen Hoffnung und Repression 1945-1961* (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1996); Carsten Gansel, 'Für "Vielfalt und Reichtum" und gegen "Einbrüche bürgerlicher Ideologie: Zu Kanon und Kanonisierung in der DDR', in *Literarische Kanonbildung*, ed. by Heinz-Ludwig Arnold (Munich: edition text+kritik, 2002), pp. 233-258; Erik Grimm, 'Writing in the Unpublic Sphere: East German Writers and the Return of Repressed Identities', in *What Remains? East German Culture and the Postwar Republic*, ed. by Marc Silberman (Washington: AICGS, 1997), pp. 75-89; Rainer Land & Ralf Possekel, *Namenlose Stimmen waren uns voraus: Politische Diskurse von Intellektuellen aus der DDR* (Bochum: Winkler, 1994); Werner Mittenzwei, *Die Intellektuellen: Literatur und Politik in Ostdeutschland von 1945 bis 2000* (Leipzig: Faber & Faber, 2001); Rhys W. Williams, Stephen Parker & Colin Riordan (eds), *German Writers and the Cold War 1945-61*, in collaboration with Helmut Peitsch (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

<sup>47</sup> See Sara Jones, "'Ein reines Phantasieprodukt" or "Hostile Biography"? Günter de Bruyn's *Vierzig Jahre* and the Stasi files', in *German Life Writing in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Birgit Dahlke, Dennis Tate & Roger Woods (Rochester NY: Camden House, 2010), pp. 196-208; Dennis Tate, *Shifting Perspectives: East German Autobiographical Narratives before and after the End of the GDR* (Rochester: Camden House, 2007); Roger Woods, 'Retold Lives: East German Autobiography after East Germany', in *Dislocation and Reorientation: Exile, Division and the End of Communism in German Culture and Politics: In Honour of Ian Wallace*, ed. by Axel Goodbody, Pól Ó Dochartaigh & Dennis Tate (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 245-255.

<sup>48</sup> e.g. Dorothee Bores, *Das Ostdeutsche PEN-Zentrum: Ein Werkzeug der Diktatur?* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010); David Clarke, 'Parteischule oder Dichterschmiede? The Institut für Literatur "Johannes R. Becher" from Its Founding to Its Abwicklung', *German Studies Review*, 29 (2006), 87-106; David Clarke, 'Das Institut für Literatur "Johannes R. Becher" und die Autorenausbildung in der DDR', in *Views from Abroad: Die DDR aus britischer Perspektive*, ed. by Peter Barker, Marc-Dietrich Ohse & Dennis Tate (Bielefeld: Bertelsmann, 2007), pp. 175-186.

<sup>49</sup> See David Bathrick, 'Der Widerstand der Ästhetik: Stephan Hermlin als "Public Intellectual"', in *20 Jahre Mauerfall: Diskurse, Rückbauten, Perspektiven*, ed. by Marta

more detail below, as I set out the contribution this project seeks to make by analysing intellectuals' positioning in the public spheres of the 1950s.

### 3.1 Top-down models of the role of intellectuals

Despite these efforts, the dominance of denunciatory discourses is also apparent in assessments of the role of intellectuals and literature in the GDR. The alleged lack of criticism of East German intellectuals prompted the political scientist Wolfgang Jäger in 1998 to question the very legitimacy of intellectual activities in the GDR, disregarding the historical specificities and peculiarities of intellectuals' positions.<sup>50</sup>

In his 2000 *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, Emmerich summarises the general verdict passed on GDR literature as 'eindeutig und vernichtend': it was accused of having served as 'Erfüllungsgehilfe einer häßlichen Diktatur'.<sup>51</sup> Even if he wants to regard GDR literature from a multitude of perspectives beyond its role in the consolidation of political power, he agrees to a large extent with this verdict as he calls writers' participation in the project to build socialism an 'Irrtum' and a 'Lehrstück einer entschieden zu engen Berührung zwischen Geist und Macht'.<sup>52</sup>

A later example of such a verdict is Wolf Lepenies' 2006 wholesale denunciation of the role of intellectuals in East Germany as an 'intellectual

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Fernandez Bueno & Torben Lohmüller (Berne: Peter Lang, 2012), pp. 31-47; Doris Danzer, *Zwischen Vertrauen und Verrat: Deutschsprachige kommunistische Intellektuelle und ihre sozialen Beziehungen (1918-1960)* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2012); Jones, *Complicity, Censorship and Criticism*. For a differentiated account of German literary history from 1945 to 1989, see Helmut Peitsch, *Nachkriegsliteratur 1945-1989* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2009).

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Mittenzwei, *Die Intellektuellen*, pp. 17-18

<sup>51</sup> Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, p. 14.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

disaster', which became apparent when the regime collapsed.<sup>53</sup> Such teleological verdicts do little to help us understand the peculiarities, dilemmas and ambiguities of the positions of intellectuals in this authoritarian state.<sup>54</sup>

Verdicts such as Lepenies's are based on the alleged failure of intellectuals to become dissidents and to contribute to the overturning of the SED regime in 1989, and their basic loyalty to, or cooperation<sup>55</sup> with a regime that is to be denounced as a totalitarian one.<sup>56</sup> Such verdicts are thus based on oversimplifying images of GDR culture and politics as well as the notion of the task of intellectuals as being critical of those in political power.<sup>57</sup>

In her 2012 book on the role of social relationships between communist German intellectuals in securing their allegiance to the Party before 1960, Doris Danzer questions the allegation that intellectuals in the GDR betrayed their duty to be critical, and argues that one could ask instead if communist intellectuals were betrayed by their Party, as it exploited their loyalty and trust

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<sup>53</sup> Wolf Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture in German History* (Princeton & Oxford: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 167-170.

<sup>54</sup> Parallel to Lepenies, Wolfgang Bialas bases his verdict on intellectuals' apparent failure to give voice to the increasing public discontents with the state during the final years of its existence. See Wolfgang Bialas, 'Ostdeutsche Intellektuelle und der gesellschaftliche Umbruch der DDR', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 33 (2007), 289-308 (p. 290).

<sup>55</sup> For instance, much attention has been paid to *Stasi* infiltration, with the result that the entire literature of the GDR became suspect of collaboration with the secret service. See Paul Gerhard Klussmann and Frank Hoffmann, 'Neue Leben? Kulturpolitische Transformationen von "Leseland" zum "literarischen Markt"', in *Weiterschreiben: Zur DDR-Literatur nach dem Ende der DDR*, ed. by Holger Helbig (Berlin: Akademie, 2007), pp. 9-24 (p. 13). Cf. Joachim Walther, *Sicherungsbereich Literatur: Schriftsteller und Staatssicherheit in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, Durchgesehene Ausgabe (Berlin: Ullstein, 1999).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Christian Joppke, 'Intellectuals, Nationalism, and the Exit from Communism: The Case of East Germany', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37 (1995), 213-241 (p. 215). Rather than simply denouncing this loyalty as a failure of intellectuals, Christian Joppke seeks to understand it as a result of the impossibility of invoking a nationalist discourse in the context of the Nazi past as well as German division.

<sup>57</sup> This is a specific interpretation of a notion of the intellectual which goes back to the very origins of the term: critical engagement for universal freedom and truth. As Dietz Behring notes, this notion has been paradigmatic to West German discourses since the 1950s. See Dietz Behring, "'Intellektueller': Schimpfwort – Diskursbegriff – Grabmal?', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 40/2010, 5-12 (p. 9)



to cement its rule.<sup>58</sup> Challenging denunciatory models, Danzer's research offers an appealing explanation of these intellectuals' loyalty to communism. In this context it is also worth considering how East German intellectuals in the 1950s conceived of their public roles.

As a result of the dominance of denunciatory discourses, many studies of GDR literature and culture work in a top-down manner by confusing official Party cultural policies with actual developments. A telling example is Klaus-Michael Bogdal's claim, notably in an article on the East German discursive space of the 1950s, that socialism interrupted the natural development of literature towards modernism.<sup>59</sup> Bogdal's statement implies that East German literature came to a standstill, whereas it actually went through many developments, including during the 1950s. It moreover exposes his teleological conception of literary history as a linear development towards modernism. His article is symptomatic of top-down thinking, because it mistakes official maxims, in this case the condemnation of modernism, for the actual situation, which was more complex. His totalitarianist reading presents East German culture as a closed system of control, leaving no space for developments which diverge from (presumably monolithic) official guidelines.

Much of the research pursuing a more differentiated understanding of the roles of intellectuals in the GDR also depends to a certain extent on top-down presumptions. For instance, in her comprehensive book on the East German PEN-Zentrum, Dorothee Bores delineates four types of intellectual conduct in relation to politics, using a matrix which is based on dichotomies

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<sup>58</sup> Danzer, *Zwischen Vertrauen und Verrat*, p. 18.

<sup>59</sup> Klaus-Michael Bogdal, 'Alles nach Plan, alles im Griff: Der diskursive Raum der DDR-Literatur in den fünfziger Jahren', in *Soziale Räume und kulturelle Praktiken: Über den strategischen Gebrauch von Medien*, ed. by Georg Mein & Markus Rieder-Ladich (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2004), pp. 123-148 (p. 133).

such as opposition and conformity, or acceptance and rejection of the regime. Two of Bores' intellectual types have a positive relationship to the authorities: the first category of intellectuals, which she dubs 'ideologists', identifies with and affirms power, whereas the second type comes to an arrangement with the regime, and avoids critical positions or public political statements in general.<sup>60</sup> The two other intellectual types Bores proposes are in conflict with power: the inner exile (a notion which implicitly links the GDR to Nazi Germany), and the critical intellectual or dissident who speaks out but is marginalised or prosecuted.<sup>61</sup> The typology proposed by Bores fits in with a range of top-down dichotomies present in research on GDR intellectuals: dissidence and compliance, 'ideology and reality', or 'dominant and subversive works of literature'.<sup>62</sup>

Parallel with Sara Jones, I argue that the boundaries between opposition and conformity were more fluid than such dichotomies suggest.<sup>63</sup> Intellectuals' positions in the East German public spheres were too versatile to be reduced to black-and-white schemes like Bores' typology. Compliance could in some cases create space for resistance to certain traits of SED rule; a single argument could be subversive and compliant at the same time; or one

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<sup>60</sup> Bores, *Das ostdeutsche PEN-Zentrum*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>62</sup> Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech*, p. 14. In 1980, Stephan Bock criticised such dichotomies in West German research on GDR literature: 'Methodisch ist einzuwenden, daß aufgrund des starken nichtliterarischen Interesses an "Dissidenten" ein Schema dominiert, das mit der Wirklichkeit kaum etwas gemein hat und auf Gegensätze wie "böse" vs. "gut", "borniert" vs. "intelligent", "stalinistisch" vs. "humanistisch" etc. hinausläuft. [...] Die Folge ist, daß [...] mangelnde Differenzierung vorherrscht.' Stephan Bock, *Literatur, Gesellschaft, Nation: Materielle und ideelle Grundbedingungen der frühen DDR-Literatur (1949-1956)* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1980), p. 167. Joppke also thinks in dichotomies, for instance when he distinguishes between dissidence and compliance. Joppke, 'Intellectuals, Nationalism, and the Exit from Communism', p. 216.

<sup>63</sup> Jones, *Complicity, Censorship and Criticism*, p. 21.

text could simultaneously contain dominant and dissident narratives and arguments.

### 3.2 Public discourses, public spheres

As David Bathrick argues in his 2012 article on Stephan Hermlin, many East German authors functioned ‘nicht nur als Auftragsdichter, sondern zugleich auch als kritische intellektuelle Instanzen mit einer gewissen Autonomie, wie sie nirgendwo sonst im öffentlichen Leben zu finden waren’.<sup>64</sup> He employs the notion of the public intellectual who uses the concept of ‘Öffentlichkeit’ in its normative Habermasian sense, against and as a challenge to the authoritarian state. Bathrick thus challenges scholars like Patricia A. Herminghouse, who contest the applicability of the notion of the public sphere for the GDR because of its presumed lack of openness.<sup>65</sup> Bathrick’s approach is promising, but he supposes intellectuals developed such a role only from the 1960s onwards.<sup>66</sup> As the case studies in this thesis show, the concept of the public intellectual, and the simultaneity of criticism and compliance, can also be applied to the situation of East German intellectuals before 1960. Involvement in the public spheres did not mean capitulation to the authoritarian regime, but something more ambiguous and dynamic, as I will set out in the following paragraphs.

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<sup>64</sup> Bathrick, ‘Der Widerstand der Ästhetik’, p. 35.

<sup>65</sup> Patricia A. Herminghouse argues that ‘invoking the term “public sphere” for the GDR is ‘a cynical or, at best, unconscionable stretching of the normative dimensions of Habermas’ term’. See Patricia A. Herminghouse, ‘Literature as “Ersatzöffentlichkeit”? Censorship and the Displacement of Public Discourse in the GDR’, *German Studies Review*, 17 (1994), ‘Totalitäre Herrschaft – totalitäres Erbe’, 85-99 (p. 85).

<sup>66</sup> Bathrick, ‘Der Widerstand der Ästhetik’, p. 34.

East Germany was characterised by a plurality of interlinked public spheres that never entirely shut down,<sup>67</sup> but in which a range of connected public discourses,<sup>68</sup> underwent continuous change influenced by various factors.<sup>69</sup> Dominant discourses, and even official Party or government discourses, were therefore never consistent. Even if Party and government measures constrained possibilities of expression considerably, and to varying degrees over time, they could never completely prevent the utterance of divergent views and counter-arguments. Indeed, many arguments and narrative patterns were not simply divergent or oppositional, but more ambiguous; most utterances contained a mixture of elements which may have had affirmative and subversive effects, depending on the contexts of speech. In the public spheres, single discourses interplay in a process, which continuously changes the consensus, as well as each individual's position in relation to this consensus. Neuhaus argues that because such individuals are interested in improving their position, they seek to influence this process of change, which in turn contributes to the consolidation of power relations.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. Marc Silberman, 'Problematizing the "Socialist Public Sphere": Concepts and Consequences', in *What Remains? East German Culture and the Postwar Republic*, ed. by Marc Silberman (Washington: AICGS, 1997), pp. 1-37 (p. 7).

<sup>68</sup> See Neuhaus, 'Probleme des literarischen Diskurses über die DDR', p. 320.

<sup>69</sup> In research on East German opposition groups in the 1980s, the formation of a 'zweite Öffentlichkeit' or 'Teilöffentlichkeiten' have been proposed (e.g. Ray Rühle, *Entstehung von politischer Öffentlichkeit in der DDR in den 1980er Jahren am Beispiel von Leipzig* (Münster: Lit-Verlag, 2003), p. 13). Whereas these public spheres are supposed to stand apart from and to be a challenge to the official 'Öffentlichkeit' of the state, my thesis supposes a range of public spheres which have a more complex relationship to state power: authority seeks to control discourses in the public spheres, and employs them to gain legitimacy, but these discourses could not exist without participation from below. Moreover, these public spheres could function to consolidate and simultaneously to challenge power. See for another example of this application of 'Teilöffentlichkeiten' to 1980s opposition groups Kathleen Kanter, 'Blockierte Potentiale: Meinungsbildungsprozesse in der DDR der achtziger Jahre', in *Germany after Unification: Coming to Terms with the Recent Past*, ed. by Gert-Joachim Glaeßner (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), pp. 39-66.

<sup>70</sup> Neuhaus, 'Probleme des literarischen Diskurses über die DDR', pp. 320-321.

My thesis therefore explores the ways in which socialist intellectuals positioned themselves in cultural, political, and aesthetic debates and narratives in the public spheres of the early GDR. It investigates the opportunities they had and the strategies they used to put forward arguments and narratives, and how these views related to both the official policies enforced by the ruling communist Party SED and how they consolidated or challenged the dominant consensus. In his 1995 *The Powers of Speech*, Bathrick argues that ‘the problem of ideological or political orientation’ for writers in the GDR

was not merely a question concerning one’s belief in part or all of a philosophical system. Rather, it was a matter of whether one wished to speak publicly or not and how one chose to situate oneself in doing so. For to ‘speak’ meant to function within the paradigms of a carefully delineated and heavily encoded linguistic network and to have internalized the dominant narrative patterns that ensured meaning as part of the life world.<sup>71</sup>

Speaking in the East German public spheres thus entailed an affirmation of dominant discourses, but also the opportunity to take a position. In order for an ideology or discourse to become dominant, it must be constituted by individual subjects who actively participate in its narrative patterns. Since discourses are dynamic, these codes and rules are in constant development and subject to change, which may be influenced by speaking subjects.

In their 1994 response to the prevailing denunciations of East German intellectuals, Rainer Land and Ralf Possekkel define the intellectual as a person who participates in a discourse in order to create, to generate new narratives.

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<sup>71</sup> Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech*, p. 17.

They argue that such narratives constitute and develop the discourse in which they are constructed, and contend that within the statements of intellectuals, discursive rules are negotiated ‘im Wechselspiel der Argumente’.<sup>72</sup> Their compelling book is intended as a pilot study for further research on discourses of intellectuals in East Germany. My investigation takes up their hypothesis and goes beyond their more general analysis, as it focuses on three individual intellectuals in a set period of time.

Apart from Land & Possekel and Bathrick, several other scholars have proposed discourse analytical approaches to GDR culture.<sup>73</sup> But such studies are often, to varying extents, informed by models presenting the relationship between intellectuals and politics in a top-down way. Bogdal even presents literary discourse as a static and closed space without room to think and speak outside of the frameworks set by the Party: ‘Ausschluss, Auftrag und Nivellierung verhindern die Entstehung differenzierter kultureller Lebensstile, aus denen heraus Literatur sich immer wieder erneuert.’<sup>74</sup> Bogdal thus denies the possibility even of development of new literature in the GDR of the 1950s.

Marie-Elisabeth Räkel’s 2001 analysis of the place of Nazism in SED cultural-political discourses during the first post-war decade is less dismissive. She rightly distinguishes between the official interpretation of Nazism as the specific German version of fascism, which in turn is the most reactionary form of capitalism, and parallel voices of Party functionaries who regarded Nazism as a phenomenon so out of the ordinary that it cannot be interpreted within

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<sup>72</sup> Land & Possekel, *Namenlose Stimmen waren uns voraus*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>73</sup> For instance, Hyunseon Lee analyses the discursive ritual of the confession in a wide range of East German literature. See Hyunseon Lee, *Geständniszwang und ‘Wahrheit des Charakters’ in der Literatur der DDR: Diskuranalytische Fallstudien* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000).

<sup>74</sup> Bogdal, ‘Alles nach Plan, alles im Griff’, p. 144.

existing analytical frameworks.<sup>75</sup> In contradiction to her own differentiations with regard to the assessment of Nazism, she presents Party discourses in general as singular and ‘verabsolutierend’, leaving no space for ‘Reformen, Anpassungen oder Kompromisse’.<sup>76</sup> Räkel focuses on leading cultural functionaries of the SED; an inclusion of the positions of (Party) intellectuals would lead to a more diverse image of these discourses.

Peter Davies (2000) has a clear intention to differentiate, but implicitly relies on top-down models. He argues rightly that in order to understand the situation of writers in East Germany, ‘we need to distance ourselves from a view which sees Marxist-Leninist rhetoric *simply* as a means of control “from above”’. He proposes regarding it instead ‘as a dynamic discursive system in which the individual’s self-understanding is formed in a continuing dialectical relationship with centres of power’, but contends that the authorities ‘reserve themselves the right to define meanings, categories and boundaries’.<sup>77</sup> The Party leadership indeed sought to keep discourses under tight control and had the physical power to impose views or prevent certain utterances, but this does not mean that intellectuals had no capacity to intervene. Davies supposes that they merely experienced their identification with SED ideology as ‘an act of free will’.<sup>78</sup> This implies an ideological system dominating individuals by making them believe they voluntarily took part in it. I contend that intellectuals were active participants in the public spheres, even if those in political power set limits to public discourses and took measures to contain their inherent

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<sup>75</sup> Marie-Elisabeth Räkel, ‘Der Nationalsozialismus im kulturpolitischen Diskurs der SED, 1946-1956’, in *After the GDR: New Perspectives on the Old GDR and the Young Länder*, ed. by Laurence McFall & Lothar Probst (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 29-46 (pp. 31-32).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>77</sup> Davies, *Divided Loyalties*, p. 51. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

dynamic. Indeed, the uneven distribution of power between Party functionaries and intellectuals clearly limited intellectuals' possibilities. Loest for instance was finally sent to prison for his public interventions in 1956-1957. On a different level, the production of Hacks's play *Die Sorgen und die Macht* was discontinued in 1959. Both Loest and Hacks had no equivalent means of response. In this uneven power relationship, intellectuals' potential to contribute to shaping discourses is dependent on institutionalised and encoded discursive procedures, conventions and regulations which allocate different subjects different roles with different degrees of influence.

As argued above, the ruling Party did not produce a single, monolithic discourse. Party discourses were ambivalent, as Land & Possekel point out: on the one hand, such discourses functioned to legitimise Party rule as it stood, but on the other they served to reform this rule to advance historical progress.<sup>79</sup> Therefore the Party leadership took measures to contain the reformist element: participation in the discourse was connected to Party discipline and a prohibition on forming fractions. These procedures were supposed to keep the reformist inclination of such discourses in check. The intellectual opposition of 1956 and its repression can serve to illustrate this point.<sup>80</sup> As Land & Possekel argue, such measures were able to contain the influence of the 'reformerischen Moment' of Party discourses, but not eradicate it. Reformist elements remained ingrained within the discourses of the Party itself.<sup>81</sup> There is hence no dualism of critical and legitimising discourses. Instead, both effects can be included in one single act of speech in the ambiguous discourses within the Party. It would

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<sup>79</sup> Land & Possekel, *Namenlose Stimmen waren uns voraus*, p. 85.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Dieter Schiller, *Der verweigerte Dialog: Zum Verhältnis von Parteiführung der SED und Schriftstellern im Krisenjahr 1956* (Berlin: Dietz, 2003).

<sup>81</sup> Land & Possekel, *Namenlose Stimmen waren uns voraus*, p. 85.



therefore be an oversimplification to suggest a monolithic, inflexible discourse or ideology which intellectuals could only endorse or reject.

### 3.3 Antifascism as ideology and discourse

The top-down models criticised in this thesis rely on such rigid notions of ideology. Terry Eagleton criticises the notion of ideology as a ‘schematic, inflexible way of seeing the world’, which became paradigmatic in the US during the Cold War, where it was ascribed to the communist system and juxtaposed to a perceived pragmatism in the West.<sup>82</sup> Whereas this pragmatism was an ideological construct in itself, such notions of ideology keep influencing totalitarianist models of socialist societies like East Germany.

While assuming they are speaking from an ideology-free place, these models also employ a traditional Marxist notion of ideology as false consciousness or a false representation of reality, used by the state to keep its subordinates in check. As Jarausch notes, totalitarianism models use this particular notion of ideology to explain conformity. Intellectuals are assumed to be especially vulnerable to seduction by ideology. Jarausch criticises the way in which this kind of theory reduces ideology to propaganda, an instrument to be moulded by state power. Whereas he is right to note that ideology is not confined to the state, he still associates ideology with ‘totalitarian’ political beliefs as opposed to an apparently ideology-free ‘democracy’. His perspective is still heavily determined by top-down schemes of the way in which ideology works.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 4.

<sup>83</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch, ‘Die Versuchung des Totalitären: Intellektuelle, Diktatur und Demokratie’, in *Rot = Braun? Nationalsozialismus und Stalinismus bei Brecht und Zeitgenossen*, ed. by Therese Hörnigk & Alexander Stephan (Berlin: Theater der Zeit & Literaturforum im Brecht-Haus, 2000), pp. 25-46 (p. 35).

Following Eagleton, this thesis instead proposes to regard ideologies as political discourses.<sup>84</sup> Ideologies are not restricted to ‘dominant forces’,<sup>85</sup> but can serve to consolidate uneven power relationships. When ideology is language, it is also narrative, practice, ritual, and institutionalised.<sup>86</sup> Antifascism, a dominant narrative in the East German public spheres of the 1950s,<sup>87</sup> can serve to exemplify this notion of how ideology works.

In the context of denunciatory discourses since 1990, the notion that antifascism was prescribed by the Party (‘verordneter Antifaschismus’<sup>88</sup>) became a focal point of struggles over the legitimacy of the GDR.<sup>89</sup> Considering the appeal of the ‘legend of the good beginning’ for those who view the GDR in a positive light,<sup>90</sup> antifascism as a favourable characteristic of the early GDR became the target of an ‘unproduktive Polemik’ from their opponents.<sup>91</sup> In their top-down models, antifascism has been described as a ‘loyalty trap’,<sup>92</sup> or a mere instrument of ‘Diktaturdurchsetzung’.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Eagleton, *Ideology*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>86</sup> John B. Thompson resists ‘the view that ideology is pure *illusion*, an inverted or distorted image of what is “real”’, because ‘once we recognize that ideology operates through language and that language is a medium of social action, we must also acknowledge that ideology is partially constitutive of what, in our societies, “is real”’. See John B. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), p. 5.

<sup>87</sup> Simone Barck, ‘Fragmentarisches zur Literatur’, in *Die DDR im Rückblick: Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft, Kultur*, ed. by Helga Schultz & Hans-Jürgen Wagener (Berlin: Links, 2007), pp. 303-322 (p. 314).

<sup>88</sup> This delegitimising notion, coined by Ralph Giordano in 1987, was widespread in denunciatory discourses on the GDR after 1990. See Helmut Peitsch, “‘Verordneter Antifaschismus’: 1949 “in die Scham gezwungen” (Heuss), 1989 von der Scham befreit?’, in *1949/1989: Cultural Perspectives on Division and Unity in East and West*, ed. by Clare Flanagan & Stuart Taberner (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 1-26 (p. 6).

<sup>89</sup> An example of the top-down perspective on antifascism as being prescribed, in 2001 Emmerich speaks of ‘das zentrale Tabu des verordneten DDR-Antifaschismus als Staatsdoktrin und Lebenslüge zugleich’. See 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 McFall & Lothar Probst (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 3-28 (p. 11).

<sup>90</sup> Jarausch, ‘Beyond Uniformity’, p. 4.

<sup>91</sup> Christoph Classen, *Faschismus und Antifaschismus: Die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit im ostdeutschen Hörfunk (1945-1953)* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2004), pp. 12-13.

<sup>92</sup> Emmerich, ‘German Writers as Intellectuals’, p. 50.

It is true that antifascism was part of official Party and state doctrines, but the notion that it was prescribed and merely an instrument of those in political power narrows antifascism down to official (dogmatic) usage. The regime used antifascism as a mechanism to exclude opponents from the public debate: it presented itself as the champion of antifascism, which linked fascism to capitalism,<sup>94</sup> branding opposition automatically as fascist.<sup>95</sup> Connecting capitalism to fascism, the antifascist ‘foundational narrative’<sup>96</sup> presented socialism as the sole guarantee against a renewed fascist rule and hence as the safeguard of peace. The FRG’s apparent failure to break with Nazism served in this argument to debunk the West German state as the stronghold of the fascist restoration.<sup>97</sup> But, as Christoph Classen argues, antifascism was more than just a ‘Herrschaftstechnik’. To recognise that it was ‘auch Ausdruck authentischen Empfindens’ is essential to understanding the success of antifascism as ‘Herrschaftslegitimation’, he claims.<sup>98</sup>

The top-down perspective on East German antifascism fails to recognise how strongly it was supported by intellectuals, or to understand the complexity and variety of the numerous antifascist narratives promulgated during the 1950s and 1960s, as outlined by Simone Barck’s 2003 exploration of antifascist literature in these decades.<sup>99</sup> Research on East German

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<sup>93</sup> e.g. Beatrice de Graaf, ‘Hitler was een West-Duitser: Antifascisme en slachtofferschap in de DDR’, in *Duitsers als Slachtoffers: Einde van een Taboe?*, ed. by Patrick Dassen, Ton Nijhuis & Krijn Thijs (Amsterdam: Duitsland Instituut & Mets en Schilt, 2007), pp. 217-255 (p. 221).

<sup>94</sup> Räkel, ‘Der Nationalsozialismus im kulturpolitischen Diskurs der SED’, p. 31.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Emmerich, ‘Deutsche Intellektuelle: was nun?’, p. 10.

<sup>96</sup> Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech*, p. 17.

<sup>97</sup> Jürgen Danyel, ‘Wer sind wir wieder? Das doppelte Deutschland in den fünfziger Jahren’, *Argonautenschiff: Jahrbuch der Anna-Seghers-Gesellschaft*, 8 (1999), 243-254 (p. 245).

<sup>98</sup> Christoph Classen, ‘Feindbild Faschismus: Zum Doppelcharakter einer Gegnerkategorie in der frühen DDR’, in *Unsere Feinde: Konstruktionen des Anderen im Sozialismus*, ed. by Silke Satjukow & Rainer Gries (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2004), pp. 127-148 (p. 130).

<sup>99</sup> Simone Barck, *Antifa-Geschichte(n): Eine literarische Spurensuche in der DDR der 1950er und 1960er Jahre* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2003).

antifascism should focus on the ways in which intellectuals constructed the narratives of this movement, and the more complex ways in which this participation in antifascism related to their attitudes towards GDR socialism.

Loest's 2007 recollection of the dedication to GDR antifascism shared by his group of friends in the mid-1950s, serves to illustrate the significance of antifascism for the individuals who participated in it. In his account of the events that led to his detention in 1957, *Prozesskosten*, he writes fifty years after the event:

Sie waren allesamt Genossen, verheiratet, Fußball- und Skatfreunde, ehrgeizig und fleißig. Fast alle waren Hitlerjugendführer und noch ein oder zwei Jahre lang Soldat gewesen. [...] Heute geht die Rede, in der DDR sei Antifaschismus 'verordnet' gewesen. Dessen bedürften L.[oest] und seine Freunde nicht. [...] Diese Junggenossen gingen in sich, die Scham, bei der Hitlerei mitgetan zu haben, bildete ein Gutteil ihrer Moral und ihrer Kraft.<sup>100</sup>

In Loest's view, the shared experiences of Nazism and their moral implications for the 1950s – shame and guilt – generated a common political outlook among these 'Genossen', by which these young men identified with antifascism, which in turn contributed to their dedication as communist activists. In their attempt to overcome Nazism, intellectuals (and others) participated in the multi-faceted and changing antifascist movement, and entered a space in which antifascism was linked to GDR socialism without necessarily identifying the

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<sup>100</sup> Erich Loest, *Prozesskosten: Bericht* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2007), p. 21.

two. Antifascism was not just ‘verordnet’, it was a conviction that came as much from the intellectuals themselves.

#### 4. The 1950s: debates, events, stages

This thesis focuses on the 1950s, a decade marked by accelerated and tense cultural, social and political developments in East Germany. Michael Lemke calls this decade ‘außerordentlich dynamische’.<sup>101</sup> East Germany underwent a socialist transformation which, as Ross argues, was ‘fraught with difficulties, disorientation and inauspicious legacies from the past’.<sup>102</sup> The young GDR went through major political crises with the purges around 1950, the June uprising of 1953, and in 1956, when tensions between critical intellectuals and the Party leadership surfaced at the Fourth Writers’ Congress in January, and reformist communists raised their opposition in the wake of the Twentieth Party Congress of the Soviet Union in February.<sup>103</sup> Without attempting to present a comprehensive picture, this section sets out a number of key political and cultural debates, events and policies that impinged on the positions taken by intellectuals in East Germany during the 1950s.

##### 4.1 Cold War and German division

The border dividing Germany into two states since 1949, was also the front line of the Cold War. The official Soviet vision of the conflict, the theory of

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<sup>101</sup> Michael Lemke, ‘Die fünfziger Jahre: Aufbau und Krisen in der DDR’, in *Bilanz und Perspektiven der DDR-Forschung*, ed. by Rainer Eppelmann, Bernd Faulenbach & Ulrich Mählert (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003), pp. 53-59 (p. 53).

<sup>102</sup> Corey Ross, *Constructing Socialism at the Grass-Roots: The Transformation of East Germany, 1945-65* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. xi.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Guntolf Herzberg, *Anpassung und Aufbegehren: Die Intelligenz der DDR in den Krisenjahren 1956/58* (Berlin: Links, 2006).

‘two irreconcilable “camps”’,<sup>104</sup> devised by Stalin’s secretary Andrei Zhdanov in 1947, presented the extreme tensions between East and West, the perils of which were soon demonstrated by the Korean War (1950-1953), as a confrontation between progress and reaction.

The two German states drifted further apart during the early 1950s: each building distinct economic systems, even before the GDR announced the start of the construction of socialism in 1952.<sup>105</sup> The announcement was an official recognition that the GDR was constructing a separate economic system, which must be seen in connection with the Western rejection of the Stalin Note of March 1952. After the Soviet initiative for a united, neutral Germany stalled, the GDR embarked on a path towards sovereignty in the eyes of the Soviet Union, which it gained officially in March 1954.<sup>106</sup> Both German states installed armies in 1955-1956, joining the military alliances of their respective blocks.<sup>107</sup> At the same time, the relationship between the two was characterised by a tension between ‘Verflechtung’ and ‘Abgrenzung’,<sup>108</sup> by exchange, rivalries, and influences.<sup>109</sup> Thomas Ahbe writes that ‘both German states sought to establish legitimacy through a distorted image of their Western/Eastern counterpart’.<sup>110</sup> As Monika Gibas argues, the image of the

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<sup>104</sup> Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Heinemann, 2005), p. 143.

<sup>105</sup> Hermann Weber, *Geschichte der DDR* (Erfstadt: area, 2004), p. 196.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

<sup>107</sup> Corey Ross, ‘Protecting the Accomplishments of Socialism? The (Re) Militarisation of Life in the German Democratic Republic’, in *The Workers’ and Peasants’ State: Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht*, ed. by Patrick Major & Jonathan Osmond (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 78-93 (p. 79); see also Weber, *Geschichte der DDR*, p. 237.

<sup>108</sup> See Christoph Kleßmann, *Arbeiter im ‘Arbeiterstaat’ DDR: Deutsche Traditionen, sowjetisches Modell, westdeutsches Magnetfeld (1945 bis 1971)*, *Geschichte der Arbeiter und der Arbeiterbewegung in Deutschland seit dem Ende des 18. Jahrhundert*, 14 (Bonn: Dietz, 2007), p. 14.

<sup>109</sup> Udo Wengst & Hermann Wentker, ‘Einleitung’, in *Das doppelte Deutschland: 40 Jahre Systemkonkurrenz: Eine Veröffentlichung des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte*, ed. by Udo Wengst & Hermann Wentker (Berlin: Links, 2008), pp. 7-14 (p. 12).

<sup>110</sup> Ahbe, ‘Two Rival States and Two Competing Master Narratives’, p. 221.

FRG figured from the onset as ‘Projektionsfläche und Kontrastfolie, auf welcher das Selbstbild der DDR entwickelt wurde’.<sup>111</sup> The interconnectedness of the two German states means that no aspect of the history of the GDR can be analysed without considering its relationship with and positioning towards the FRG.<sup>112</sup> Therefore this thesis also analyses the ways in which East German intellectuals reflected political and cultural developments in West Germany in their literary, aesthetic and political publications, and the imagery and narratives of the FRG they constructed.

For both states, as Clare Flanagan writes, ‘unity and division were features of their propaganda campaigns against the other bloc’.<sup>113</sup> As the FRG’s virulent anticommunism permeated its entire political culture, culminating in the 1956 prohibition of the communist party KPD,<sup>114</sup> in this heyday of the Cold War, East German propaganda pounced on the opportunity to denounce the FRG as ‘Bonner Ultras’ and servants of the US American ‘Dollarimperialismus’.<sup>115</sup>

The FRG was additionally denounced for the extent to which its political culture was supposed to be defined by continuities to Nazi Germany. Axel Schildt and Detlef Siegfried point out ‘die immer schamlosere Rehabilitierung einstiger NS-Größen und die Verweigerung einer ehrlichen

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<sup>111</sup> Monika Gibas, “‘Bonner Ultras’, “Kriegstreiber” und Schlotbarone”: Die Bundesrepublik als Feindbild der DDR in den fünfziger Jahren’, in *Unsere Feinde: Konstruktionen des Anderen im Sozialismus*, ed. by Silke Satjukow & Rainer Gries (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2004), pp. 75-106 (p. 76).

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Christoph Kleßmann, ‘Verflechtung und Abgrenzung: Aspekte der geteilten und zusammengehörigen deutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte’, in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 29-30/1993, p. 30.

<sup>113</sup> Clare Flanagan, ‘1949: Writers and the Loss of National Unity’, in *1949/1989: Cultural Perspectives on Division and Unity in East and West*, ed. by Clare Flanagan & Stuart Taberner (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 43-57 (p. 46).

<sup>114</sup> See Christoph Kleßmann, *Zwei Staaten, eine Nation: Deutsche Geschichte 1955-1970* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1988), p. 59.

<sup>115</sup> Danyel, ‘Wer sind wir wieder?’, p. 245.

Auseinandersetzung mit den deutschen Verbrechen'.<sup>116</sup> During the 1950s, a large number of books by former high-ranking Nazis were published, which spread a discourse of 'Verharmlosung', 'Minimierung des Täterkreises', claims of 'Nicht-gewusst-Haben' and a 'Rückzug auf die Position des Befehlsempfängers'.<sup>117</sup> This apparent failure to break with Nazism is decisive in understanding the appeal of antifascism as proclaimed by the GDR.

The Holocaust and other Nazi crimes, and the presence of perpetrators and victims impacted on the East German public spheres also in the form of mourning, grief and mistrust of compatriots, as well as questions of moral responsibility and guilt. When official discourses accepted Comintern's 1933 definition of fascism as the most reactionary form of capitalism, and regarded the German people as victims of the Nazis persisting in the FRG,<sup>118</sup> this did not mean a failure to confront questions of responsibility and guilt. As Helmut Peitsch shows, the cultural functionary Alexander Abusch's *Irrweg einer Nation* (1946) differentiated between the socio-economic factors contributing to fascism and individuals' morally assessable behaviour. In line with KPD statements, Abusch wrote that the German working-class movement shared guilt as it had failed to prevent Nazi crimes committed in Germany's name.<sup>119</sup>

#### 4.2 Crises and authoritarianism in the GDR

In 1949, the SED decided to become a 'Partei neuen Typus', i.e. to accept a centralised structure of command by the Politburo under Walter Ulbricht,

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<sup>116</sup> Axel Schildt & Detlef Siegfried, *Deutsche Kulturgeschichte: Die Bundesrepublik – 1945 bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: Hanser, 2009), p. 133.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>118</sup> See Robert G. Moeller, 'The Politics of the Past in the 1950s: Rhetorics of Victimisation in East and West Germany', in *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany*, ed. by Bill Niven (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 26-42.

<sup>119</sup> Peitsch, *Nachkriegsliteratur*, p. 88.



which became the centre of power for the newly established state. Soon after, the Party started the so-called ‘Säuberung’ of its ranks. The Zentrale Parteikontrollkommission (ZPKK) was installed to purge the Party of Social Democrats who stuck to their old political allegiance, and of communists suspected of plotting against the Party. Especially suspicious groups were Party members of a non-proletarian class background and former ‘Westemigranten’.<sup>120</sup> Both groups had a relatively high percentage of Jews, and the denunciations were part of a wave of purges going through the communist Parties of Eastern Europe in the context of the show trials in Budapest against László Rajk (1949/1950) and in Prague against Rudolf Slánsky (1951/1952), both of which had strong anti-Semitic undertones.<sup>121</sup> This was also the case in East Germany in 1950, where Paul Merker – himself not a Jew – was accused of being a Zionist agent, ousted from the SED leadership and imprisoned in connection to the Slánsky trial.<sup>122</sup> Many returnees from Western exile, such as Herzfelde, came under scrutiny for connections to Noel Field, the US American communist who had helped many of them flee from Europe when the Nazis marched into France and who was now accused of having recruited Rajk, Slánsky and others as agents for the CIA.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Mario Keßler, *Die SED und die Juden: Zwischen Repression und Toleranz: Politische Entwicklungen bis 1967* (Berlin: Akademie, 1995), pp. 66-67.

<sup>121</sup> In his diary, the Jewish writer living in East Berlin Alfred Kantorowicz recorded his astonishment by the anti-Semitic tone of the trial against Slánsky in November 1952. See Deborah Vietor-Engländer, ‘Résistance, Restauration und deutsch-jüdische West-Remigranten: Alfred Kantorowicz’s Schauspiel *Die Verbündeten* in der DDR’, in *Dislocation and Reorientation: Exile, Division and the End of Communism in German Culture and Politics: In Honour of Ian Wallace*, ed. by Axel Goodbody, Pól Ó Dochartaigh & Dennis Tate (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 153-166 (p. 163).

<sup>122</sup> Lothar Mertens, *Davidstern unter Hammer und Zirkel: Die Jüdischen Gemeinden in der SBZ/DDR und ihre Behandlung durch Partei und Staat 1945-1990* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1997), p. 319.

<sup>123</sup> Karin Hartewig, *Zurückgekehrt: Die Geschichte der jüdischen Kommunisten in der DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau 2000), p. 321.

The five-year plan of 1950 and the programme of the construction of socialism, announced in 1952, often described as the introduction of Stalinism in East Germany,<sup>124</sup> led to such economic problems that on 2 June 1953 the new Soviet leadership demanded reducing the pace of construction in order to avoid unrest and further moving away of people to the West. Following the Soviet demand, the SED leadership announced the 'neue Kurs' on 11 June, to alleviate discontents with their economic policy. But the increase in production norms, opposed by many labourers, remained in place.<sup>125</sup> Six days later, on 17 June, a strike swept across the country, which was suppressed violently with the help of Soviet tanks.

Historians writing from a top-down perspective emphasise intellectuals' complicity with the regime in denouncing the uprising and patronising the striking workers.<sup>126</sup> Intellectuals allegedly supported the official version of the events, which regarded the strike as the work of fascist agents-provocateurs, and articles by writers such as Loest seem to support this view.<sup>127</sup> The reaction of writers like Loest was more complex and ambiguous:

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<sup>124</sup> e.g. Weber, *Geschichte der DDR*, p. 212.

<sup>125</sup> Christoph Kleßmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung: Deutsche Geschichte 1945-1955* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1991), p. 278.

<sup>126</sup> e.g. Erhart Neubert, 'Der 17. Juni zwischen Verdammung und Verdrängung in Politik, Gesellschaft und Literatur', in *Die abgeschnittene Revolution: Der 17. Juni 1953 in der deutschen Geschichte*, ed. by Hans-Joachim Veen (Cologne: Böhlau, 2004), pp. 129-158; Bernd Eisenfeld, Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk & Erhart Neubert, *Die verdrängte Revolution: Der Platz des 17. Juni 1953 in der deutschen Geschichte* (Bremen: Temmen, 2004), p. 598; Hubertus Knabe, *17. Juni 1953: Ein deutscher Aufstand* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2004), pp. 259-260.

<sup>127</sup> See Erich Loest, 'Mit Provokateuren wird nicht diskutiert!', *Neues Deutschland*, 21 June 1953, p. 4.

as the cases of Herzfelde and particularly Loest show, intellectuals also made substantial criticisms of the regime in the aftermath of the uprising.<sup>128</sup>

The SED leadership around General Secretary Ulbricht was consolidated by the suppression of the uprising, which was followed by a purge of critics within the Party ranks.<sup>129</sup> The next challenge to its power came in 1956. Nikita Khrushchev's revelations of the atrocities committed under Stalin, in his secret speech at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Soviet Union in February, left the Party leadership confused, unleashing new power struggles.<sup>130</sup> The resulting uncertainty about the prevalent Party line gave new momentum to reform socialist positions in the Party. In the period between Khrushchev's speech and the suppression of the Hungarian Uprising in November, a space opened up for reformist intellectuals. They published critical articles condemning Ulbricht's Stalinism,<sup>131</sup> or formed circles to discuss the consequences of Khrushchev's speech for the GDR. Most prominently, a group formed around the philosopher Wolfgang Harich. Backed by culture minister Becher, the Harich group met weekly at the Aufbau-Verlag.<sup>132</sup> After the supposed counter-revolution in Hungary was crushed by the Soviet army, setting strict limits to de-Stalinisation, members of this group,

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<sup>128</sup> In the controversial case of Bertolt Brecht's attitude in relation to the June uprising, Patrick Harkin (2011) similarly calls for a reassessment of the 'common view that Brecht was complicit in the SED's suppression of its own people'. Patrick Harkin, 'Brecht and 17 June 1953: A Reassessment', in *Brecht and the GDR: Politics, Culture, Posterity*, ed. by Laura Bradley & Karen Leeder, *Edinburgh German Yearbook*, 5 (Rochester: Camden House, 2011), pp. 83-102 (p. 83).

<sup>129</sup> Weber, *Geschichte der DDR*, pp. 226-227.

<sup>130</sup> Rüther, Günther, 'Greif zur Feder, Kumpel': *Schriftsteller, Literatur und Politik in der DDR 1949-1990* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1991), p. 77; Mario Frank, *Walter Ulbricht: Eine deutsche Biographie* (Berlin: Siedler, 2001), pp. 254-257.

<sup>131</sup> For instance Alfred Kantorowicz, 'Gewissen und Mahner des Volkes', in *Im 2. Drittel unseres Jahrhunderts: Illusionen, Irrtümer, Widersprüche, Einsichten, Voraussichten* (Cologne: Wissenschaft und Politik, 1967), pp. 148-153. Originally published in the *Berliner Zeitung* on 14 June 1956.

<sup>132</sup> Mittenzwei, *Die Intellektuellen*, p. 138.

including Harich and Aufbau's director Walter Janka, were imprisoned for their allegedly counter-revolutionary plans.

#### 4.3 Legitimacy

From the foundation of the GDR, its leadership promulgated a range of interlinked narratives on which the legitimacy of the state rested. Alongside the regime's appropriation of antifascism discussed above, the GDR sought legitimacy in its self-representation as a proletarian dictatorship, even if its Leninist self-understanding meant that the proletarians were governed by a small avant-garde Party.<sup>133</sup> The SED's claim to represent the working class became problematic after the strikes of June 1953, as the cases of Herzfelde and Loest will show.

A third legitimacy narrative combined the socialist, working-class outlook with a national claim. At its founding in 1949, the GDR proclaimed to be the true German national state – a claim which amounted to a clear rejection of the FRG. The West German state was accused of breaching national unity, which the GDR claimed to defend, for instance in its 1950 campaign under the slogan 'Deutsche an einen Tisch'.<sup>134</sup> The GDR officially regarded itself as the continuation of progressive currents in German history.<sup>135</sup> Throughout the 1950s, both states claimed to pursue national unity, and launched numerous initiatives to manifest this intent, yet, as Pól O'Dochartaigh argues, 'the measures taken on a daily basis [...] always prioritised other considerations'.<sup>136</sup> Despite such other priorities and shifting policies, the

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<sup>133</sup> Kleßmann, *Arbeiter im 'Arbeiterstaat' DDR*, p. 13.

<sup>134</sup> Kleßmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung*, p. 208.

<sup>135</sup> Mai, 'Staatsgründungsprozeß und nationale Frage', p. 35.

<sup>136</sup> Pól O'Dochartaigh, *Germany since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 37.

national claim and use of patriotic rhetoric remained a central aspect of SED discourses on the German nation and division, also after the announcement of the construction of socialism at the Second Party Congress in June 1952 following the Western rejection of Stalin's proposal of a neutralised unified Germany in the spring. Parallel to further block integration in the mid-1950s, from 1954 the newfound Ministry of Culture, led by the poet Johannes R. Becher, repeatedly signalled its intent to secure national unity on a cultural level.<sup>137</sup> These efforts stranded as Becher was sidelined in the wake of the 1956-1957 crisis.

The national narrative impinged on cultural public discourses as it resulted in the official propagation of the cultural heritage of the German *Klassik*, and contributed to the condemnation of modernism in art and literature as an expression of Western 'decadence' undermining national unity. The main authors of the *Weimarer Klassik*, Goethe and Schiller, were supposed to have defined the humanist values of the non-ruling, and hence still progressive bourgeoisie, which betrayed these values once it became the ruling class. By designating the working class as 'die einzig rechtmäßige kulturelle Erbin und zugleich Vollstreckerin des klassischen deutschen Humanismus',<sup>138</sup> only socialism was deemed able to fulfil the ideas of Goethe and Schiller.<sup>139</sup> The canonisation of the *Klassik* thus functioned to legitimise the East German state by establishing it as the continuation of the 'humanistische Erbe' of the

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<sup>137</sup> Jens-Fietje Dwars, *Johannes R. Becher: Triumph und Verfall: Eine Biographie* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2003), pp. 217-218.

<sup>138</sup> Petra Weber, '1949/1955: Thomas Mann in Frankfurt, Stuttgart und Weimar: Umstrittenes kulturelles Erbe und deutsche Kulturnation', in *Das doppelte Deutschland: 40 Jahre Systemkonkurrenz: Eine Veröffentlichung des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte*, ed. by Udo Wengst & Hermann Wentker (Berlin: Links, 2008), pp. 35-63 (p. 36).

<sup>139</sup> Ingeborg Cleve, 'Weimarer Klassik in der DDR', in *Die DDR: Analysen eines aufgegebenen Staates*, ed. by Heiner Timmerman (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001), pp. 409-420 (p. 409).

*Klassik*.<sup>140</sup> The appropriation of the *Klassik* also ascribed to the GDR the characteristics of a *Kulturstaat*,<sup>141</sup> and underpinned the Party's *Bündnispolitik* towards bourgeois intellectuals.<sup>142</sup> In the context of the national claim of the GDR, the *Bündnispolitik* aimed to win over non-proletarian parts of society by appealing to the heritage of the *Klassik* and of bourgeois realism.

Moreover, the appropriation of the *Klassik* served as a counter-model to the FRG, where the supposedly progressive heritage was allegedly neglected. In the context of the emerging Cold War, GDR nationalism drew upon cultural discourses on bourgeois 'decadence' as they condemned Western influence in Germany, and alleged the undermining influence of Western art on the national consciousness of the masses.<sup>143</sup> Modernism, which was accused of neglecting the classical-humanist heritage, had no place in this legitimacy narrative.

#### 4.4 Cultural politics

Around 1950, significant changes took place in cultural policies: in the context of the so-called *antifaschistisch-demokratische* transitional phase, the SED's policy was to build an antifascist alliance across society to gain popular

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<sup>140</sup> See Lothar Ehrlich, Gunther Mai & Ingeborg Cleve, 'Weimarer Klassik in der Ära Ulbricht', in *Weimarer Klassik in der Ära Ulbricht*, ed. by Lothar Ehrlich & Gunther Mai (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000), pp. 7-31 (p. 8).

<sup>141</sup> Mai, 'Staatsgründungsprozeß und nationale Frage', p. 58.

<sup>142</sup> Gerd Dietrich, "'Die Goethepächter': Klassikmythos in der Politik der SED', in *Weimarer Klassik in der Ära Ulbricht*, ed. by Lothar Ehrlich & Gunther Mai (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000), pp. 151-174 (p. 154).

<sup>143</sup> In 1951, the poet and Party functionary Johannes R. Becher disqualified West Germany by alleging it was in a state of cultural decline, stating the 'zersetzende' influence of the works of authors like George Orwell and Aldous Huxley. See Johannes R. Becher, 'Wir wollen uns an einen Tisch setzen: Referat Johannes R. Bechers auf dem Ersten Gesamtdeutschen Kulturkongreß in Leipzig, 16. bis 19. Mai 1951, Auszug' in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED*, ed. by Elimar Schubbe (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1972), pp. 194-197 (pp. 194-196).

support. This *Bündnispolitik*, following from the *Volksfront* against fascism of the late 1930s, ruled that cultural orthodoxies, which gained the upper hand within the SED, were not yet systematically enforced in the wider cultural public spheres. But there is a development from vague threats such as those in Anton Ackermann's programmatic speech at the 1946 Kulturtagung and open hostility towards modernist or non-communist art and literature in the late 1940s.<sup>144</sup> In 1949, shortly before the establishment of the GDR, Party officials published essays condemning modernist art and literature as 'decadence'.<sup>145</sup> In doing so they followed the example set by Alexander Dymshiz in November 1948, when this cultural spokesman of the Soviet occupation force railed against 'the formalist direction in German art'.<sup>146</sup> The Soviets introduced cultural policies reliant on a particular conception of socialist realism, which derived from the high ranking Soviet Party functionary Andrei Zhdanov's interpretation at the 1934 First Congress of Soviet Writers in Moscow of Stalin's notion of writers as engineers of the human soul.<sup>147</sup> Stalin's notion, Zhdanov argued, obliged writers to portray reality in its revolutionary development.<sup>148</sup> At the congress, Zhdanov as well as Karl Radek and Maxim Gorki contrasted socialist realism with forms of modernism.<sup>149</sup> SED cultural

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<sup>144</sup> See Wilhelm Pieck & Anton Ackermann, *Unsere kulturpolitische Sendung: Reden auf der Ersten Zentralen Kulturtagung der Kommunistischen Partei Deutschlands vom 3. bis 5. Februar 1946* (Berlin: Verlag Neuer Weg, 1946), pp. 25-27.

<sup>145</sup> e.g. Fritz Erpenbeck, 'Formalismus und Dekadenz: Aufsatz, April 1949, Auszug', in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED*, pp. 109-115.

<sup>146</sup> Alexander Dymshiz, 'Über die formalistische Richtung in der deutschen Malerei', in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED*, pp. 97-103.

<sup>147</sup> Werner Mittenzwei remarks that the discussions at the 1934 Soviet Writers' Congress, interpreted socialist realism in various ways. Mittenzwei, *Die Intellektuellen*, p. 202.

<sup>148</sup> Andrej Zhdanov, 'Die Sowjetliteratur, die ideenreichste und fortschrittlichste Literatur der Welt', in *Sozialistische Realismuskonzeptionen: Dokumente zum I. Allunionskongress der Sowjetschriftsteller*, ed. by Hans-Jürgen Schmitt & Godehard Schramm (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp. 43-50 (p. 47).

<sup>149</sup> Günter Erbe, *Die verfemte Moderne: Die Auseinandersetzung mit dem 'Modernismus' in Kulturpolitik, Literaturwissenschaft und Literatur der DDR* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1993), p. 39. Radek used James Joyce as an example of modernism's destructive effects on

policies in the early 1950s implemented the particular Soviet interpretation of socialist realism as developed in the 1930s,<sup>150</sup> with its basic rules of partisanship, ‘Volksverbundenheit’, and socialist ‘Ideengehalt’.<sup>151</sup>

The Party decided to enforce its orthodox cultural policies in the wider public spheres at the Fifth Meeting of the Central Committee of the SED in March 1951, where it adopted a resolution announcing a ‘struggle against formalism and decadence’.<sup>152</sup> The resolution condemned ‘Formalisten’ such as expressionism and Dadaism, despised as the manifestation of ‘decadence’ in art and literature, and announced administrative measures against them.<sup>153</sup> To administer the cultural public spheres, the ‘Staatliche Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten’ and the ‘Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen’ were installed, again following the Soviet example.<sup>154</sup>

The formalism campaign was accompanied by the canonisation of a particular conception of socialist realism as *Aufbau* literature, in the context of the task set for art and literature in contributing to the construction of socialism, which was announced at the Second Party Congress in June 1952. Literature was to show the contemporaneous efforts, for instance in

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literature. Karl Radek, ‘Referat über die moderne Weltliteratur und die Aufgaben der proletarischen Kunst (14.8.1934)’, in *Sozialistische Realismuskonzeptionen: Dokumente zum I. Allunionskongress der Sowjetschriftsteller*, ed. by Hans-Jürgen Schmitt & Godehard Schramm (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp. 140-213 (pp. 203-206).

<sup>150</sup> Mittenzwei, *Die Intellektuellen*, pp. 202-203.

<sup>151</sup> Erbe, *Die verfemte Moderne*, p. 35.

<sup>152</sup> ‘Der Kampf gegen den Formalismus in Kunst und Literatur, für eine fortschrittliche deutsche Kultur: Entschließung des Zentralkomitees der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, angenommen auf der V. Tagung vom 15. bis 17. März 1951’, in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED*, pp. 178-186.

<sup>153</sup> Dieter Schlenstedt, ‘Doktrin und Dichtung im Widerstreit: Expressionismus im Literaturkanon der DDR’ in *Literaturgesellschaft DDR: Kanonkämpfe und ihre Geschichte(n)*, ed. by Birgit Dahlke, Martina Langermann & Thomas Taterka (Stuttgart & Weimar: Metzler, 2000), pp. 33-103 (pp. 54-55).

<sup>154</sup> Dagmar Buchbinder, ‘Die Staatliche Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten (1951-1953): Eine Kulturbehörde “neuen Typus”’, in *‘Die Eroberung der Kultur beginnt!’: Die Staatliche Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten der DDR (1951-1953) und die Kulturpolitik der SED*, ed. by Jochen Staadt (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 9-276 (p. 44).



collectivised industries (*Produktionsliteratur*), to secure a socialist future, and the threats posed to this by the allegedly imperialist West and its agents. To support the construction of socialism, writers were encouraged to observe it at its roots in factories, villages, collective farms, and other places.<sup>155</sup> Loest for instance visited and wrote about the ‘Arbeiter-und-Bauernfakultäten’ (educational institutions for young proletarian activists)<sup>156</sup> and the border guards who allegedly protected the socialist construction against the Western imperialist threat coming from the FRG.<sup>157</sup> The requirement for literature to be *gegenwartsbezogen*, brought about a problematic situation for literature dealing with the (recent) past, such as books about the traumas of Nazism and the war, as this subject area was deemed superfluous by the Party leadership in the *Aufbau* period.<sup>158</sup>

From 1951 onwards the conception of socialist realism as *Aufbau* literature became the norm, but it is important to note that the strong German tradition of Marxist aesthetic debate was much more diverse than this narrow Stalinist notion. Being far more than an imposition of the Soviet model, many of the cultural public discourses in East Germany drew upon the wider tradition of German Marxist aesthetic debates.<sup>159</sup> Even if the leadership put forward particular realism models, the consensus over what socialist realist art should entail was also informed by these debates. As the following chapters demonstrate, these debates would not only be constitutive of the aesthetic positions of the older intellectuals like Herzfelde, who fought over these issues

<sup>155</sup> Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, p. 139.

<sup>156</sup> Erich Loest, *Das Jahr der Prüfung: Roman* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1954).

<sup>157</sup> Erich Loest, ‘Dienst an der Grenze’, *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 1.2 (1953), 138-145.

<sup>158</sup> See Simone Barck, ‘Zum frühen Antifaschismus-Diskurs am Beispiel des VVN-Verlages’, in *Verwaltete Vergangenheit: Geschichtskultur und Herrschaftslegitimation in der DDR*, ed. by Martin Sabrow (Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsanstalt, 1997), pp. 259-292 (p. 288).

<sup>159</sup> See Glenn Jordan & Chris Weedon, *Cultural Politics: Class, Gender, Race and the Postmodern World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 93.

such as modernism and realism during Weimar and exile, but also of the positions of younger intellectuals like Hacks and his ally Heinar Kipphardt.

But official cultural policies were not monolithic, and did not form a closed system. As Gunther Mai argues, SED cultural policies were determined by the dilemmas between ‘Bündnisangebote’ to ‘bürgerlichen Kräfte’ or transformation to overcome bourgeois society, and between the implementation of Soviet norms or a national ‘Erbepolitik’.<sup>160</sup> Parallel to *Aufbau* literature, another version of socialist realism, based on the aesthetic ideas of Georg Lukács, would remain authoritative at least until 1956. His aesthetics condemned modernism and appropriated the cultural heritage of the *deutsche Klassik* and bourgeois realism of the nineteenth century as the norm for socialist realism.<sup>161</sup> Therefore his theories were well-suited to serve the *Bündnispolitik* objective of reaching out to bourgeois sections of society.<sup>162</sup>

Tensions between Party officials and writers over aesthetic policies rose in late 1955 and early 1956. In November 1955 the SED commission preparing the Fourth Writers’ Congress of January 1956, led by Deputy Minister for Culture Abusch, repeated the official doctrine of socialist realism as implemented around 1951: the working ‘Mensch’ had to be central to socialist realist literature. Abusch declared partisanship as a duty of literature,

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<sup>160</sup> Gunther Mai, ‘Staatsgründungsprozeß und nationale Frage als konstitutive Elemente der Kulturpolitik der SED’, in *Weimarer Klassik in der Ära Ulbricht*, ed. by Lothar Ehrlich & Gunther Mai (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000), pp. 33-60 (p. 34).

<sup>161</sup> Weber, ‘1949/1955: Thomas Mann in Frankfurt, Stuttgart und Weimar’, p. 47; Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, p. 120.

<sup>162</sup> See 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: edition text + kritik, 1991), pp. 34-42.

and cited Stalin's definition of writers as engineers of the human soul. The Politburo officially confirmed these theses.<sup>163</sup>

At the Fourth Writers' Congress in January 1956, writers protested against such orthodoxies in cultural policy. Stefan Heym had an argument with Ulbricht when he warned against judging works of literature on their political contents alone.<sup>164</sup> Anna Seghers and Lukács gave critical addresses. Seghers (whose text was delivered by Hermlin) questioned the requirement that literature should only be about the present socialist construction.<sup>165</sup>

*Schematismus* became a central and highly contested notion in the struggles over socialist realism in the lead-up to and during the 1956 crisis, especially at the Fourth Writers' Congress. Whereas all agreed in their dismissal of 'schematic' representations of reality, some intellectuals explicitly related such static or 'scholastic' literature to the prevailing Party policies of socialist realism. Seghers argued that the demand to depict reality, the transition to socialism, in a positive light, caused a general trend among authors to avoid the depiction of genuine conflict. Instead, she argued, they adhered to dogmas and 'Schablonen', which resulted in 'Schematismus' – effectively evading reality.<sup>166</sup> Seghers and others thus called for a more critical approach to reality than common in official cultural policies in the context of the construction of socialism. She and other intellectuals, among them Herzfelde, criticised the Party's harsh treatment of writers who supposedly diverged from the socialist realist doctrine, particularly when officials condemned such authors as

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<sup>163</sup> Dieter Schiller, *Hoffnung auf Tauwetter: Von der Kritikerkonferenz zum Schriftstellerkongreß (April 1955 bis Januar 1956)* (Berlin: Helle Panke, 2003), p. 27.

<sup>164</sup> See Schiller, *Der verweigerte Dialog*, pp. 11-13.

<sup>165</sup> Schiller, *Hoffnung auf Tauwetter*, p. 27.

<sup>166</sup> Anna Seghers, 'Der Anteil der Literatur an der Bewußtseinsbildung des Volkes: Hauptreferat auf dem IV. Deutschen Schriftstellerkongreß, 10. Januar 1956', in *IV. Deutscher Schriftstellerkongreß, Januar 1956: Protokoll Band 1* (Berlin: DSV, 1956), pp. 41-70 (p. 57).

‘decadent’.<sup>167</sup> Despite such opposition, Party functionaries refused to modify their definitions or abandon their use of the terms formalism and ‘decadence’.<sup>168</sup>

An important opponent of Party cultural policies was the literary scholar and Leipzig professor Hans Mayer. In a planned radio broadcast of November 1956, he criticised contemporaneous East German literature and called for a more positive reception of modernism to improve its quality.<sup>169</sup> The radio broadcast in which he was to make his argument was cancelled, but after the journal *Sonntag* published a transcript, the Party’s newspaper *Neues Deutschland* published a series of dismissive articles.<sup>170</sup>

The *Bündnispolitik* persisted until the aftermath of the 1956-1957 crisis. The late 1950s witnessed a turn towards more proletarian conceptions of socialist culture. Lukács fell from grace following his role in the Hungarian Uprising of 1956. His ally, Becher was sidelined because of his connections to Harich and Janka, and replaced by more orthodox cultural functionaries such as Abusch and Alfred Kurella, who returned from Soviet exile in 1954.<sup>171</sup> At the Fifth Party Congress of the SED in July 1958, Ulbricht called for the working class to occupy ‘die Höhen der Kultur’. The Bitterfelder Konferenz of April 1959 was an effort to put this proposal into practice, to continue

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<sup>167</sup> Cf. Schiller, *Der verweigerter Dialog*, p. 123.

<sup>168</sup> See Alfred Kurella, ‘Einflüsse der Dekadenz: Diskussionsrede Alfred Kurellas auf dem Ausspracheabend des Kulturbundes in Leipzig, Juli 1957, Wortlaut des im “Sonntag” veröffentlichten Auszugs’, in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED*, pp. 469-472.

<sup>169</sup> Hans Mayer, ‘Zur Gegenwartslage unserer Literatur: Vortrag von Prof. Hans Mayer, 28. November 1956: Auszug’, in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED*, pp. 449-450.

<sup>170</sup> Franziska Meyer, ‘The literary critic Hans Mayer: from West to East, from East to West’, in *German Writers and the Cold War 1945-61*, ed. by Rhys W. Williams, Stephen Parker & Colin Riordan, in collaboration with Helmut Peitsch (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 180-202 (pp. 191-192).

<sup>171</sup> See Jens-Fietje Dwars, *Johannes R. Becher: Triumph und Verfall: Eine Biographie* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2003), pp. 232-233.

literature's focus on the construction of socialism, and to stimulate the programme of 'schreibende Arbeiter'.<sup>172</sup> The Bitterfelder Konferenz was a turn towards a more proletarian culture, but also the continuation of cultural policies from the early 1950s, which promoted writers' internships in factories. In this context, the antifascist coalition-building function of the canonisation of the cultural heritage of the 'Klassik' and bourgeois realism changed. After 1956-1957, it functioned more to express national unity and fight American cultural influences and modernism.<sup>173</sup>

### 5. The generational paradigm

This section discusses the problematic concept of generation which is paradigmatic in a large body of research on East Germany since the 1990s, in spite of its problematic consequences: the generational paradigm presents belonging and sameness as natural and inevitable, overlooks differences among people of the same age, and obscures other issues, factors, and possible models of identification. In 1996, Karen Leeder critiques the extent to which generation has become part of the 'critical discourse' on the GDR, and calls it a 'suspect category; one which has never been comprehensively explained or examined'.<sup>174</sup> She remarks that applying the term 'obscured the diversity of political and poetic aspiration among young writers'.<sup>175</sup> According to Leeder, three problems arise when 'generation' is used to mark out pieces of literary history: the concept disregards continuities between generations, simultaneous

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<sup>172</sup> See Kleßmann, *Arbeiter im 'Arbeiterstaat' DDR*, p. 433.

<sup>173</sup> Wolfram Schlenker, *Das 'kulturelle Erbe' in der DDR: Gesellschaftliche Entwicklung und Kulturpolitik 1945-1965* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1977), pp. 73-74.

<sup>174</sup> Karen Leeder, *Breaking Boundaries: A New Generation of Poets in the GDR* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 4.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

developments of generations, and differences within one generation.<sup>176</sup>

Nevertheless, she goes on to examine and describe a group of East German poets in the 1980s as a generation, the 'Hineingeborenen', and contrasts them to earlier 'generations' – paradoxically in order to question the generalisations applied to them.<sup>177</sup>

As I argue in the next pages, the problems of the generational paradigm are not thoroughly reflected in most generational models that have been applied in various ways to various aspects of the history of the GDR. Attempts from the field of social history to identify generations in East Germany are especially problematic.<sup>178</sup> A 2006 article by Fulbrook exemplifies these difficulties. She conceives of three generations which came to full development in East Germany: the 'KZ-Generation' (born before the First World War), the 'Aufbau-Generation' (born between 1925 and 1935), and the 'Erste FDJ-Generation' (born in the 1950s). In order to do justice to those who do not fit in with this model, she adds two cohorts that were hindered in their advancement.<sup>179</sup> The labels Fulbrook applies to these generations reveal the blurring of historical experiences, social opportunities, and cultural and

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>178</sup> e.g. Bernd Lindner, 'Die Generation der Unberatenen: Zur Generationenfolge in der DDR und ihren strukturellen Konsequenzen für die Nachwendezeit' in *Die DDR aus generationengeschichtlicher Perspektive: Eine Inventur*, ed. by Annegret Schüle, Thomas Ahbe & Rainer Gries (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2006), pp. 93-112; Dorothee Wierling, *Geboren im Jahr Eins: Der Jahrgang 1949 in der DDR: Versuch einer Kollektivbiographie* (Berlin: Links, 2002).

<sup>179</sup> Mary Fulbrook, 'Generationen und Kohorten in der DDR: Protagonisten und Widersacher des DDR-Systems aus der Perspektive biographischer Daten', in *Die DDR aus generationengeschichtlicher Perspektive*, ed. by Annegret Schüle, Thomas Ahbe & Rainer Gries (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2006), pp. 113-130 (pp. 127-128). The two age groups that Fulbrook constructs were unable to form a generation are the 'Kinder des Dritten Reichs', and the group of persons who were young when the wall came down ('zweite FDJ-Generation'). The latter cohort acquired a generational consciousness only through the Wende, Fulbrook argues.

political attitudes, which is symptomatic of a discourse which presents these opportunities and attitudes as naturally given.<sup>180</sup>

In literary history, writers are often presented as representatives or embodiments of their 'generation'. Gudrun Schneider-Nehls (1997) for instance portrays Loest, Eberhard Koebel and Arnolt Bronnen as 'Generationsgestalten', in order to explore different possibilities of intellectual conduct in the twentieth century.<sup>181</sup> She thus implies that such conduct depends primarily on generationality, and that the particular ways in which Loest behaved are somehow representative for his age group.

Similarly problematic to Fulbrook's model from social history, is a 2001 analysis by Emmerich of intellectuals' positions in relation to what he calls the antifascist 'Gründungsmythos', which he presents in a generational model. As Fulbrook does for society in general, he presumes three generations of intellectuals, but emphasises different experiences from those proposed by Fulbrook: he argues that the first generation of intellectuals supported GDR antifascism (in spite of scepticism towards the KPD/SED leadership) because of their experiences as antifascist exiles, whereas the second generation's sense of guilt made them switch over from one 'totalisierendes, geschlossenes Weltbild' to the other, i.e. from Nazism to communism.<sup>182</sup> Apart from

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<sup>180</sup> Fulbrook retains her model of three East German generations in her 2011 book on generational experiences of violence in Nazi Germany and the GDR. She concedes that 'generations are not simply givens', but rather 'shifting constellations, the contours of which drift and reshape as new challenges are faced, and different issues about the past, present and future rise to the top of the agenda'. On the one hand, her proposition makes the generational paradigm less static. On the other hand, it does not provide a solution to the generalisations and naturalisations of difference and belonging that the concept carries. See Mary Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives: Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 248.

<sup>181</sup> Gudrun Schneider-Nehls, *Grenzgänger in Deutschland: Untersuchung einer intellektuellen Verhaltensmöglichkeit in unserem Jahrhundert: Eine Untersuchung dreier Generationsgestalten der Jahrgänge 1895-1926: Arnolt Bronnen – Eberhard Koebel – Erich Loest* (Potsdam: Verlag Berlin-Brandenburg, 1997).

<sup>182</sup> Emmerich, 'Deutsche Intellektuelle: was nun?', pp. 8-9.

exposing Emmerich's reliance on totalitarianist models, and his top-down notion of the ideological transition he presents, his argument shows how his use of the generational paradigm governs problematic generalisations.<sup>183</sup> For instance, Hacks's dedication to GDR antifascism and socialism does not fit Emmerich's model: he lived in West Germany during the first post-war decade, and – emphasising his antifascist family background – did not regard himself as complicit in Nazi crimes.<sup>184</sup>

Many examples of the use of generation from studies on East German culture or intellectuals apply the concept in a less explicit way and do not create the generalisations which make the paradigm so problematic.<sup>185</sup> Of course, it is important to take note of intellectuals' past experiences, however, as most examples from literary history mention generational belonging incidentally, or use it as an organising principle, without reflecting on the consequences of the paradigm, the problematic implications of the term creep in.<sup>186</sup> For instance, in her 2000 contribution to *The Cambridge History of German Literature*, Helen Fehervary invariably introduces writers by mentioning their generational status as a primary characteristic. But she fails to

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<sup>183</sup> Similar to Emmerich is Andreas Degen's 2011 use of the term 'Exilgeneration', which cannot be applied to younger exiles like Stefan Heym or Stephan Hermlin, whom he then mentions separately. Andreas Degen, 'Einleitung', in *Szenen Berliner Literatur 1955-1965*, ed. by Andreas Degen (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2011), pp. 7-14 (p. 13).

<sup>184</sup> Dennis Püllmann, *Von Brecht zu Braun: Versuch über die Schwierigkeiten poetischer Schülerschaft* (Mainz: André Thiele, 2011), pp. 35-36.

<sup>185</sup> Dennis Tate for instance uses generation implicitly without making the problematic generalising step. See Tate, *Shifting Perspectives*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>186</sup> Land & Possekel apply generation as an organising principle, as they present the discourses they identify as specific for particular generations: they distinguish for instance between the discourse of the 'Altkommunisten', of the 'Aufbau-Generation', and of the 'Reformergeneration'. Land & Possekel, *Namenlose Stimmen waren uns voraus*, pp. 19-48.



clarify what generational model she adheres to, or indeed why this particular aspect is relevant to the particular writer.<sup>187</sup>

Two examples from 2011 are illustrative of the way in which the term ‘generation’ persists unquestioned. In both cases the factually redundant term slips into the introductory characterisation of the discussed author for no apparent reason except for its appeal as a fashionable term. The seemingly harmless use of ‘generation’ in the following examples actually has startling implications. Laura Bradley’s first sentence of the 2011 *Edinburgh German Yearbook* on Brecht in the GDR reads: ‘Bertolt Brecht has come to exemplify the dilemmas faced by German socialists of his generation.’ This sentence implies Brecht also exemplifies dilemmas faced by leading Party officials of a similar age, for instance Walter Ulbricht.<sup>188</sup> Another example of such an unquestioning recourse to the concept is found in the introduction to the 2011 volume on Loest edited by Carsten Gansel and Joachim Jacob: ‘[Loest] gehört zu jener Generation, die noch am Ende der Zweiten Weltkrieg von der Oberschule weg berufen wurde’. It is without doubt that Loest’s experiences as a child soldier are important for understanding his role as a writer, but in using a generational perspective, the authors imply not only that all Germans of his age were conscripted, but also that all visited the ‘Oberschule’.<sup>189</sup> Moreover, the generational perspective fails to identify Loest’s enthusiasm for Nazism

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<sup>187</sup> Helen Fehervary, ‘The literature of the German Democratic Republic (1945-1990)’, in *The Cambridge History of German Literature*, ed. by Helen Watanabe-O’Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 393-439.

<sup>188</sup> Laura Bradley, ‘Introduction’, in *Brecht and the GDR: Politics, Culture, Posterity*, ed. by Laura Bradley & Karen Leeder, *Edinburgh German Yearbook*, 5 (Rochester: Camden House, 2011), pp. 1-24 (p. 1).

<sup>189</sup> Carsten Gansel & Joachim Jacob, ‘Der Wirklichkeit auf der Spur: Erich Loest’, in *Geschichte, die noch qualmt: Erich Loest und sein Werk*, ed. by Carsten Gansel & Joachim Jacob (Göttingen: Steidl, 2011), pp. 10-15 (p. 10).

and eagerness to become a soldier, instead presenting his being conscripted as something common to his peers.

Despite his critique of generational models common to research on East German literature, Dennis Püllmann (2011) continues to depend on the paradigm. Examining the terms ‘Exilgeneration’, ‘Flakhelfergeneration’, and ‘Aufbaugeneration’, he claims that the problems of these generational models are heightened by the proximity of ‘Krieg und Völkermord’, meaning that small differences in age can have major consequences.<sup>190</sup> Püllmann nevertheless argues that the category of generation should not be abandoned, as it is the only concept available to make sense of ‘reale kollektive Erfahrungen von Geschichte als Gewaltgeschichte’.<sup>191</sup> The question is, though, which or whose collective experiences a generational model emphasises. Püllmann’s fixation on age brackets out other possible aspects of how individuals experienced this troublesome history, and different levels of involvement. Within the collectives constructed by generational models, there can be immense differences. The term ‘Exilgeneration’ for instance fails to address where an intellectual went into Exile – a question with big consequences for their situation in the early GDR. Moreover, the term turns a blind eye to those within the same age group who did not go into exile.

As a paradigm in academic writing, generation is problematic as it is used to explain (past) cultural and political developments by identifying age groups with common outlooks derived from common ‘key formative

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<sup>190</sup> Püllmann, *Von Brecht zu Braun*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

experiences'.<sup>192</sup> Since Karl Mannheim conceptualised 'generation' as a sociological category (1928),<sup>193</sup> the genealogical meaning of the word, signalling continuity, was gradually replaced by a synchronic perspective with a classificatory function.<sup>194</sup> Categorising persons along generational lines can lead to presuppositions that obscure our view on their historical positions and bracket out other aspects such as class, gender, political affiliation, cultural movements, or local identities. The term generation establishes certain commonalities of a particular age group; individuals are regarded as representatives of a rather arbitrary whole, which can lead to problematic distortions.<sup>195</sup>

Mannheim sought to account for differences and groupings based on other aspects than age – such as social class, geographical position – as well as (in consequence) different degrees of generational belonging, by distinguishing between 'Generationslagerung', 'Generationszusammenhang', and 'Generationseinheit',<sup>196</sup> in which only the latter provides 'reale Verbindungen' between people of the same age, but not necessarily a shared political and cultural outlook.<sup>197</sup>

The differentiation in 'Generationslagerung', 'Generationszusammenhang', and 'Generationseinheit' does make the concept less stringent and coercive, but from most generational models it remains

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<sup>192</sup> This is Fulbrook's apt translation of Mannheim's notion of 'Schlüsselerlebnisse' which are supposed to form generational identities. Mary Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives: Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 7.

<sup>193</sup> Karl Mannheim, 'Das Problem der Generationen', in *Wissenssoziologie: Auswahl aus dem Werk*, ed. and with an introduction by Kurt H. Wolff (Berlin & Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1964), pp. 509-565.

<sup>194</sup> Sigrid Weigel, *Genea-Logik: Generation, Tradition und Evolution zwischen Kultur- und Naturwissenschaften* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2006), pp. 96-97.

<sup>195</sup> For a critical introduction into the generation paradigm and its problems, see Ulrike Jureit, *Generationenforschung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2006).

<sup>196</sup> Mannheim, 'Das Problem der Generationen', pp. 541-542

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p. 544.

unclear which of the three categories is meant. Moreover, the classificatory function of the paradigm still has an over-determining effect.<sup>198</sup> For its seemingly obvious, but actually imprecise meaning,<sup>199</sup> its effect of cementing differences as naturally given due to time of birth,<sup>200</sup> and its simultaneous covering up of differences and commonalities regarding aspects other than age, the paradigm upholds power relationships by presenting difference and belonging as natural. Moreover, it constructs unitary identities in a way similar to nationalism with a simultaneous inclusive and exclusive effect.

The generational paradigm in academic writing has to be seen separate from, although it is closely related to, its use as a means of self-definition by authors and other (historical) persons through narratives about the past, which make sense of common experiences, and derive commonalities for the present from them. These narratives and the collectives they construct are worth examining. Mark Roseman (2005) aims to establish such a strand of research as he proposes (with reference to Benedict Anderson) conceiving of generations as ‘imagined communities’ which come into existence in a ‘Wechselspiel von Phantomen, Projekten, Identitäten’.<sup>201</sup> In generational narratives, experiences of these past realities are connected to conclusions for the present and expectations for the future, and constitute generational identifications. Björn Bohnenkamp, Till Manning and Eva-Maria Silies (2009)

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<sup>198</sup> Bernd Weisbrod, ‘Generation und Generationalität in der neueren Geschichte’, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, August 2005, 3-9 (p. 4).

<sup>199</sup> Sami Khatib, “‘Talking ‘bout My (Third) Generation’: An Intervention in the Misuse of a Notion”, in *Dissonant Memories – Fragmented Present: Exchanging Young Discourses between Israel and Germany*, ed. by Charlotte Misselwitz & Cornelia Siebeck (Bielefeld: transcript, 2009), pp. 17-23 (pp. 17-18).

<sup>200</sup> For the problematic blurring of cultural and natural notions in the concept, see Weigel, *Genea-Logik*, p. 96.

<sup>201</sup> Mark Roseman, ‘Generationen als “Imagined Communities”’: Mythen, generationelle Identitäten und Generationenkonflikte in Deutschland vom 18. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert’, in *Generationen: Zur Relevanz eines wissenschaftlichen Grundbegriffs*, ed. by Michael Wildt & Ulrike Jureit (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2005), pp. 180-199 (pp. 180-181, 183-184).

propose analysing generational narratives as constructions, myths, missions, and arguments.<sup>202</sup> Both their approach and Roseman's differ fundamentally from the generational paradigm which seeks to explain historical developments, actions or (intellectual) positions by attributing them to past generations which the paradigm itself constructs. Academics should instead critically examine the construction of generational identities, their formation and functioning in the imagination of historical persons.<sup>203</sup> Moreover, one should ask which alternative or competing concepts were available for identification, and how the application of the concept of 'generation' obscures the view of other factors such as class, gender, political affiliations, cultural movements, local identities, etc. Therefore the following chapters will not regard Loest, Herzfelde and Hacks as members or even representatives of particular generations, but approach them from a multitude of perspectives, and hence contribute to a multi-faceted image of what made up their positions.

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<sup>202</sup> Björn Bohnenkamp, Till Manning & Eva-Maria Silies, 'Argument, Mythos, Auftrag und Konstrukt: Generationelle Erzählungen in interdisziplinärer Perspektive', in *Generation als Erzählung: Neue Perspektiven auf ein kulturelles Deutungsmuster*, ed. by Björn Bohnenkamp, Till Manning & Eva-Maria Silies (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009), pp. 9-29.

<sup>203</sup> As Dorothee Wierling argues, such 'narrative communities' can provide fruitful insights into the relationships between public and private memories. Her essay is problematic, though, as she presupposes the existence of generations, thus affirming their narratives. See Dorothee Wierling, 'Generations as Narrative Communities: Some Private Sources of Public Memory in Postwar Germany', in *Histories of the Aftermath: The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe*, ed. by Frank Biess & Robert G. Moeller (Oxford, New York: Berghahn 2010), pp. 102-120.

## 2. Wieland Herzfelde

### Reforming Party discourses from within

#### 1. Introduction

Wieland Herzfelde (1896-1988) returned to East Germany from exile in New York in April 1949. The former publisher Herzfelde worked in East Germany as a professor of ‘Literatursoziologie’ in Leipzig and in 1955-1956 as a teacher at the newly established Literaturinstitut Leipzig. In 1956-1958, he was an editor of the official journal of the Writers’ Union *Neue deutsche Literatur* (NDL). He published as a critic, poet, and political commentator in NDL and the periodicals *Aufbau* and *Sonntag*.

Herzfelde developed a complicated position in the East Germany during the 1950s, due to his modernist artistic background, and his status as a returnee from Western exile. A Dada member and leader of the Malik-Verlag during the Weimar Republic and the exile years, his aesthetics were strongly rooted in modernism and he had worked with an inclusive aesthetic programme, as I will set out in section 2 of this chapter. In this context it is important to note his close personal and artistic ties to two exponents of the Weimar avant-garde, whose works were heavily contested in the early 1950s: his brother John Heartfield,<sup>204</sup> and his longstanding friend (and namesake of his son) George Grosz.<sup>205</sup>

The tension between Herzfelde’s aesthetic background and official cultural policies of the 1950s was complemented by an ambiguity in his

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<sup>204</sup> See Bock, *Literatur, Gesellschaft, Nation*, p. 135.

<sup>205</sup> In his memoirs, Herzfelde’s son emphasises his father’s ties to Grosz. See George Wyland-Herzfelde, *Glück gehabt: Erinnerungen 1925-1949* (München: DTV, 2003), p. 296. See also Danzer, *Zwischen Vertrauen und Verrat*, p. 528. Danzer claims that Herzfelde’s artistic alliance with Grosz raised suspicion within the SED leadership.

political stances, which corresponds with the tension between the reformist and affirmative inclinations of communist intellectual discourses as identified by Land and Possekel.<sup>206</sup> As a Party member for over thirty years, who joined the KPD shortly after its foundation in 1918, Herzfelde agreed with GDR socialism in principle, affirmed official discourses and the primacy of the Party leadership, but was critical of particular policies.

### 1.1 Research questions

This chapter will explore Herzfelde's ambiguous self-positioning in the East German cultural public spheres from his arrival in 1949 until the aftermath of the 1956-1957 crisis. Considering his modernist aesthetic background, how did Herzfelde position himself in cultural discourses about modernism, realism and the cultural heritage? What aesthetic concepts were available at different times in the rapid development of the debates in the 1950s to enable him to take a position within the ever changing consensus in these discourses, and to bring forward divergent views on art and literature? Did he maintain his avant-garde positions and, if so, how did he negotiate these in the context of SED aesthetic orthodoxies? Did he employ specific strategies to defend his principles or did he adapt them as a result of changing external pressures?

This chapter will furthermore analyse the cultural narratives he constructed of the East German state in the debates on socialism, antifascism and the German nation. These narratives of the GDR naturally stand in the wider context of the tense international situation during the Cold War. Hence

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<sup>206</sup> Land & Possekel, *Namenlose Stimmen waren uns voraus*, p. 85.

this chapter analyses the narratives he constructed of the Cold War, German division, and of the FRG and its Western allies.

As this chapter explores Herzfelde's self-positioning in various public spheres of East Germany in the 1950s, and the strategies used within these texts to articulate his views, the source material consists mainly of texts that were to some degree available to the public: his 1949 memoir, essays, poems, speeches and university lectures. A number of sources used in this chapter are unpublished archive materials: manuscripts for speeches, university lectures, and articles.

## 1.2 Reception

Herzfelde is renowned for his role as a publisher during the Weimar years and his exile, both of which have received wide attention in research.<sup>207</sup> However research on his role and position in the GDR is sporadic and features mainly in studies with a wider scope.<sup>208</sup> In his book on the 1956 crisis, Siegfried Prokop discusses Herzfelde's position during this crisis in some detail, building mainly on the memoirs of Wolfgang Harich.<sup>209</sup> Furthermore, Herzfelde receives attention in books on literary organisations like the (East) German PEN,<sup>210</sup> in

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<sup>207</sup> See Jürgen Schebera, 'Strategien eines Verlegers im Exil: Wieland Herzfelde: Prag – New York – Ostberlin 1933-1945', in *Die Resonanz des Exils: Gelungene und mißlungene Rezeption deutschsprachiger Exilautoren*, ed. by Dieter Sevin (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992), pp. 51-65; Jean-Michel Palmier, *Weimar in Exile: The Antifascist Emigration in Europe and America* (London: Verso, 2006).

<sup>208</sup> e.g. David Pike, *The Politics of Culture in Soviet-occupied Germany 1945-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 572; Schiller, *Der verweigerte Dialog*, p. 139.

<sup>209</sup> Prokop, *1956 – DDR am Scheideweg*, pp. 134-135. On Herzfelde's stances during the crisis, see also Mark Lehmstedt (ed.), *Der Fall Hans Mayer: Dokumente 1956-1963* (Leipzig: Lehmstedt, 2007), p. 254; John Connelly, *Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945-1956* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 196-197; John Connelly, 'Ulbricht and the Intellectuals', *Contemporary European History*, 6 (1997), 329-359 (p. 347).

<sup>210</sup> See Bores, *Das ostdeutsche PEN-Zentrum*, pp. 448-450; Helmut Peitsch, 'No Politics'? *Die Geschichte des deutschen PEN-Zentrums in London 1933-2002* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2006), pp. 185-186. See also Lothar Mertens' article on academics returning from emigration,



research on various aspects of East German literature such as censorship,<sup>211</sup> and in a number of studies into the specific problems of Jews or Jewish communists in the GDR.<sup>212</sup> Since these publications only mention Herzfelde briefly, they cannot give insight into the complexity and ambiguity of his positioning in 1950s East Germany.

An exception to the common disregard of Herzfelde's role in East Germany is Danzer's extensive 2012 investigation into the social relationships between communist intellectuals up to the 1960s. Besides Willi Bredel and Seghers, Herzfelde is one of the three protagonists in this book, which contains valuable information on Herzfelde's network since the start of his communist involvement around 1918, and well into his years in the GDR.<sup>213</sup>

In addition to opening up a less thoroughly researched period in Herzfelde's work, the originality of my analysis lies in the connection it makes between debates in Marxist aesthetics in 1950s East Germany and pre-1945, and in the attention given to the role of this modernist intellectual in aesthetic debates in East Germany. This chapter will demonstrate that there is a shift in Herzfelde's stances between the years before and after 1951-1952. During the first years after his optimistic arrival in East Germany, he engaged critically with dominant discourses, principally official SED discourses on aesthetics. His positions differed depending on the different institutional contexts and audiences. His essays and speeches addressed to fellow intellectuals contain

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which mentions Herzfelde briefly: Lothar Mertens, 'Remigration als Elitenaustausch: Die Rückkehr vertriebener Wissenschaftler in die SBZ/DDR', in *Unter dem Deckel der Diktatur: Soziale und kulturelle Aspekte des DDR-Alltages*, ed. by Lothar Mertens (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2003), pp. 197-248 (p. 215).

<sup>211</sup> See Simone Barck, Martina Langermann & Siegfried Lokatis, '*Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer*': *Zensur-System und literarische Öffentlichkeit in der DDR bis Ende der sechziger Jahre* (Berlin: Akademie, 1998).

<sup>212</sup> See Hartewig, *Zurückgekehrt*, pp. 204, 321.

<sup>213</sup> Danzer, *Zwischen Vertrauen und Verrat*.

hidden criticisms of the very SED cultural policies he supports in his university lectures. After 1952, as the Party enforced its doctrinary interpretations of socialist realism in the formalism campaign and the construction of socialism, the contexts in which he previously raised criticisms of official aesthetics vanished. On occasions Herzfelde returned to his critical positions during the political crises after the uprising of 1953 and in 1956-57 – even if he stopped short of joining the oppositional circles that emerged during the latter crisis.

After a discussion of Herzfelde's ambiguous engagement with KPD cultural policies during the Weimar era and in exile, I will analyse how he conceived of his return to Germany in a narrative of homecoming, but will also consider the threatening atmosphere – in the context of the purges in the SED in relation to the trials against Rajk and Slánsky – to which he returned. A discussion of his self-positioning in aesthetic debates from the early 1950s, which amounts to a defence of the legacy of modernism and the avant-garde as legitimate parts of a socialist cultural heritage, is followed by his Leipzig university lectures from the same period, which are more compatible with official aesthetic discourses. Subsequently, I will examine his critical reaction, within the semi-public sphere of the Writers' Union, to the 1953 uprising, which is followed by an analysis of his positioning in relation to discourses on the German nation and the Cold War over the course of the 1950s, in which he relied on a narrative of the GDR as the champion of progress and German unity. The chapter will conclude by analysing his positions during the 1956-1957 crisis, when he kept his sympathy with reformist intellectuals within the semi-public sphere of Party and Writers' Union meetings, but as editor of *NDL*

defied Party directives when the SED Kulturabteilung tried to prevent a critical publication.

## 2. Ambiguous communist involvement before 1949

Herzfelde's involvement in left-wing politics and culture dates back to the First World War.<sup>214</sup> Together with Erwin Piscator, George Grosz and his brother John Heartfield, Herzfelde joined the newly founded communist party KPD during the 1918-1919 revolution. He soon became a prominent representative of the cultural avant-garde as a publisher and member of the Berlin Dada group. From the outset, his relationship to the KPD was ambivalent. The Party rejected the radicalism of Dada and Malik, which were deemed negative and destructive.<sup>215</sup> Considering the Party's orthodox cultural policies, Herzfelde's modernist and inclusive aesthetic views conflicted with his plea that art should be subordinated to the communist cause. He made this plea in his 1921 pamphlet 'Gesellschaft, Künstler und Kommunismus', which exemplifies his ambivalence.<sup>216</sup> In the pamphlet, he expresses disapproval of the KPD's condemnation of all modernist art as 'decadent', calling it a result of 'gefährliche Sektiererneigungen'.<sup>217</sup> Moreover, he argues that once communism comes into power, it would be wrong to enforce aesthetic norms,

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<sup>214</sup> In his 1949 memoir Herzfelde constructs a narrative of his conversion from a youngster who was enthusiastic about the war to an anti-war activist. Following an 'Entwicklungsroman' pattern, he recalls how he became uneasy with his role as a member of the occupation force as a paramedic in Belgium. After hitting a hated sergeant in the face, he felt 'erlöst'. He was dismissed from duty and returned to Berlin 'hochgestimmt' in 1915: 'jetzt fuhr ich wirklich in den Krieg. [...] Und in einen guten Krieg [...]' From Wieland Herzfelde, *Immergrün: Merkwürdige Erlebnisse und Erfahrungen eines fröhlichen Waisenknaben* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1949), pp. 108-125 (pp. 24-25).

<sup>215</sup> W.L. Guttsman, *Art for the Workers: Ideology and the Visual Arts in Weimar Germany* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 149.

<sup>216</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, 'Gesellschaft, Künstler und Kommunismus', in *Zur Sache: Geschrieben und gesprochen zwischen 18 und 80* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1976), pp. 54-92 (pp. 58-61).

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

as this would lead to superficial works and a counter-revolutionary reaction among artists.<sup>218</sup> Thirty years later, with the 1951 formalism resolution, the SED would enforce exactly this kind of aesthetic norm.

Consistent with Herzfelde's demand, in the 1921 pamphlet, that art of all directions should be supported,<sup>219</sup> the Malik-Verlag printed a broad range of left-wing literature, even if it conflicted with KPD orthodoxies.<sup>220</sup> Herzfelde founded the Malik publishing house in 1917 and kept it independent of the KPD.<sup>221</sup> Illustrative of Malik's aesthetic inclusiveness is a statement in the introduction to the anthology of prose Herzfelde edited in 1932: 'Wichtiger als die Methode ist die Perspektive.'<sup>222</sup>

Herzfelde kept Malik going in exile in Prague, where also edited the journal *Neue deutsche Blätter* with Seghers and Oskar Maria Graf.<sup>223</sup> Both the Malik-Verlag and *Neue deutsche Blätter* sought an alliance with exiled writers from all political backgrounds.<sup>224</sup> Especially in the first years of exile, the broad publishing programme of Malik met with reservations from the KPD leadership in Moscow.<sup>225</sup> Schebera writes that the Party declined financial support for Malik after Becher, on an official visit in 1933, reported that the

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., pp. 87-89.

<sup>220</sup> Schebera, 'Strategien eines Verlegers im Exil', pp. 51-52.

<sup>221</sup> Danzer, *Zwischen Vertrauen und Verrat*, p. 167.

<sup>222</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, 'Vorwort', in *Dreißig neue Erzähler des neuen Deutschland: Junge deutsche Prosa*, ed. by Wieland Herzfelde (Berlin: Malik, 1932), pp. 1-15 (pp. 10-11).

<sup>223</sup> Danzer, *Zwischen Vertrauen und Verrat*, p. 125.

<sup>224</sup> See for *Neue deutsche Blätter* Herzfelde's letter to Becher of 14 August 1933, in *Briefe an Johannes R. Becher 1910-1958*, ed. by Rolf Harder (Berlin: Aufbau, 1993), pp. 50-52; for Malik, see Herzfelde's letter to Upton Sinclair in April 1933, in Upton Sinclair, Wieland Herzfelde & Hermynia zur Mühlen, *Werter Genosse, die Maliks haben beschlossen...: Briefe 1919-1950*, ed. by Walter Grünzweig & Susanne Schulz (Bonn: Weidle, 2001), pp. 192-193.

<sup>225</sup> See Alfred Kantorowicz' comments on Malik and *Neue deutsche Blätter*, in Alfred Kantorowicz, *Politik und Literatur im Exil: Deutschsprachige Schriftsteller im Kampf gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (Hamburg: Christians, 1978), pp. 55-56.

‘Gruppe um Herzfelde’ was ‘gänzlich opportunistisch verseucht’.<sup>226</sup> The *Volksfrontpolitik* was not yet in place.

How Herzfelde advocated modernist literature defying official aesthetic orthodoxies is demonstrated by his contribution at the 1934 First Congress of Soviet Writers in Moscow, where Andrei Zhdanov laid down the official Stalinist conception of socialist realism as the portrayal of reality in its revolutionary development.<sup>227</sup> Herzfelde participated in a discussion that was part of a broader debate on modernism, and links back to the debates in *Die Linkskurve* two years prior to the conference.<sup>228</sup> He reacts to the programmatic speech of Party functionary Karl Radek,<sup>229</sup> who contrasted James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and socialist realism.<sup>230</sup> Herzfelde counters Radek’s attack on modernism by praising *Ulysses* as honest and realist – claiming its ‘regellose Nebeneinander’ appears to Joyce as the ‘eigentliche physische Realität’ – and by pleading for Joyce’s right to experiment in portraying the world as he perceives it.<sup>231</sup> Applying the principle of realism, and including a subjective perception of reality in it, he made a case for modernist literature just as it was under attack from a high-ranking Party official.

Herzfelde’s unease with the cultural policies of the Moscow KPD during exile is reflected in his letters to Ernst Bloch. On 9 August 1938, he

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<sup>226</sup> Schebera, ‘Strategien eines Verlegers im Exil’, p. 53.

<sup>227</sup> Zhdanov, ‘Die Sowjetliteratur, die ideenreichste und fortschrittlichste Literatur der Welt’, p. 47.

<sup>228</sup> Jost Hermand, ‘The “Good New” and the “Bad New”: Metamorphoses of the Modernism Debate in the GDR since 1956’, *New German Critique*, 3 (1974), 73-92 (p. 73). For the *Linkskurve*-debates, see Helga Gallas, *Marxistische Literaturtheorie: Kontroversen im Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller* (Berlin & Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1971), pp. 64-69.

<sup>229</sup> Régine Robin, *Socialist Realism: An Impossible Aesthetic* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 9.

<sup>230</sup> Radek, ‘Referat über die moderne Weltliteratur und die Aufgaben der proletarischen Kunst’, pp. 203-206.

<sup>231</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, response to Karl Radek (no title), in *Sozialistische Realismuskonzeptionen: Dokumente zum I. Allunionskongress der Sowjetschriftsteller*, ed. by Hans-Jürgen Schmitt & Godehard Schramm (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp. 239-244.

voiced his scepticism over the orthodox line in the 'Expressionismusdebatte'.

Referring to an article by Bernhard Ziegler (i.e. Alfred Kurella) in the Moscow-based journal *Das Wort*, who stated that expressionism paved the way for fascism,<sup>232</sup> Herzfelde exclaims:

Mich mutet das alles so irre an. Weil er, Ziegler, ein schlechter expr. Maler war, taugt der Expressionismus nichts. Als ob nicht bei jedem Stil Macher und Bluffer zu finden wären [...]. Komisch!<sup>233</sup>

Years later, on 20 April 1947, he was critical of Georg Lukács's notion of totality when writing about the canonical Soviet film *Ivan the Terrible I* (1944, Sergei Eisenstein): 'Ich kenne den Eisenstein und die [...] fragwürdigen Geschichtstheorien, die dem zugrunde liegen. Verfeinert, aber im Grunde dasselbe ist dem Lukacz [sic] sein Totalitätsgemusch.'<sup>234</sup> The principle of totality that he detested so much was a central notion in Lukács's realism concept which dominated KPD cultural discourses during the *Volksfront* of the 1930s and was to become a constituent part of GDR *Bündnispolitik* until 1956.<sup>235</sup> Herzfelde's 1947 scepticism indicates his opposition to the realism discourses he would engage with when he returned to Germany two years later.

Combined with the role of the Malik-Verlag before 1933, Herzfelde's past as a Western exile diminished his opportunities to work as a publisher in the GDR. Simone Barck, Martina Langermann and Siegfried Lokatis claim that, in the course of the 1950s, the literary state apparatus committed a gradual

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<sup>232</sup> Bernhard Ziegler (i.e. Alfred Kurella), 'Nun ist dies Erbe zuende...', in *Marxismus und Literatur Band 2*, ed. by Fritz J. Raddatz (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1969), pp. 43-50.

<sup>233</sup> Ernst Bloch & Wieland Herzfelde, 'Wir haben das Leben wieder vor uns': *Briefwechsel 1938-1949*, ed. by Jürgen Jahn (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), p. 21.

<sup>234</sup> Bloch & Herzfelde, *Briefwechsel*, pp. 225-226.

<sup>235</sup> Spies, 'Georg Lukács und der Sozialistische Realismus in der DDR', p. 39.

elimination 'der mit Namen wie Willi Münzenberg, Wieland Herzfelde und Walter Janka verbundenen verlegerischen Traditionslinie der Westemigration'.<sup>236</sup> But Herzfelde never worked as a publisher after his return. He returned to take up a professorship in 'Literatursoziologie' at Leipzig University, offered to him in 1948.<sup>237</sup> Schebera regards the professorship as a means to keep Herzfelde away from publishing, and supposes that returnees from Moscow were preferred as leaders of publishing houses, ignoring the fact that the Aufbau Verlag was led by Walter Janka, who spent his exile in Mexico.<sup>238</sup>

There is another reason to Herzfelde's being unable to work as a publisher after his return, namely the purges of returnees from Western exile in the Party around 1950. Herzfelde was actually envisaged as director of a new publishing house related to the Akademie der Künste, as the SED Politburo decided in September 1949. The appointment, of which Herzfelde was not informed, was blocked in October 1950 when he appeared before the Zentrale Parteikontrollkommission (ZPKK) because of his contacts with Noel Field.<sup>239</sup> In the context of the show trials in Hungary against László Rajk (1948-1949) and in Czechoslovakia against Rudolf Slánsky (1951-1952), in which Field, the American who helped many exiles to flee from Europe in the 1940s, was accused of espionage, suspicions that Western exiles were recruited as agents frequently had an anti-Semitic dimension.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Barck, Langermann & Lokatis, *Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>237</sup> Danzer, *Zwischen Vertrauen und Verrat*, p. 443.

<sup>238</sup> Schebera, 'Strategien eines Verlegers im Exil', pp. 61-62.

<sup>239</sup> Danzer, *Zwischen Vertrauen und Verrat*, p. 479.

<sup>240</sup> Karin Hartewig, 'Die Loyalitätsfalle: Jüdische Kommunisten in der DDR', in *Zwischen Politik und Kultur: Juden in der DDR*, ed. by Moshe Zuckermann (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002), pp. 48-62 (pp. 57-58); Thomas Haury, *Antisemitismus von links: Kommunistische Ideologie, Nationalismus und Antizionismus in der frühen DDR* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2002), pp. 343-349.

Considering his exile in the West and the Jewish ancestry of his father, this hostile atmosphere affected Herzfelde's position. Indeed, he and his Jewish wife lost their SED membership in 1951 because of their contacts to Field,<sup>241</sup> only to be reinstated in 1956.<sup>242</sup> Herzfelde's response indicates that he still regarded himself a Party member. As Loest reports, he sent a telegram to the Central Committee stating: 'Ausgeschlossen? Ausgeschlossen!'<sup>243</sup> He disputed the Party leadership's command over the definition of his communist identity, and he kept participating actively in Party discourses, as we shall see in the following sections. On the other hand, as David Pike reports, Herzfelde later testified that he feared arrest after his expulsion from the Party.<sup>244</sup> Indeed, Paul Merker, who was removed from the Party leadership in the same process as Herzfelde's expulsion, was arrested as a 'Zionist agent' in 1952 when his name was connected to the accused in the Slánsky trial.<sup>245</sup> This context of fear and suspicion may have contributed the cautious negotiating tactics characteristic of his self-positioning in the East German public spheres.

### 3. Return to an antifascist homeland

Shortly after returning from exile, Herzfelde constructed a narrative of homecoming in which he conceived of his historical duty to support the social and political development of his refound homeland, as long as it faced up to the Nazi past and came to terms with the shared German responsibility for it. This narrative emerges in the final chapter of his 1949 memoir *Immergrün*:

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<sup>241</sup> Hartewig, *Zurückgekehrt*, p. 321.

<sup>242</sup> Prokop, *1956 – DDR am Scheideweg*, p. 86.

<sup>243</sup> Erich Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß: Ein Lebenslauf*, 4th edition (Munich: DTV, 1999), p. 174.

<sup>244</sup> Pike, *The Politics of Culture*, p. 572.

<sup>245</sup> See Jay Howard Geller, *Jews in Post-Holocaust Germany, 1945-1953* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 171.



*Merkwürdige Erlebnisse und Erfahrungen eines fröhlichen Waisenknaben*, which he wrote largely in exile, but completed after his return.<sup>246</sup> The narrative of homecoming responds to a statement in the first chapter – pre-published in *Sinn und Form* – which relates how his family fled to Switzerland shortly before Herzfelde's birth to escape his father's (the socialist writer Franz Held)<sup>247</sup> conviction for blasphemy in 1895: 'So ergab es sich, daß ich schon als Embryo zum Flüchtling wurde.'<sup>248</sup> The emigrant Herzfelde conceives of himself as a born fugitive.

Herzfelde describes the homecoming he longed for as a returning fugitive, as his assumption of new tasks in support of the endeavour of Party comrades to build a new Germany.<sup>249</sup> Similar to Franziska Meyer's observations of Seghers's correspondence to Lore Wolf, he narrates his own homecoming to 'a very specific anti-fascist homeland'.<sup>250</sup> The autobiography as a whole unfolds a 'defeat to victory' plot: Herzfelde describes his participation in the socialist struggle from the First World War via the defeat against Nazism until his homecoming to an antifascist collective determined to lead Germany to the future. He thus offers a personal variant of the legitimacy 'foundationalist narratives' of the GDR discussed by Julia Hell.<sup>251</sup> It envisions the foundation of the East German state, and his engagement for it,

<sup>246</sup> In a 1961 preface to *Immergrün*, Herzfelde reveals that the final chapter was written after arrival in Berlin. Wieland Herzfelde, *Unterwegs: Blätter aus fünfzig Jahren* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1961), p. 7.

<sup>247</sup> Danzer, *Zwischen Vertrauen und Verrat*, p. 199.

<sup>248</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, 'Aus den "Merkwürdigen Erlebnissen und Erfahrungen eines fröhlichen Waisenknaben"', *Sinn und Form: Beiträge zur Literatur*, 4.4 (1949), 103-139 (p. 104).

<sup>249</sup> Herzfelde, *Immergrün*, pp. 251-255.

<sup>250</sup> Franziska Meyer, 'Not in the rubble of the cities, but beyond; despite everything, out there is still my country': Jewish Women writers and the return to Germany: Anna Seghers and Grete Weil', in *Coming home? Vol. 2: Conflict and Return Migration in the Aftermath of the Second World War*, ed. by Sharif Gemie, Norry LaPorte & Scott Soo (Cambridge: Scholars Press, 2012). At press.

<sup>251</sup> Julia Hell, 'At the Centre an Absence: Foundationalist Narratives of the GDR and the Legitimatory Discourse of Antifascism', *Monatshefte*, 84 (1992), 23-45 (pp. 24-26).

from the perspective of both the class struggle and the immediate post-fascist context.

The setting for the narrative of homecoming is the celebration by a group of antifascist 'Genossen' to welcome an unnamed married couple returning from exile in the US. As the first-person narrator – seemingly identical with the author – reflects the speeches which the returnees give to greet their comrades, the gender roles assigned to each of them are typical for such 'foundationalist narratives': whereas the woman pronounces suffering and grief, her husband emphasises resistance and struggle.<sup>252</sup> His address connects three narrative patterns: persecution in Nazi Germany and the US, praise of the Party and the solidarity among comrades, and a return to the 'Heimat' where the new duties and efforts ahead would be fulfilled in cooperation with these comrades, guided by the Party leadership. This masculine hero calls his departure from the US a 'Befreiung' and a 'Sieg der Genossen, ihrer Solidarität, ihrer [...] Anstrengungen'.<sup>253</sup> In the context of the McCarthyist persecutions, the narrative presents prolonged exile in the US as a captivity which is overcome by a joint effort of comrades – a connection between fascism and capitalism which coincides with the claim of socialists' victory over 'fascist capitalists' made in official discourses.<sup>254</sup> The hero furthermore promises: 'mit allen Kräften an der Bewältigung der Aufgaben mitzuarbeiten, die er in der Heimat vorfand, in Eintracht mit den

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<sup>252</sup> For an extensive discussion of gendered GDR founding narratives, see Julia Hell, *Post-Fascist Fantasies: Psychoanalysis, History, and the Literature of East Germany* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 25-102.

<sup>253</sup> Herzfelde, *Immergrün*, p. 251.

<sup>254</sup> Paul Betts, 'The Twilight of the Idols: East German Memory and Material Culture', *The Journal of Modern History*, 72 (2000), 731-765 (p. 736).

Versammelten, unter Führung der Partei'.<sup>255</sup> His homecoming thus obliges him to accept new duties ahead and commits him to follow the Party leadership.

The narrative concludes with the speech of the female returnee, who expresses her fears and sorrows, and her horror of Germany where the people had only recently 'Verbrechern zugejubelt'.<sup>256</sup> In accordance with the passive roles allocated to women in the foundationalist narratives identified by Hell, the narrator calls for a specific female view on the past, declaring women the true victims of the war, who suffer threefold: for themselves, their husbands and their children.<sup>257</sup> This image derives from the cliché of the woman as caring mother and wife, and attests to the constitution of women as submissive and passive in dominant antifascist discourses.<sup>258</sup> The narrative constructs, just like the narratives analysed by Hell, 'two worlds which are separate, hierarchical, but nevertheless complementary: the feminine universe of suffering, but also life and hope, and the masculine realm of struggle'.<sup>259</sup> It is in the feminine realm of suffering and hope, during the emotional speech of the returned 'Genossin', that the first-person narrator describes finding a sense of belonging. As he describes his thoughts on witnessing her expression of grief, he turns her mourning into hope as he finds salvation in the consciousness that the tasks ahead must be connected to a responsibility towards the victims of Nazism:

Heute, hier, fühle sie sich zum erstenmal seit ihrer Rückkehr wieder unter  
Freunden. [...] Wie ein schwacher, letzter Schrei kam es aus ihrer Brust [...]:

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<sup>255</sup> Herzfelde, *Immergrün*, p. 251.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>258</sup> Hell, 'At the Centre an Absence', p. 31.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

‘Sie haben alle ermordet. Den Vater. Die Mutter. Die Freunde. Die Schwester!’ Da sank sie vornüber. [...] Mir war, als schläge in uns allen, [...] ein einziges, gequältes Herz. [...] wir blickten hinab in das dunkle Vergangene, das auf einmal Gegenwart war: in ein unterirdisches Meer von Blut, in das, auch für uns, die Tränen einer Frau rannen. Wir blickten auf Deutschland.

Wie aber soll ich erklären, daß der Gram des Erinnerns, die Pein zu wissen: hier gibt es keinen Trost, zugleich Trost und Erlösung war? Laß deine Tränen strömen, Genossin. Du hast für uns alle gebeichtet, für unser ganzes Volk. Was wir verschweigen möchten, hast du ausgesprochen: nicht nur die Zukunft ruft uns, auch die Vergangenheit. [...] Der Schmerz, der dich niederbrach, hat [die Ermordeten], für einen Augenblick, mit uns versöhnt, für den ewigen Augenblick des ins Wir verströmenden Ichs.

Als du dich erhobst, lag mattes Licht auf deiner Stirn. Und ich sah, wonach ich [...] seit meiner Heimkehr vergeblich ausgespäht hatte: den verloren Pfad zwischen gestern und morgen.<sup>260</sup>

These are the final words of the book. Painting a grim image of post-fascist Germany as a sea of blood, Herzfelde reminds the reader of the omnipresence of Nazi perpetrators, impeding identification with the country as a whole. Only among antifascist comrades, in an ‘anti-fascist homeland’,<sup>261</sup> does he narrate his homecoming: he unfolds a Christian narrative of confession and redemption, and envisions a reconciliation between victims and survivors.

This vision is ambiguous about who is to be included in the redeeming community: whereas the participants in the celebration are all comrades,

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<sup>260</sup> Herzfelde, *Immergrün*, pp. 254-255.

<sup>261</sup> Meyer, ‘Not in the rubble’, p. 10.

Herzfelde calls the woman's tears a confession on behalf of 'unser ganzes Volk'. He holds the entire German population accountable for Nazism, and connects this accountability with responsibility for a better future, similar to Abusch's 1946 book *Der Irrweg einer Nation*. Abusch pleaded for self-criticism as a moral cleansing and argued that the Germans should become a 'mündiges und demokratisch verantwortliches Volk'.<sup>262</sup>

The vision of a redemption through the confession of the female comrade is also an early call to recognise responsibility for the Nazi past. It is this recognition of the acuteness of the Nazi legacy, with its survivors, victims and perpetrators, that guides the narrator onto the path to the future. Herzfelde's narrative of homecoming culminates in a new perspective, but like his female protagonist, he finds a sense of belonging only within the community of mourning comrades.

Herzfelde envisaged an active role for literature in coming to terms with the past, as his contribution to the discussion on 'Gegenwartsdichtung' in the *Tägliche Rundschau (TR)* on 22 December 1949 illustrates. In response to the editor's proposal in the same discussion that literature should deal with issues of the present and offer a positive perspective for the future, rather than looking back at the recent past, Herzfelde asserts that Nazism and the war do not belong to the past, but exist in every aspect of the present. Therefore literature was obliged to take up this theme:

Der Blick in diese Vergangenheit ist nicht ein Blick nach Rückwärts [...], er ist vielmehr eine künstlerische Notwendigkeit, [...] weil man [...] erst recht

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<sup>262</sup> Quoted in Peitsch, *Nachkriegsliteratur*, p. 84.

das Versagen seines eigenen Volkes lieber vergißt, als daß man davon spricht.<sup>263</sup>

The latter sentence connects to a sentence from the previous quotation, in which the weeping returnee is addressed: ‘Was wir verschweigen möchten, hast du ausgesprochen: nicht nur die Zukunft ruft uns, auch die Vergangenheit.’<sup>264</sup> Shortly after his return, Herzfelde made a repeated appeal to remember, since the way to the future was only to be found through memorialising the Nazi victims. This argument ran counter to the conception of socialist realism as a focus on present developments, as proposed by the editor of the discussion in *TR*, and which would become dominant in *Aufbau* literature after 1951.

#### 4. Aesthetics: Defending a legacy

Herzfelde engaged critically with SED aesthetic policies in a series of writings from 1949-1952 discussing contemporaneous writers and artists: Grosz, Becher, Seghers and Brecht. He negotiated divergent aesthetic views with support for SED cultural policies, and sought to create a space for modernism – and with that for his own artistic past – within dominant aesthetic discourses. These texts reveal his strategy of employing authority figures and quoting core aspects of official discourses in order to justify controversial ideas and express approval for outsiders. They also indicate what terminology was available to bring forward divergent ideas, and how these strategies and language changed

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<sup>263</sup> Quoted in Bock, *Literatur, Gesellschaft, Nation*, p. 136.

<sup>264</sup> Herzfelde, *Immergrün*, p. 254.

with the severing of aesthetic debates after the announcement of the formalism campaign by the Central Committee in March 1951.

#### 4.1 Subjectivity and realism: George Grosz

In *Aufbau* of January 1950 Herzfelde published the essay ‘Ißt George Grosz wirklich von goldenen Tellern?’, intervening in an East-West debate around the painter Grosz. This upheaval (which unfolded when Herzfelde was in exile) is emblematic of rising Cold War tensions in the late 1940s: on 5 May 1948 *Neues Deutschland* (ND) condemned this representative of the Weimar avant-garde and Western exile, who remained in the US after 1945, supposedly sticking to his ‘golden tableware’ instead of joining the effort of rebuilding Germany.<sup>265</sup> Tensions between Grosz and the Party leadership had increased in exile because of his admiration for the US.<sup>266</sup> The friendship with Grosz was essential in Herzfelde’s development as a communist and an artist: during the First World War they met in Berlin circles of young artists who protested against the war, and they joined the newfound KPD together in 1918.<sup>267</sup>

The polemic against Grosz in ND, viewed in the context of a growing hostility towards modernism, was therefore also an indirect attack on Herzfelde’s artistic, political and personal background.<sup>268</sup> He responded to this threat soon after his arrival, about a year after the original dispute. With his

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<sup>265</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, ‘Ißt George Grosz wirklich von goldenen Tellern?’, *Aufbau*, 6.1 (1950), 86-88.

<sup>266</sup> Palmier, *Weimar in Exile*, pp. 508-509.

<sup>267</sup> See Danzer, *Zwischen Vertrauen und Verrat*, p. 122. They remained friends in exile; Herzfelde’s son George Wyland-Herzfelde for instance describes how, when his father left New York for Germany in 1949, Grosz said goodbye at the pier. Wyland-Herzfelde, *Glück gehabt*, p. 296.

<sup>268</sup> In November 1948, Alexander Dymshitz initiated official campaigns against modernism with an article against ‘formalist’ painting in the *TR*. Alexander Dymshitz, ‘Über die formalistische Richtung in der deutschen Malerei’, in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur-, und Kulturpolitik der SED*, pp. 97-103.

late intervention, Herzfelde sought to neutralize the hostility and claim a place for Grosz's work in GDR realism discourses, arguing that satirical images like those of Grosz presented reality in a more pronounced way. He starts in a reconciliatory vein, calling the upheaval a 'Komödie der Irrungen' and emphasising that he does not believe that *ND* had deliberately ridiculed Grosz.<sup>269</sup> Instead, Herzfelde states that the reason for the conflict could be found in Grosz's ideological ambiguities, particularly his 'beinahe plumpe Selbst-Persiflage, er "esse mit goldenem Besteck von goldenen Tellern"'.<sup>270</sup> It seems, however, that this initial assertion of *ND*'s blamelessness serves to cover his defence of Grosz: by remarking that in this case the self-mockery is obvious, he is still allocating *ND* its share of responsibility. Moreover, he argues that Grosz's 'gewaltige' oeuvre should be sufficiently indisputable to banish any misperceptions.<sup>271</sup>

Herzfelde continues to praise Grosz by presenting him as a true realist artist: 'er war, wie jeder echte Künstler, gerecht. Gerichtet haben die Objekte seiner Kunst sich selbst, durch ihr wirkliches Sein, von dem er die Maske der konventionellen Erscheinung riß.'<sup>272</sup> Herzfelde characterises Grosz's paintings as realist, replicating the argument made in his 1921 pamphlet, in which he described the task of communist artists as unmasking the bourgeois system in a way understandable to all.<sup>273</sup> The characterisation quoted above also relates to Lukács's assertion that art should uncover the power relations beneath the

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<sup>269</sup> Herzfelde, 'Ißt George Grosz wirklich von goldenen Tellern?', p. 86.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., pp. 86-87.

<sup>273</sup> Herzfelde, 'Gesellschaft, Künstler und Kommunismus', p. 74.



surface of capitalist society.<sup>274</sup> Herzfelde's statement thus connects the avant-garde with a realist understanding of socialist art. However, Herzfelde smuggles in the term conventional, which implies a criticism of the more conventional forms preferred by official realism discourses.

In the 1930s, Lukács criticised the avant-garde precisely for not showing 'das Wesentliche', but portraying only parts of reality in a 'verzerrt' manner,<sup>275</sup> or producing 'verzerrte und entstellte Stimmungsnachklänge der Wirklichkeit'.<sup>276</sup> Herzfelde responds to such accusations in his claim that Grosz was a clear partisan in the progressive struggle, 'indem er einerseits die Verkommenheit der Klassen bloßstellte, gegen die dieser Kampf sich richtete, andererseits die servilen, verdummtten, verspießerten und käuflichen Kreaturen, die sich dem Kampf entzogen'.<sup>277</sup> The discrepancy between the caricatures of Grosz and Lukács's realism model is obvious, yet Herzfelde brings them together by describing the former in terms of the latter. At stake is the issue of subjectivity. He denies that Grosz only gives a subjective image of reality by claiming that these caricatures showed the true face of capitalist society. Stating that Grosz's caricatures depict objective reality, undermines a realism conception which, like Lukács's, calls for 'correctly proportioned' representations of reality.<sup>278</sup> By calling Grosz a realist, Herzfelde tried to alter official aesthetic discourse, to make space for the avant-garde legacy. Or can we read his argument for Grosz actually as a challenge to dominant realist discourses altogether?

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<sup>274</sup> Georg Lukács, 'Es geht um den Realismus' (1938), in *Marxismus und Literatur, Band II*, ed. by Fritz J. Raddatz (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1969), pp. 60-86 (pp. 69, 77).

<sup>275</sup> Georg Lukács & Anna Seghers, 'Ein Briefwechsel zwischen Georg Lukács und Anna Seghers', in *Essays über Realismus* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1948), pp. 171-215 (p. 189).

<sup>276</sup> Lukács, 'Es geht um den Realismus', p. 85.

<sup>277</sup> Herzfelde, 'Ißt George Grosz wirklich von goldenen Tellern?', p. 87.

<sup>278</sup> Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, p. 120.

Herzfelde's defence of Grosz leaves the issue of the latter's lack of support for communism, the other requirement of socialist realism, unanswered. He does not claim Grosz had a communist conviction along SED lines. Instead he likens Grosz to the highly revered, non-communist figure of Thomas Mann. He calls Grosz a 'deutscher Maler und Meister [...] ebenso wie Thomas Mann ein deutscher Schriftsteller [ist]' and concludes: 'Ob er es bleiben wird, hängt nicht zuletzt davon ab, ob wir es wollen.'<sup>279</sup> The latter sentence aims at Grosz's critics, as the main source of the conflict; Grosz's sincerity is put beyond doubt.

Apart from indicating an adherence to national cultural heritage discourses, the comparison with Mann must be seen in the context of the debate on Mann and exile, launched by West German authors such as Frank Thiess, who coined the term 'innere Emigration'. Thiess's 1945 metaphor dismissing exile as safe and comfortable 'Logen und Parterreplätzen',<sup>280</sup> is ironically reflected in Grosz's golden tableware. Mann was heavily criticised in the Western context of hostility to exiles and because of his visit to Weimar in 1949,<sup>281</sup> which 'provided the opportunity in the East for statements of good intention' regarding national unity.<sup>282</sup> In East Germany, following Lukács's endorsement of him as a true realist<sup>283</sup> and as a successor of Goethe,<sup>284</sup> Mann was adopted as a central part of the heritage GDR culture should build upon.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> Herzfelde, 'Ißt George Grosz wirklich von goldenen Tellern?', pp. 87, 88.

<sup>280</sup> Frank Thiess, 'Die innere Emigration', in *Vaterland, Muttersprache: Deutsche Schriftsteller und ihr Staat seit 1945*, ed. by Klaus Wagenbach, Winfried Stephan, Michael Krüger & Susanne Schüssler (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 1995), p. 47.

<sup>281</sup> See Weber, '1949/1955: Thomas Mann in Frankfurt, Stuttgart und Weimar', p. 35.

<sup>282</sup> Flanagan, '1949: Writers and the Loss of National Unity', p. 48.

<sup>283</sup> Lukács, 'Es geht um den Realismus', p. 61.

<sup>284</sup> Weber, '1949/1955: Thomas Mann in Frankfurt, Stuttgart und Weimar', p. 36.

<sup>285</sup> Colin Smith, 'All Quiet on the Eastern Front? East German literature and its Western reception (1945-1961)', in *German Writers and the Cold War 1945-61*, ed. by Rhys W.

Grosz's reputation in official discourses was not so positive; Herzfelde's comparison serves to claim a place for him – and the avant-garde – in this heritage. With Grosz, Herzfelde found not only a friend under assault, but also his own intellectual past: his role as a poet, aesthetic thinker, and publisher in the cultural avant-garde of Weimar and in Western exile. Both the contested legacy of the avant-garde and the challenged status of Western exile were implicitly present in both the criticism of Grosz and Herzfelde's defence of him, which came down to championing his artistic legacy as useful for GDR culture.

#### 4.2 Revaluating expressionism

As we have seen, Herzfelde was highly sceptical of the condemnation of expressionism by Kurella in the late 1930s. In 1950, with this art movement still under scrutiny from official discourses,<sup>286</sup> Herzfelde used the canonical figure of Becher, a former expressionist, to defend expressionism. In his speech at the premiere of Becher's 'Neue deutsche Volkslieder' on 7 July 1950 in the Kongresshalle in Leipzig, Herzfelde uses Lukácsian concepts of realism to show his appreciation for Becher's early expressionism.<sup>287</sup>

Becher himself condemned his expressionist past.<sup>288</sup> As Dieter Schlenstedt notes, official SED cultural policies around 1950 disqualified expressionism as a German variety of formalism.<sup>289</sup> Nevertheless, Herzfelde claims, without actually using the disputed term, that Becher's early

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Williams, Stephen Parker & Colin Riordan, in collaboration with Helmut Peitsch (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 7-26 (p. 9).

<sup>286</sup> Cf. Jens-Fietje Dwars, *Johannes R. Becher: Triumph und Verfall: Eine Biographie* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2003), pp. 203-204.

<sup>287</sup> Akademie der Künste Berlin (AdK), Wieland-Herzfelde-Archiv (WH), 2479-5: Wieland Herzfelde, 'Ansprache über Johannes R. Becher' (July 1950).

<sup>288</sup> Bock, *Literatur, Gesellschaft, Nation*, p. 122.

<sup>289</sup> Schlenstedt, 'Doktrin und Dichtung im Widerstreit', pp. 33-103 (p. 54).

expressionist works were ‘kein kunstvolles Spiel mit Worten und Harmonien’ – in other words: not something that could have been condemned as formalist. The young Becher’s troubles were ‘keineswegs nur seelischer Art’, as his ‘subjektive Hin- und Hergerissenwerden objektiven, gesellschaftlichen Widersprüchen und Konflikten [entsprach]’ – namely the First World War.<sup>290</sup> This distinction between Becher’s subjective poetry and the objective circumstances of war is reminiscent of Lukács’s insistence that expressionism might have subjectively supported the anti-war struggle, but objectively counteracted it as it failed to expose the true, imperialist nature of war.<sup>291</sup> However, Herzfelde claims that Becher knew already back then, ‘obwohl er noch keine Verbindung zur Arbeiterklasse hatte’ (i.e. in his expressionist period), that the war was a ‘von Menschen herbeigeführte Katastrophe’. With his poems, he concludes, Becher demonstrated ‘bewusst’ against the war, alongside Karl Liebknecht.<sup>292</sup> The implication of Herzfelde’s merging of aesthetics and politics is that Becher was consciously on the right side, even before his conversion to realism, which amounts to a re-evaluation of Becher’s expressionist period, when he and Herzfelde were part of the same circle of young artists in Berlin.<sup>293</sup>

A striking example of the interplay of canonical and non-conformist patterns in Herzfelde’s stance is his praise for the language of the later, ‘realist’ Becher as understandable for the masses, ‘ohne ihre beunruhigende und

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<sup>290</sup> AdK, WH, 2479-5: ‘Ansprache über Johannes R. Becher’ (July 1950).

<sup>291</sup> Georg Lukács, “‘Größe und Verfall’ des Expressionismus” (1934), in *Marxismus und Literatur, Band II*, ed. by Fritz J. Raddatz (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1969), pp. 7-42 (p. 21).

<sup>292</sup> AdK, WH, 2479-5: ‘Ansprache über Johannes R. Becher’ (July 1950).

<sup>293</sup> See Danzer, *Zwischen Vertrauen und Verrat*, p. 121; Lilly Becher & Gert Prokop, *Johannes R. Becher: Bildchronik* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1963), p. 45.

zündende Kraft einzubüssen'.<sup>294</sup> Whereas the former part of this characterisation fits SED cultural policies (comprehensibility is part of literature's educational function), the latter does not. Its valuing of 'disturbing' language stems from a modernist aesthetic tradition, and runs counter to demands that literature should educate the people and inspire them to contribute to the struggle against capitalism.<sup>295</sup> Moreover, Herzfelde implicitly ascribes this power to Becher's expressionist period, since the use of 'einbüßen' implies that it was already present. He presents the comprehensibility of Becher's language instead as a result of his later studies of Marxism-Leninism.<sup>296</sup> This statement echoes Lukács's 1937 claim that Becher had abandoned expressionism when he sided with the proletariat.<sup>297</sup> Herzfelde negotiates between official cultural policies and preserving expressionist (and other modernist) cultural legacies. Therefore he claims that the power of Becher's poems is part of his expressionist heritage and interweaves this thesis into a wider argument that it is right that Becher had abandoned expressionism.

In the final part of his speech, Herzfelde uses the totality principle to justify Becher's early and less directly political poetry. Herzfelde's appraisal again builds on the aesthetics of Lukács (whom he does not mention), e.g. the presumption that realism should show the 'objektiven gesellschaftlichen Gesamtzusammenhang'.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> AdK, WH, 2479-5: 'Ansprache über Johannes R. Becher' (July 1950).

<sup>295</sup> Alexander Abusch, 'Aktuelle Fragen unserer Kulturpolitik, 14. Juni 1950', in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur-, und Kulturpolitik der SED*, pp. 140-144 (p. 141).

<sup>296</sup> AdK, WH, 2479-5: 'Ansprache über Johannes R. Becher' (July 1950).

<sup>297</sup> Lukács, "'Größe und Verfall" des Expressionismus', p. 8.

<sup>298</sup> Lukács, 'Es geht um den Realismus', p. 64.

In den tausend Gedichten Bechers, deren Held unsre Zeit ist, ihre Kämpfe, die Arbeiterklasse, die Sowjet-Union, die Heimat, Deutschland und die Männer in denen sich der Geist des Humanismus und der Revolution verkörpert hat, in ihnen allen ist [...] auch vom Dichter selbst die Rede. Und umgekehrt lebt in jenen anderen tausend Gedichten, deren Thematik das eigene Dasein, eigene Lust und Qual [...] sind, so sehr die Welt als Ganzes mit, dass sie dadurch aus der Sphäre des Einzelnen [...] herausgehoben werden.<sup>299</sup>

The use of totality by Herzfelde contrasts with his disdain for ‘Totalitätsgemusch’ expressed in the 1947 letter. In declaring that this totality applies to all of Becher’s work – with the clear implication that this includes the expressionist period –, Herzfelde uses this concept of Lukács to make expressionism acceptable for dominant cultural discourses.

A similar tactic to Herzfelde’s employing the canonical Becher in order to criticise the official denunciation of expressionism, was used in the next year by Alfred Döblin at the official celebration of Becher’s 60<sup>th</sup> birthday on 22 May 1951 at the Staatsoper in Berlin. Döblin, a guest speaker from West Germany, connected Becher’s expressionism with his later fight against the ‘Schund- und Schmutzgesetz’, drawing attention to the disqualification of expressionism as decadent ‘Schund’ in official discourses, and implying a continuity between GDR cultural policies and the conservative censorship during the Weimar Republic.<sup>300</sup> Herzfelde’s argument was part of a broader debate about the heritage of socialist art and literature, in which he claimed a place for modernism.

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<sup>299</sup> AdK, WH, 2479-5: ‘Ansprache über Johannes R. Becher’ (July 1950).

<sup>300</sup> Dwars, *Johannes R. Becher*, pp. 203-204.

#### 4.3 Affirmation and subversion

Herzfelde's strategy to affirm official aesthetic discourses, while smuggling in certain divergent elements, can also be observed in his 'Nachwort' to the 1950 edition of Seghers's novel *Das siebte Kreuz*, published at the Aufbau Verlag. He defines Seghers's famous style of writing as follows:

Er ist gewiß das Produkt gründlicher literarischer Bildung, des Einflusses vor allem der großen französischen und russischen Realisten des 19. Jahrhunderts, aber auch der Stilexperimente vom Naturalismus bis zum Expressionismus, zur neuen Sachlichkeit und der – vom Film angeregten – Montagetechnik.<sup>301</sup>

Herzfelde affirms the importance of learning from those realists endorsed by Lukács, such as Tolstoi and Balzac, but also advocates experiments contrary to official discourses, and even names four modernist styles as elements of the aesthetics of the canonical Seghers. Herzfelde's mentioning of 'Montagetechnik' in this context must be read as a plea for this modernist method, and a defence of the aesthetics of his brother Heartfield, the exponent of this technique in the visual arts.

Likewise, when he praises Seghers's 'ungekünstelten, wahrhaft volkstümlichen Wortschatz', adding that she refrains from the 'Einbeziehung vulgärer, schmutziger Wendungen, die "volkstümlich" wirken sollen', he mocks literature which follows from the official postulation of *Volkstümlichkeit*.<sup>302</sup> But he leaves unclear which specific works he is referring to, which makes his criticism ambiguous. He brings his claims in line with

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<sup>301</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, 'Liebe zu Deutschland: Anna Seghers und Das siebte Kreuz', in *Zur Sache*, pp. 226-237 (p. 235).

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

official discourses as he claims that Seghers's language has 'nichts gemein mit der degradierenden Drastik des spätbürgerlichen Realismus und Humanismus'.<sup>303</sup> His rejection of late bourgeois culture echoes Lukács's 1936 disapproval of the 'Beschreibungskunst des neueren Realismus'.<sup>304</sup> This text must also be read in the context of a controversy surrounding Seghers's latest novel *Die Toten bleiben jung*, which was under increasing scrutiny from official Party organs over the course of the year 1950.<sup>305</sup> Loreto Villar argues that Seghers's position in 1950 was privileged but 'heikel'.<sup>306</sup> In this context, Herzfelde, her exile publisher, ensured he presented a positive image of her in this introduction.

#### 4.4 Negotiating during the formalism campaign

The SED campaign against formalism, officially announced at the fifth meeting of the Central Committee in March 1951, made Herzfelde's negotiating tactics more complicated.<sup>307</sup> This complication can be seen in his article on Brecht, published in December 1951 in *Aufbau*, in which he defends Brecht's work against accusations of formalism and 'decadence'.<sup>308</sup>

Brecht's play *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* (1939) had already been accused of 'volksfremde Dekadenz' in 1949 as it allegedly failed to show the outrage of the masses against war. At the fifth meeting of the Central

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>304</sup> Georg Lukács, 'Erzählen oder beschreiben?', in *Essays über Realismus*, pp. 197-242 (pp. 201-204).

<sup>305</sup> Early in 1950 Fritz Erpenbeck hailed the novel in *Neues Deutschland* as the work of a great realist, later in the same newspaper Peter Kast critiqued its lack of 'Parteinahme'. Loreto Villar, 'Die "kompromittierende Interessantheit" in *Die Toten bleiben jung* von Anna Seghers: Ein Blick auf die kontroverse Rezeption 1950 in der DDR', *Treibhaus: Jahrbuch für die Literatur der fünfziger Jahre*, 4 (2009), 103-120.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>307</sup> 'Der Kampf gegen den Formalismus in Kunst und Literatur, für eine fortschrittliche deutsche Kultur'.

<sup>308</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, 'Der Lyriker Bertolt Brecht', *Aufbau*, 7.12 (1951), 1097-1104.



Committee, Brecht was criticised for his stage adaption of Gorki's *Die Mutter* (1932).<sup>309</sup> The opera *Das Verhör des Lukullus* (1951), for which he wrote the libretto to music by Paul Dessau, was cancelled after it received a harsh reprimand.<sup>310</sup> Herzfelde's essay gives us an insight into the tactics he used in this drastically changed atmosphere – particularly in face of the denunciations of the modernist heritage which formed his personal artistic background. His relationship to Brecht goes back to the 1920s and is based on congruent aesthetic positions. In exile, Brecht published the first volumes of his collected theatre plays at Herzfelde's Malik-Verlag in Prague. From 1943 he was a partner in Herzfelde's Aurora-Verlag in New York, where *Furcht und Elend des Dritten Reiches* was published.<sup>311</sup>

Similar to his speech on Becher, Herzfelde focuses on Brecht's artistic origins. He claims that Brecht's early work was rooted in popular culture, as it was inspired by the 'Deutlichkeit und Drastik' (note the positive use of latter term, which is inconsistent with the text on Seghers) of the songs performed by 'Drehorgelspielern' and 'Volkskomikern'. He claims Brecht's early work served 'der Vermittlung revolutionärer Erkenntnisse'.<sup>312</sup> This is a different goal from Lukácsian totality, or even Zhdanov's definition of art as the portrayal of reality in its revolutionary development. Herzfelde's terminology differs from the realism concepts preferred by official cultural policies.

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<sup>309</sup> For a concise discussion of the formalism accusations against Brecht, see Manfred Jäger, *Kultur und Politik in der DDR 1945-1990* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1995), pp. 52-68.

<sup>310</sup> "'Das Verhör des Lukullus': Stellungnahme des "Neuen Deutschland" zur Aufführung der gleichnamigen Oper von Brecht und Dessau in der Deutschen Staatsoper, 22. März 1951', in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur-, und Kulturpolitik der SED*, pp. 186-187.

<sup>311</sup> See Werner Mittenzwei, *Der Realismus-Streit um Brecht: Grundriß der Brecht-Rezeption in der DDR 1945-1975* (Berlin & Weimar: Aufbau, 1978), pp. 177-180. The final two volumes of Brecht's *Gesammelte Werke* were not published before Nazi Germany occupied Czechoslovakia and forced Herzfelde to flee once more.

<sup>312</sup> Herzfelde, 'Der Lyriker Bertolt Brecht', p. 1098.

Herzfelde claims that even though Brecht's principle of presenting only 'einen Extrakt der Wirklichkeit' limits the 'realistische Wirkung seiner Dichtung', it enables visualisation of 'Fragen des Klassenkampfes [...] durch Bloßlegung des für die revolutionäre Erkenntnis Wesentlichen'.<sup>313</sup> Contrasting such extracts with the totalising pictures advocated by Lukács, Herzfelde maintains that the former suit the purpose of socialist literature. While he does not claim to follow Brecht's assertion that the totality principle cannot lead to an objective representation of reality,<sup>314</sup> his argument comes down to a defence of Brecht and other authors who were accused in the formalism campaign, and crucially of the avant-garde legacy he shared with Brecht.

Moreover, he presents Brecht's epic theatre as a precursor to socialist realist theatre: he asserts that Brecht's theory contributed 'entscheidend zur Überwindung des spätbürgerlichen Hof- und Burgtheaterstils' as it established the 'Primat der Politik auf der Bühne'.<sup>315</sup> Following this argument, socialist realist theatre was not possible without Brecht's epic theatre. Employing a modernist argument, Herzfelde additionally suggests that epic theatre is better than the traditional theatre preferred by SED cultural policy, which he connects with the 'decadence' of (Viennese) courts, and the late bourgeoisie.

The formalism resolution of March 1951 emphasised the importance of artists' rootedness in their national culture.<sup>316</sup> Herzfelde's essay responds to this demand when he depicts Brecht as a patriot with a strong bond to his people: he states that during exile, Brecht discovered the 'nationale Bedingtheit der Kunst' and came to a 'Bekenntnis zu Deutschland'. Herzfelde argues

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<sup>313</sup> Ibid., p. 1099.

<sup>314</sup> Luc Herman, *Concepts of Realism* (Columbia SC: Camden House, 1996), p. 137.

<sup>315</sup> Herzfelde, 'Der Lyriker Bertolt Brecht', p. 1100.

<sup>316</sup> 'Der Kampf gegen den Formalismus in Kunst und Literatur für eine fortschrittliche deutsche Kultur', p. 184.

against accusations of ‘Volksfremdheit’ that were imposed on Brecht, as he states that, although Brecht does not belong to ‘den “leicht lesbaren” Schriftstellern’, his language derives from ‘die ungekünstelte Sprechweise seiner bayrischen Landsleute’. Brecht’s literature differs much from ‘der gewollt literarischen Tradition [...], die im Expressionismus den Gipfel der Schwerverständlichkeit und Volksfremdheit erreichte’.<sup>317</sup> Contradicting his earlier defence of expressionism in the speech on Becher, he uses the narrative pattern denouncing expressionism for its alleged incomprehensibility in order to typify Brecht as *verständlich* and *volksverbunden*. Now that the formalism campaign had been unleashed, his negotiation tactics became more complicated as he was increasingly restricted to the use of official language. The essay concludes with an appraisal of Brecht’s ‘dramatischen Methode’:

Diese Methode erlaubt es, Leid auszudrücken, ohne zu klagen, zum Kampf zu rufen, ohne pathetisch zu werden, und ohne große Worte vom Größten, vom Befreiungskampf der Arbeiterklasse, zu berichten.<sup>318</sup>

Herzfelde’s argument is not only a justification of Brecht’s theory, but also shows disapproval of official conceptions of socialist realism, even if he does not name particular styles or authors to whom the three negative qualifications (‘klagen’, ‘pathetisch’, ‘große Worte’) apply.

Herzfelde made another case for Brecht in a contribution to *Sinn und Form* less than a year later, championing the theatrical methods of the Berliner

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<sup>317</sup> Herzfelde, ‘Der Lyriker Bertolt Brecht’, p. 1101.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., p. 1102.

Ensemble (BE).<sup>319</sup> This essay shows how his use of ambiguity works to challenge and simultaneously affirm official maxims. As an epigraph he quotes two statements on the importance of theoretical knowledge. The first one by Leonardo da Vinci, the second one, interestingly, by Constantin Stanislavski, whose canonical theatrical methods functioned in official discourses as a positive counterpart to the disputed work of Brecht.<sup>320</sup> In his introduction on the theatrical context of Brecht's work, Herzfelde also mentions Stanislavski, alongside Gordon Craig, Vsevolod Meyerhold and Max Reinhardt, as persons with decisive influence on renewing theatre in the twentieth century. The positive valuation of Meyerhold is striking, since he was arrested, tortured and executed in 1939-1940 for his opposition to Stalinism.<sup>321</sup> Herzfelde thus claims a place for this highly problematic dramatist in the legacy socialist theatre should build upon. The naming of Meyerhold can be connected to a passage two pages afterwards. Discussing developments in Soviet theatre during the 1930s, Herzfelde implicitly comments on the Stalinist purges:

Aber ob radikal oder konservativ in Fragen des Stils und der Form – die Dramatiker und Regisseure der Sowjetunion wollten dem Fortschritt, der neuen Gesellschaft, der Revolution dienen, und alle, oft erbitterten Diskussionen gingen nicht darum, ob, sondern wie das geschehen sollte. Das

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<sup>319</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, 'Theorie und Praxis eines Ensembles', *Sinn und Form: Beiträge zur Literatur*, 4 (1952), 54-70.

<sup>320</sup> For instance, at the Stanislavski-Konferenz in 1953 in Berlin, the methods of Brecht and Stanislavski were juxtaposed in favour of the latter, whereas Brecht stressed the congruencies between him and Stanislavski. See Astrid Oesmann, 'Die Schriften: Einführung', in *Brecht Handbuch*, 4: *Schriften, Journale, Briefe*, ed. by Jan Knopf (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003), pp. 1-15 (p. 10). See also Renate Ullrich, "'Und zudem bringt Ihr noch den genialen Stanislawski in Verruf': Zur Kanonisierung einer Schauspielmethode", in *Literaturgesellschaft DDR: Kanonkämpfe und ihre Geschichte(n)*, ed. by Birgit Dahlke, Martina Langermann & Thomas Taterka (Stuttgart & Weimar: Metzler, 2000), pp. 104-144; Jäger, *Kultur und Politik in der DDR*, p. 62; Mittenzwei, *Der Realismus-Streit um Brecht*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>321</sup> Robert Leach, *Vsevolod Meyerhold* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 29.

letzte Wort in diesen [...] Auseinandersetzungen sprach das Publikum der [...] Sowjetmenschen. Es lehnte den traditionsfeindlichen Formalismus als kleinbürgerlich-anarchistisches Überbleibsel ab. Es forderte eine kritisch an die Folklore und das nationale Erbe anknüpfende, zu Sozialismus erziehende, den Massen verständliche Kunst. Seitdem geht die Diskussion auf der höheren Ebene einer Entwicklung zum sozialistischen Realismus weiter.<sup>322</sup>

At face value this is a straightforward condemnation of formalism, in consensus with official realism discourses. However, with the name and fate of Meyerhold in mind, the first sentence of this quotation appears to comment on the persecution of artistically divergent, but politically assenting intellectuals like Meyerhold – or even on the repressive turn taken by the SED in the formalism debate. On the other hand, the claim that the general public of Soviet people decided against this art, brings into play a narrative pattern which identifies the Party with the people and serves as a defence of Stalinism.

Turning towards the German context, Herzfelde defends epic theatre by calling Piscator's method revolutionary and 'gegenwartsbezogen', two key requirements in SED discourses.<sup>323</sup> He simultaneously legitimises SED cultural policies as he emphasises the funding received by the BE. The repertoire of the ensemble, he concedes, fails to address 'Probleme der Gegenwart', a requirement of official conceptions of socialist realism. But he underlines that the BE works to overcome this deficiency with a 'Zeitstück' on a 'Helden der Arbeit'.<sup>324</sup> Such a play would fit in with the 'Aktivistenkampagne' around the heroised miner Adolf Hennecke, the East

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<sup>322</sup> Herzfelde, 'Theorie und Praxis eines Ensembles', pp. 56-57.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid., pp. 58-59.

German version of the Stachanov Movement, which was intended to stimulate labourers to higher achievements, and to raise productivity norms in consequence.<sup>325</sup> Brecht planned to write a play on Hennecke's successor as a celebrated activist, the mason Hans Garbe who, as SED propaganda claimed, repaired a 'Ringofen' single-handedly without disruptions of production.<sup>326</sup> The project was eventually taken up by Heiner Müller in his play *Der Lohndrucker* (1957).

Herzfelde's concessions to official aesthetic discourses are followed by a criticism of the ways these discourses conceptualise positive heroes: he counters the allegations that GDR theatre in general fails to show positive heroes by stating that different notions of such heroes exist.<sup>327</sup> When he demonstrates this idea using the drum scene from Brecht's *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* – in which Courage's mute daughter Katrin beats a drum to warn the inhabitants of the city of Halle against a surprise attack – Herzfelde uses the term 'formalism' to dismiss those critics of epic theatre who claim the scene provokes strong reactions because it is the most dramatic one in the play: 'Die Form allein kann natürlich nicht die Ursache der starken Reaktion des Publikums [...] sein. Derlei anzunehmen ist ja gerade der Irrtum des Formalismus.' Rather, Katrin's empowering act counters the spectators' doubts, and makes them aware of their own powers, Herzfelde asserts:

Nicht mit Katrin identifizieren sie sich [...], sie identifizieren sich mit dem, was Dichter und Schauspieler gestalten: daß noch im ärmsten, geschlagensten

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<sup>325</sup> See Kleßmann, *Arbeiter im "Arbeiterstaat" DDR*, p. 216.

<sup>326</sup> John Fuegi, *Brecht & Co.: Biographie* (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1997), p. 800.

<sup>327</sup> Herzfelde, 'Theorie und Praxis eines Ensembles', pp. 59-60.

Menschen, ja gerade in ihm der Mut lebt und die Kraft, sich für Gerechtigkeit für das Leben einzusetzen.<sup>328</sup>

By emphasising identification with ideas, not with characters, Herzfelde champions Brecht's method, which opposed identification with characters on stage, notably with an example from a play which had been accused of being *volksfremd*. His strategy of ambiguous negotiation allows him to make this claim, as he does use the term identification, but focuses on the engagement of the audience that Brecht insisted theatre should achieve.

#### 4.5 Criticism of classicism

At the Third Writers' Congress in May 1952 in Berlin, Herzfelde criticised official heritage concepts, specifically the exaltation of the *deutsche Klassik*, in his response to the address by Stephan Hermlin. Hermlin quoted the West German author Rudolf Alexander Schröder's claim that the classical heritage was not valued sufficiently in West Germany, and argued that 'das alte Wahre', banned by the Nazis, was still taboo in the FRG, but restored by the GDR, where 'arbeitende Menschen' read the 'Klassik'.<sup>329</sup> Herzfelde questions Hermlin's argument, and in consequence the official conception of the classical heritage: 'Dieses Alte, Wahre, gibt es das?' Questioning the reasons behind revering the *Klassik*, Herzfelde does not denounce its heritage altogether, but calls for a more critical reception:

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid., pp. 60-61.

<sup>329</sup> Stephan Hermlin, 'Die zukünftige Nationalliteratur der Deutschen', in *Erinnerung als Aufgabe? Dokumentation des II. und III. Schriftstellerkongresses in der DDR 1950 und 1952*, ed. by Carsten Gansel & Tanja Walenski (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2008), pp. 296-315 (pp. 298, 299).

Wir wollen das Wahre in Verbindung mit dem Lebendigen begreifen und nicht in Verbindung mit dem Ästhetischen, wie das so sehr der Brauch der Vergangenheit und jener Repräsentanten der Vergangenheit war, die heute noch leben.<sup>330</sup>

In this criticism of official *Erbepolitik* and of normative aesthetics, Herzfelde proposes to determine the reliability of a work of literature through a connection with living reality instead of using purely formal standards – in other words: formal issues, such as the question whether it is strictly realist, should not determine the value of literature. Making his argument compatible with the formalism campaign, he finally claims that such a preoccupation with ‘das Ästhetische’ belongs to the past. He thus puts his criticism of official cultural policies in terms derived from official discourses.

Herzfelde integrated modernism, expressionism and the avant-garde into the heritage of socialist literature. In order to do this, he was increasingly restricted to the use of officially sanctioned language, particularly after the formalism campaign was launched in 1951. The radical turn of the Party leadership narrowed the discursive consensus. Anyone willing to be part of the consensus, to be able to take a position in the discourse, was required to go along with this shift. Supporting the consensus was the precondition to attempting to influence it. In the texts on Brecht, Herzfelde made use of verdicts as *Volksfremdheit* and *Formalismus* to create room for his argument. Before 1951 his strategy was similar. In his defence of Grosz he used the

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<sup>330</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, ‘Zur Rede Stephan Hermlins’, in *Erinnerung als Aufgabe? Dokumentation*, pp. 332-334 (p. 333).



dominant realist aesthetic discourses to defend Grosz and preserve his work as part of the cultural heritage.

### 5. Affirmative stances in the lectures

As an effect of his negotiation strategy, the publications cited above are largely affirmative of the very cultural policies they seek to modify. During the same years in the very different institutional context of his lectures on literature and cultural policies at the University of Leipzig, Herzfelde refrained from this strategy of smuggling in divergent or alternative ideas. Opposition was especially problematic in the context of Leipzig University, in particular at the faculty in which Herzfelde worked. As John Connelly argues, the SED brought together its prominent Marxist academics here.<sup>331</sup> Bernd Leistner claims that it was not until the second half of the 1950s, that prominent staff members such as Hans Mayer and Ernst Bloch expressed criticism of SED cultural policies.<sup>332</sup> However, the development of their respective critical stances is complex and cannot be reduced to Leistner's artificial early and late 1950s caesura. Nevertheless, Leipzig University was a prestigious place for the SED, which sought to control its staff and students tightly.<sup>333</sup> Moreover, in contrast to Bloch and Mayer, Herzfelde taught at the Journalistische Fakultät; nicknamed 'das rote Kloster', this institution was designated to train journalists in a partisan way and this did not leave much space for diversions.<sup>334</sup> In his

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<sup>331</sup> John Connelly, 'East German Higher Education Policies and Student Resistance, 1945-1948', *Central European History*, 28 (1995), 259-298 (p. 272).

<sup>332</sup> See Bernd Leistner, 'Hans Mayer als Literaturprofessor in Leipzig', *Treibhaus: Jahrbuch für die Literatur der fünfziger Jahre*, 4 (2009), 207-220.

<sup>333</sup> Connelly describes how, around 1950, the well-ordered university Party organisation kept a close watch on university life as 'they were plagued by doubts that students and teachers were not revealing their true opinions'. See Connelly, *Captive University*, p. 183.

<sup>334</sup> See Mertens, 'Remigration als Elitenaustausch', p. 215.

academic teaching role, he conformed to Party discipline and conveyed official cultural discourses, as will be demonstrated in the following section.

### 5.1 Partisan positions

Herzfelde's inaugural lecture 'Die deutsche Literatur im Exil', held at the beginning of the academic year in October 1949, set the tone for his more assenting line.<sup>335</sup> He harshly condemns anticommunist exile writers (mentioning Arthur Koestler explicitly), in a way which contrasts with his inclusiveness in exile: 'Manchmal verraten Stil und Wortschatz, häufiger die Gedanken eines Autors, daß der Ungeist, der ihn über die Grenzen trieb, ihn ins Exil begleitet hat, ohne daß er es merkte.'<sup>336</sup> Herzfelde links anticommunist authors to the fascist 'Ungeist'; by arguing that authors who think of themselves as antifascists may in fact be betrayed by their writing style as fascist, he departs from his aesthetic openness in other contexts. His harsh judgment illustrates how antifascism could function as a medium of exclusion and denunciation, if opponents were automatically regarded as fascists.

In his lecture on censorship (February 1950), Herzfelde also took a more partisan position. In contrast to the subtle negotiations in his aesthetic essays, commenting on the enforcement of aesthetic norms, Herzfelde constructs an argument which justifies state interventions in literature under socialism, and reserves the term censorship for capitalist societies. He defines censorship as a change to a literary text which does not serve the purpose of literature. This purpose, he goes on to argue, is identical with the cause of

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<sup>335</sup> Helmut Peitsch notes how this lecture set 'wertende Maßstäbe' for exile literature, but does not discuss it in length. Peitsch, 'No Politics?', p. 186.

<sup>336</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, 'Die deutsche Literatur im Exil: Antrittsvorlesung an der Universität Leipzig, Herbstsemester 1949', in *Zur Sache*, pp. 189-213 (p. 211).

socialism: true literature serves ‘die Sache der Menschheit’, and hence ‘wurden die Schriftsteller, selbst wenn sie es gar nicht beabsichtigten, [...] ja, zuweilen gegen ihren Willen, zu Verbündeten des Proletariats’.<sup>337</sup> Whereas the essays are often critical of Lukács’s theories of realism, this argument appropriates his 1930s argument for bourgeois realism.<sup>338</sup> The effect of Herzfelde’s argument is twofold: it rejects the idea that any alteration to literature, which is done with a socialist aim, can be defined as censorship, but denies protection against censorship to writers who do not conform to aesthetic norms.

Another contrast to his critical positions is his denial that ‘in der Sowjet-Union Kunst und Literatur gegängelt werden’. Herzfelde claims that this alleged misunderstanding results from the misleading ‘kapitalistisch-individualistische Auslegung des Begriffs der geistigen Freiheit’. Instead, he presents intellectual freedom as the recognition of the need to maintain Party discipline:

Der das Wesen und die Notwendigkeiten des Klassenkampfes [...] erkennende Sozialist, weiss sich als durchaus frei, indem er die Parteidisziplin einhält und verteidigt. [...] Man kann also, wenn überhaupt, von einer Zensur im sozialistischen Staat nur sprechen, wenn man damit den Einfluss meint, den die Partei auf das kulturelle Leben nimmt. Wer diesen Einfluss verneint, und damit die Rolle der Partei beim Kampf um den Sozialismus und bei seinem Aufbau, der verneint zugleich den Willen der Werktätigen, sich [...] zu befreien. Denn die Partei verkörpert diesen Willen. Wer hingegen den

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<sup>337</sup> AdK, WH, 2799-8: ‘Prof. Wieland Herzfelde, Ueber Entstehung und Funktionen von Literatur, 3. Untersuchung: Ueber Zensur, III. Vorlesung 9.2.1950’.

<sup>338</sup> Lukács, ‘Es geht um den Realismus’, p. 69.

Führungsanspruch der Partei, d.h. der besten und bewährtesten Kräfte des Volkes, bejaht, für den gibt es im Sozialismus keine Zensur.<sup>339</sup>

The greater freedom pursued by the working class under the leadership of the communist Party means that conforming to Party discipline is the real way to maintain intellectual freedom. The first sentence of this quote, with its masculine presentation of the conscious socialist, could be read as a characterisation of Herzfelde's own position as he defends the official line notwithstanding criticisms brought forward in other contexts. Speaking to his students, Herzfelde justifies the Party's leading role in matters of literature, and accepts censorship applied by the socialist state as a necessity of the class struggle, a struggle which would finally lead to greater freedom. His argument fails, however, due to his inability to solve the paradox between his defence of the state's right to censorship and the impossibility of censorship under socialism.

The contrast with Herzfelde's defence of modernism in other texts from the same period is particularly striking, when he claims that until the Russian Revolution naturalists, futurists and expressionists sided with the proletariat, but the establishment of the Soviet Union led to a new situation: he claims that most of these writers retained their old positions after communism secured power. These positions (which Herzfelde characterises as the unmasking of bourgeois society) were not historically relevant anymore, now that the 'Verwirklichung des Sozialismus' was on the agenda.<sup>340</sup> He dismisses the

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<sup>339</sup> AdK, WH, 2799-8: 'Ueber Zensur, III. Vorlesung 9.2.1950'.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

expressionism he defended in the speech on Becher, and the unmasking of bourgeois society, which he valued in Grosz's work.

## 5.2 The formalism campaign

The affirmative function of Herzfelde's academic teaching becomes stronger after the launch of the formalism campaign in 1951. In his lecture on 'Die Kunst- und Kulturpolitik seit Gründung der DDR' of 9 October 1952, he grants a central role to the formalism resolution. He summarises the resolution extensively, investigates the extent to which its goals have been achieved, and calls for an improvement of literary criticism in order to better realise these goals. He heralds the Party line, assents with statements of high-ranking officials such as Ulbricht and Fritz Apelt, the director of the 'Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen', and never shows any distance from the official line. Nevertheless, it could have been explained as a call for an open discussion of the ways in which the Party enforces its cultural policies, when he quotes Becher's declaration that also in literary criticism socialist realism had to be enforced. For he interprets part of Becher's criticism as being aimed at the 'Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen' and the 'Kulturfunktionäre der Massenorganisationen'. His interpretation allows him to suggest the possibility of open discussion. In contrast to Herzfelde's critical considerations at the Third Writers' Congress (May 1952) about the classical heritage, he finally calls Becher's role as a literary critic 'typisch für das Wiederaufleben eines Verhaltens, das sich für unsere Klassiker von selbst verstand, das aber in der bürgerlichen Literatur dieses Jahrhunderts nur noch selten anzutreffen ist': the

writer as critic.<sup>341</sup> Herzfelde affirms the narrative of the revival of the *deutsche Klassik* in the GDR, of which he was critical in his contribution at the Third Writers' Congress in that same year.

In his lecturing role, Herzfelde put forward the official Party view on literature, which had been enforced since the announcement of the struggle against formalism. In the context and function in which he spoke, the official literary line was hard to challenge. The paradox between his delicate negotiating in the essays on aesthetics and the strict stance in his lectures is partly explained by their different contexts. It also indicates that the ambiguity in his relationship to communist cultural policies, which was already present in the Weimar era, persisted.

#### 6. The June 1953 uprising

Herzfelde's reaction to the uprising of 17 June 1953 was ambiguous as well. A few days after the event, on 22 June, he attended a discussion of members of the Writers' Union in Berlin, where he proposed a reaction to the uprising which in aesthetic terms was largely in accordance with the official policy that writers should study working class life more closely, but which also implied the criticism that the demands of the working class had not sufficiently been taken notice of by the leadership.<sup>342</sup> As I will show in the next chapter, the critical essay by Loest, 'Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne' (July 1953), which

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<sup>341</sup> AdK, WH, 2829-2: 'Prof. W. Herzfelde, 9.10.1952, Literatur- und Kunstkritik, 3. Vorlesung: Die Kunst- und Kulturpolitik seit Gründung der DDR'.

<sup>342</sup> 'DSV, Bezirksverband Berlin: Außerordentliche Sitzung (22. Juni 1953)', in *Parlament des Geistes: Literatur zwischen Hoffnung und Repression 1945-1961*, ed. by Carsten Gansel (Berlin: BasisDruck, 1996), pp. 315-317.

caused the author's near exclusion from the Writers' Union, was informed by the same argument.<sup>343</sup>

Using official demands to align works of literature more closely with the needs of the working class, Herzfelde criticises aspects of Party and government policies that he regarded as reasons for the uprising. Alongside the writers Peter Kast and Jan Petersen, he argues that authors should visit workplaces in order to let, as Herzfelde put it, 'die Arbeiter durch unsere Feder sprechen'.<sup>344</sup> They proposed discussing government and Party failures as possible reasons for the uprising, but the writer Otto Gotsche, then personal secretary of Ulbricht,<sup>345</sup> denied this possibility. The document reveals that Herzfelde proposed supporting those authors whose books were 'nicht mehr übernommen' – a rather euphemistic phrase meaning they were censored.<sup>346</sup> Even though he does not use the term censorship, Herzfelde showed support for colleagues whose works were banned. By contrast, in the 1950 university lecture on censorship discussed above, he denied such authors the right to regard themselves as true writers of literature – and hence the right to be free from censorship. Again the inconsistency of his stances in different institutional, but also historical contexts is striking. His tactics may have entailed defending the Party line when he felt this was necessary, while putting forward criticisms in contexts where he felt this was possible.

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<sup>343</sup> Erich Loest, 'Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne', *Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel: Zeitschrift für die Verbreitung des fortschrittlichen Buches, für Literaturkritik und Bibliographie*, 4 July 1953, pp. 548-549.

<sup>344</sup> 'DSV, Bezirksverband Berlin: Außerordentliche Sitzung (22. Juni 1953)', p. 316.

<sup>345</sup> Anne Hartmann, 'Schriftsteller als kulturpolitische Kader: Auswirkungen der sowjetischen Präsenz auf das kulturelle Leben in der SBZ', in *Schriftsteller als Intellektuelle: Politik und Literatur im Kalten Krieg*, ed. by Sven Hanuschek, Therese Hörnigk & Christine Malende (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), pp. 159-172 (p. 168).

<sup>346</sup> 'DSV, Bezirksverband Berlin: Außerordentliche Sitzung (22. Juni 1953)', pp. 316-317.

The enclosed, semi-public sphere of the Writers' Union offered the context for Herzfelde to bring forward criticism and propose reforms of economic policies. Following his own recommendation at the meeting of 22 June 1953, he visited a printing works in Leipzig and reported to the Writers' Union. As Gansel argues, Herzfelde's report signals that 'ein Teil der Autoren durchaus die stalinistische Fehlentwicklung in der DDR besorgt registrierte'.<sup>347</sup> It can indeed be concluded from Herzfelde's report that he opposed Soviet-style economic policies as practised by the SED leadership. His criticism aims at the heart of GDR economic policies when he concludes that much unrest among the personnel in this printing works was caused by the underprivileged position of light industries: 'Vor allem darf die Leichtindustrie wegen der Schwerindustrie nicht so wesentlich benachteiligt werden.'<sup>348</sup> Another problem he registered was the impossibility of 'kleinere Anschaffungen' for the benefit of the employees because all investment was planned in advance. The 'Nichterfüllung ihrer wiederholt vorgebrachten Wünsche' reportedly demoralised the workers. Hence Herzfelde concludes: 'Bestimmungen, Erlasse der übergeordneten Stellen sind zu starr, zu eng begrenzt'.<sup>349</sup> Herzfelde responds to actual socio-economic problems, which partly caused the uprising. He blames them on the rigid way in which the authorities ran the planned economy, and particularly on the focus on heavy industries which was central to SED policies during the construction of socialism.<sup>350</sup> He thus positioned himself on the reformist side, urging for changes in the context of the 'Neue

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<sup>347</sup> Gansel, *Parlament des Geistes*, p. 175.

<sup>348</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, 'Diskussion mit dem Produktionsleiter (Juli 1953)', in Gansel, *Parlament des Geistes*, pp. 317-319 (p. 317)

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 318.

<sup>350</sup> Arnd Bauerkämper, *Die Sozialgeschichte der DDR* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2005), p. 28.



Kurs', rather than the leadership's reluctant acceptance of it, to contain the unrest which became apparent in June 1953.

Herzfelde supports his claims by presenting them as concerns of the workers who, he assures, 'sind ehrlich bemüht, sich für den Aufbau einzusetzen, ihre Haltung ist nicht ablehnend gegenüber der heutigen Politik'. They reportedly objected that the wage system was unfair, which again reflects on SED economic policies, particularly the raised production norms. Finally, he writes that the employees condemned 'Schönmalerei in Funk und Zeitung', distrusted government statements, and demanded evidence of government claims.<sup>351</sup> With the final point, Herzfelde repeats the concerns raised in the resolution of the Leipzig Schriftstellerverband condemning 'beschönigende Informationen', which he signed on the day before the visit to the printing works.<sup>352</sup> The resolution was initiated by Loest, who was the chairperson of the Leipzig Schriftstellerverband after Herzfelde had nominated him in 1951.<sup>353</sup> It contains many elements of the criticism raised in Loest's heavily denounced essay 'Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne' which, as will be shown in the next chapter, criticised the glossing over of real problems by the official press.<sup>354</sup> In a similar way to Loest's essay, Herzfelde's report considers the workers an authority that the Party leadership should take notice of. Coming from within the reformist strand of Party discourses, both authors aim to improve GDR socialism. Whereas Loest ran into trouble by publishing his objections in a major journal, the Leipzig *Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel*,

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid., pp. 318-319.

<sup>352</sup> 'DSV, Bezirksverband Leipzig: Resolution zum 17. Juni 1953', in Gansel, *Parlament des Geistes*, pp. 303-304.

<sup>353</sup> Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, p. 172.

<sup>354</sup> 'DSV, Bezirksverband Leipzig: Resolution zum 17. Juni 1953', pp. 303-304.

Herzfelde chose to raise them within the more enclosed public sphere of the Writers' Union.

Confining his criticism to the particular context of the Writers' Union limited its impact, but it does fit in with the cautious tactical approach which Herzfelde deploys to negotiate his fundamental support for GDR socialism with the concerns and criticisms he had about particular issues or policies. In this respect, it is notable that he published considerably less frequently on aesthetic issues after 1952, the subject area which offered a platform for him to propose alternative views during the very first years after his arrival. Moreover, in his article on the proletarian writer August Hild in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* of 3 October 1954, Herzfelde takes a more consensual stance in aesthetic matters.<sup>355</sup> In terms fully in line with official discourses, he praises Hild's 'Produktionsromane',<sup>356</sup> which deal with the socialist transformation of industry from the perspective of a factory worker.<sup>357</sup> He refrains from his previous negotiating tactics of smuggling in terms and narrative patterns which diverge from official discourse.<sup>358</sup> These tactics became problematic in the face of the more stringent cultural policies persisting since the formalism resolution of 1951, and of the focus on *Aufbau* literature resulting from the 1952 announcement of the construction of socialism. Cautioned by the formalism campaign's attack on his own aesthetic background, the particular context enabling him to intervene in aesthetic debates around 1950, diminished after these events.

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<sup>355</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, 'August Hild oder die Kunst des Staunens', in *Zur Sache*, pp. 247-250.

<sup>356</sup> Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, p. 139.

<sup>357</sup> For instance August Hild, 'Das Versprechen', in *Offen steht das Tor des Lebens: Eine Anthologie junger deutscher Prosa*, ed. by Vilmos Korn (Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1951), pp. 253-272. With the help of a senior Party functionary, the hero of this short story solves a conflict between his word of honour to a colleague on the one hand, and his responsibility towards the collectivised factory on the other.

<sup>358</sup> Herzfelde, 'August Hild', pp. 247-250.

## 7. German Division and the Cold War

In his publications about the international political context of the Cold War and German division, Herzfelde constructed a set of related narratives legitimising the GDR and denouncing the FRG and the US. In this particular context, he positioned himself clearly on the official line, affirming cultural and political narratives as well as the official line in the politics of the day.

### 7.1 Images of the United States

The memoir *Immergrün* contains examples of both culturally and politically denunciatory narratives of the US. Herzfelde loaths the American displacement of culture by the amusement industry, and presents the US as the centre of aggressive imperialist power, the successor to Nazi Germany as the main threat to world peace. How the former argument bears similarities to, but also differs fundamentally from official Party discourses condemning bourgeois ‘decadence’, can be seen in the chapter “‘By the Waters of Minnetonka” oder Die drittgrößte Industrie’, an episode from his exile in New York.<sup>359</sup> He reports of a visit to a jazz nightclub, where he is struck by the superficiality and obscenity of the performances. His American companion explains the rationalised, industrial way in which the entertainment business works, and concludes with the remark: ‘Sollten Sie das alles geistlos nennen, mein Lieber, das wäre ein Kompliment.’<sup>360</sup> The narrative deviates from official discourses though, as it shows great enthusiasm for aspects of modern American culture: Herzfelde expresses his love for the jazz song which forms the title of the

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<sup>359</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, *Immergrün: Merkwürdige Erlebnisse und Erfahrungen eines fröhlichen Waisenknabens*, sixth edition (Berlin: Aufbau, 1981), pp. 257-267

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265.

chapter, as well as his horror for the way in which it is performed by the musicians in the New York nightclub.<sup>361</sup>

The narrative pattern of the US as the new imperialist power and successor to Nazi Germany, occurs in *Immergrün* when Herzfelde recalls his reasons for leaving the US: ‘was mich 1933 aus Deutschland stieß, hieß mich sechzehn Jahre später Amerika den Rücken kehren’. To stay in the US would mean to become complicit – ‘sei es nur durch erzwungenes Schweigen’ – in a ‘zynisch geplanten Attentat gegen den Frieden’.<sup>362</sup> The statement implies a criticism of exiles who opted to stay in the US, which contrasts with the defence of Grosz he wrote not much later and with a passage in his inaugural lecture where he defends those who did not return to Germany.

His defence of such exiles stems from a different narrative than the Cold War anti-Americanism which incites his criticism of them, namely a narrative of national belonging and collective suffering. For in the 1949 inaugural lecture he cites a proclamation of Thomas Mann, stating that the works of these exiles did return and that exiles remained Germans who suffered with Germany.<sup>363</sup> Even so, the image this lecture constructs of the US is very negative as well: ‘die moralisch-politische Zersetzung der Emigration [...] steigerte sich in Amerika, wo den Behörden, der Presse und der Öffentlichkeit am Nationalsozialismus vielfach nur das Wort Sozialismus mißfiel, zu einer denunziatorischen Hetze [...]’.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> For a discussion of West and (official) East German objections against jazz and fears of the dangers of Americanisation associated with jazz music around 1950, see Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 56-61.

<sup>362</sup> Herzfelde, *Immergrün*, p. 247.

<sup>363</sup> Herzfelde, ‘Die deutsche Literatur im Exil’, pp. 208-209.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 206-207.

With reference to the prosecutions of communists by Senator McCarthy in the US, Herzfelde repeatedly criticises the US as an unjust and essentially fascist power. In *Immergrün* (1949) he states that the return of the couple, around whom the narrative of homecoming is centered, was ‘jahrelang gewaltsam verhindert’, and: ‘die beiden hatten es verstanden, sich aus den Händen [...] der tiefstgesunkenen Justiz zu befreien’.<sup>365</sup> In the 1951 essay on Brecht, he recalls the McCarthyist investigation which held Brecht up when he wanted to leave the US: ‘Den Expatriierten wollte man weiterhin aus der Heimat verbannen, indem man ihn in den Vereinigten Staaten festhielt.’ Conflating McCarthyism and Nazism, the use of ‘weiterhin’ establishes a unity between the unjust prosecution of suspected communists in the US and the much more violent Nazi crackdown on communists in 1933. In juxtaposing the US prosecution of Brecht with the ‘besonderen Fürsorge’ he received in the GDR, this Cold War narrative also serves to legitimise GDR cultural policies.<sup>366</sup>

Herzfelde furthermore used Cold War narratives to reject Western notions of cultural and economic freedom, and to justify conformity in the East, defending the administrative enforcement of cultural orthodoxies he opposed in the different context of his aesthetic arguments from the same period. Speaking about the US in the 1950 lecture about censorship, Herzfelde applies a traditional anti-capitalist argument when he attempts to unmask the principle of economic freedom as the privilege of a small group owning everything ‘bis zu den Hirnen und Muskeln der Zeitgenossen’. He notes that this misleading concept of freedom appears in US culture as well, since

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<sup>365</sup> Herzfelde, *Immergrün*, p. 251.

<sup>366</sup> Herzfelde, ‘Der Lyriker Bertolt Brecht’, p. 1100.

‘Ehrlichkeit, Offenheit, Sauberkeit, Geradheit und der geringste Grad von Realismus’ are actually banned.<sup>367</sup> Asserting that US American culture lacks ‘Ehrlichkeit’ and ‘Sauberkeit’, Herzfelde connects to official images of degenerative US cultural influences in Germany, for instance’s *ND*’s 1949 criticism of jazz music, which emphasised its indecency and alleged that the Americans dumped a ‘mudslide of boogie woogie’ on Germany.<sup>368</sup>

His treatment of realism is slightly more ambiguous. The fact that he mentions realism as an American taboo in connection to the orthodox ideals of decency, openness, and honesty could be interpreted as a desertion of his criticism of official realism concepts in the aesthetic debates discussed above. But as he leaves the term realism itself unqualified, and considering his broad understanding of realism in his 1949 essay on Grosz, this positive use of realism still allows for unorthodox understandings. Without explaining how the supposed prohibition works, he presents an image of the US as the land of censorship, and of cultural indecency and dishonesty.

In the same lecture about censorship, Herzfelde invokes Zhdanov’s 1947 theory of two ‘camps’ to defend rigid cultural policies as a necessity of the Cold War.<sup>369</sup> With Korea, that other divided country, on the brink of war, Herzfelde presents the international political situation of the Cold War as a stage in the class struggle which unfolded ‘zum erbitterten Ringen zweier weltweiter Systeme’.<sup>370</sup> The harsh measures necessary in this confrontation, he goes on to argue, disguise the fact that cultural freedom is to be found in the

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<sup>367</sup> AdK, WH, 2799-8: ‘Ueber Zensur, III. Vorlesung 9.2.1950’.

<sup>368</sup> Quoted in Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>369</sup> See Judt, *Postwar*, p. 143.

<sup>370</sup> AdK, WH, 2799-8: ‘Ueber Zensur, III. Vorlesung 9.2.1950’.

Eastern camp, misleading ‘viele Intellektuelle’ to only see ‘Unfreiheit’ there.<sup>371</sup>

It is remarkable that Herzfelde effectively defends rigid cultural policies, which is partly explained by the institutional context of this lecture, but also by his application of the coercive ‘two camps’ thesis in a Cold War narrative, which does not provide the context appropriate to the kind of divergent positions he negotiated in his aesthetic publications.

## 7.2 Legitimatory patriotism

Herzfelde’s 1952 lecture on GDR cultural policy applies a similar narrative to West Germany, representing it as a place of cultural suppression.<sup>372</sup> This lecture shows how such narratives linked in with the legitimatory appeal to patriotism in official discourses. Implying that the GDR represented the German nation and the peace movement, Herzfelde argues that West German intellectuals who advocated peace and national unity were systematically denigrated and persecuted by the ‘Kriegshetzer’ dominating the FRG and West German culture. To prove this point, he refers to a recent event which is symbolic for the division of German literature: the split of the German PEN-group in 1951.<sup>373</sup> Under pressure from anti-communist writers led by Günther Birkenfeld, and FRG government propaganda, most West German PEN members split off to form their own branch of this international writers’ organisation.<sup>374</sup> Herzfelde blames this affair on warmongers, directed by American spies under the leadership of Melvin Lasky.<sup>375</sup> Birkenfeld was

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> AdK, WH, 2829-2: ‘Prof. W. Herzfelde, 9.10.1952, Literatur- und Kunstkritik’.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

<sup>374</sup> Bores, *Das ostdeutsche PEN-Zentrum*, pp. 124-128.

<sup>375</sup> AdK, WH, 2829-2: ‘Prof. W. Herzfelde, 9.10.1952, Literatur- und Kunstkritik’.

indeed supported by Lasky's organisation Congress for Cultural Freedom,<sup>376</sup> which did receive CIA funding.<sup>377</sup> From these events Herzfelde constructs a narrative locating the forces for peace and national unity in the GDR and conceiving of the FRG as actively sabotaging these forces. With this narrative, Herzfelde contributes to the SED's strategy to define antifascism and opposition to Western imperialism as the proper form of German patriotism.

On several other occasions, Herzfelde propounded this national dimension of SED discourses, which claimed the GDR to be the rightful German state as opposed to the US-occupied FRG. Reaching out to possible allies in West Germany, and claiming to be seeking to overcome division, the GDR leadership promulgated the slogan 'Deutsche an einen Tisch'.<sup>378</sup> In a statement on behalf of the Kulturbund group of his university on 10 October 1951, Herzfelde reacted to prime minister Grotewohl's address to the Volkskammer earlier that day. Grotewohl responded to Adenauer's plea for free 'gesamtdeutsche' elections, by proposing a 'gesamtdeutsche Beratung' for national unity and a peace treaty instead.<sup>379</sup> Herzfelde's rapid reaction and the way in which he uses Grotewohl's language indicates that he internalised the official narrative: he hails the GDR government's willingness 'alles zu unterlassen [...], was der Verständigung zwischen Deutschen im Wege stehen könnte', and claims that Grotewohl was able to speak so confidently because 'unsere Regierung im Namen der übergrossen Mehrzahl aller Deutschen auch

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<sup>376</sup> Bores, *Das ostdeutsche PEN-Zentrum*, p. 112.

<sup>377</sup> Michael Rohrwasser, 'Vom Exil zum "Kongress für kulturelle Freiheit": Anmerkungen zur Faszinationsgeschichte des Stalinismus', in *Schriftsteller als Intellektuelle: Politik und Literatur im Kalten Krieg*, ed. by Sven Hanuschek, Therese Hörnigk & Christine Malende (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), pp. 137-158 (p. 153).

<sup>378</sup> Dietrich Orlow, 'The GDR's Failed Search for a National Identity, 1945-1989', *German Studies Review*, 29 (2006), 537-558 (p. 544).

<sup>379</sup> Hans-Peter Schwartz (ed.), *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland Band 1: Adenauer und die hohen Kommissare 1949-1951* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1989), pp. 414-415.



im Westen spricht, wenn sie ein einiges, friedliebendes Deutschland als die dringendste Aufgabe bezeichnet'.<sup>380</sup> Although Grotewohl's defensive counter-proposal must be seen against the background of the SED regime's lack of legitimacy (he effectively rejected national elections), Herzfelde connects the aspirations of the entire nation to his proposal.

In his statement, Herzfelde supports GDR politics of the day, as he did in other statements on German division, for instance when seeking a dialogue with West German intellectuals at the 'Dichtertreffen für Frieden und nationale Einheit' in 1954. As official patriotism claimed the GDR to be the rightful representative of the nation, it aimed to seek allies among intellectuals in the West, even if their national claim had become secondary to the construction of socialism, announced in mid-1952.<sup>381</sup> As Flanagan argues, this *Bündnispolitik* acted upon the 'frequent insistence that intellectuals represented the true cultural community', an insistence which 'echoed theories of the "Kulturnation", a concept which could be used as confirmation of survival of the nation in spite of political and geographical division'.<sup>382</sup> Seeking to put itself at the head of this intellectual movement for unity, the SED seized upon the opportunity offered by the inter-German 'Dichtertreffen' in July 1954 at the highly symbolic Wartburg in Eisenach, where Luther translated the bible into German in the 1520s. The 'Dichtertreffen' was organised by two Protestant writers from East and West, Ludwig Bäte and Otto Riedel, supported by the East German Writers' Union. The SED attached high

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<sup>380</sup> AdK, WH, 2614: Wieland Herzfelde, 'Erklärung zur Rede des Ministerpräsidenten am 10.10.51 (teleph. An den K.B. der Univ. durchgegeben)'.

<sup>381</sup> The construction of socialism was a new stage in German division as it meant a further step in the separate economic development of both German states, as well as a more radical rhetoric which could intimidate possible non-socialist sympathisers in the West.

<sup>382</sup> Flanagan, '1949: Writers and the Loss of National Unity', p. 45.

importance to this gathering, and many of its prominent intellectuals attended.<sup>383</sup>

Herzfelde was among the East Germans selected to speak here. His address fits the political programme to reach out to West German writers. Moreover, he wrote two articles in which he celebrated the inner-German dialogue which took place at this event, and claimed this alleged national success for GDR cultural policies: ‘Worte schlagen Brücken’<sup>384</sup> and ‘Die Macht des Wortes’ (published in *Sonntag* and *Aufbau* respectively).<sup>385</sup> With the titles of these articles, he refers to the power of the intellectual’s voice to overcome national division, specifically to a statement by Becher, as we will see. There is a discrepancy between these titles and the title of his address: ‘Von der Gefährdung des Wortes’.<sup>386</sup> The different titles reflect the different audiences and purposes of these texts. The *Aufbau* and *Sonntag* articles demonstrate to an East German readership the achievement of the ‘Dichtertreffen’ in connection with GDR cultural policies of patriotism, whereas the mixed audience at the ‘Dichtertreffen’ itself had to be convinced of the urgency of defending national culture against Western imperialism.

At the start of his address, Herzfelde seeks to open up a dialogue with West German and other non-communist participants, as he admits that there is

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<sup>383</sup> J.H. Reid, ‘Christians, Pacifists and others: West German literature published in East Germany’, in *German Writers and the Cold War 1945-61*, ed. by Rhys W. Williams, Stephen Parker & Colin Riordan, in collaboration with Helmut Peitsch (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 27-46 (pp. 36-37). In an interview with Carsten Gansel from 2007, Gustav Just, secretary of the Writers’ Union at the time, emphasised the importance attached to the ‘Dichtertreffen’ and the support his organisation gave to it. See Carsten Gansel, ‘Hoffnungen auf einen Sozialismus mit menschlichem Antlitz: Gespräch mit Gustav Just’, in *Rhetorik der Erinnerung: Literatur und Gedächtnis in den ‘geschlossenen Gesellschaften’ des Real-Sozialismus*, ed. by Carsten Gansel (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2009), pp. 425-432 (p. 428).

<sup>384</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, ‘Worte schlagen Brücken: Die Schriftstellertagung auf der Wartburg’, *Sonntag: Wochenzeitung für Kultur, Politik und Unterhaltung*, 18 July 1954, p. 2.

<sup>385</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, ‘Die Macht des Wortes’, *Aufbau: Kulturpolitische Monatsschrift*, 10.8 (1954), 673-677.

<sup>386</sup> AdK, WH, 2625: Wieland Herzfelde, ‘Von der Gefährdung des Wortes, 5.7.1954’.

no common answer to the questions he poses. He goes on in this reconciliatory vein as he supposes all writers shared a responsibility for Germany's decline: 'Denn der Schriftsteller ist ja nicht nur Sprachrohr seines Volkes [...], er erweckt, er fördert zugleich, bewußt oder unbewußt, jene Ideen, die das Volk zu verwirklichen trachtet.'<sup>387</sup> He focuses on the shared responsibility of all Germans and hence the writers, for the situation which allowed Nazism to take power. This notion of the relationship between writers and the people, is a far cry from the subversive avant-garde he defended in his aesthetic texts from the early 1950s, e.g. the opposition between the people and literature in capitalist societies he had claimed in his 1920s writings.<sup>388</sup> Following the objective to reconcile and reach out to compatriots in the West, he may have resorted to a more conservative, nationalist notion of this relationship.

Whereas his argument reaches out to possible allies among West German writers, it also serves as a rejection of those opposed to the GDR. For, following his insistence on 'true literature's' articulation of the nation's currents of feeling and thinking, Herzfelde alleges that West Germany's supposed 'literarische Selbstverstümmelung' is an 'Angriff auf unsere nationale Existenz'.<sup>389</sup> His patriotic argument echoes the notion of the 'Kulturnation' to denounce the FRG and implicitly identify the GDR as the legitimate political embodiment of this nation.

Herzfelde uses a similar narrative when he argues that the German language has decayed as a result of the linguistic legacy of Nazism, which is especially problematic in the West, where 'die alten Nazis' and their jargon

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<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

<sup>388</sup> For example: Wieland Herzfelde, 'Erste internationale Dada-Messe: Zur Einführung', in *Zur Sache*, pp. 51-53.

<sup>389</sup> Herzfelde, 'Von der Gefährdung des Wortes', AdK, WH, 2625.

have been resurrected.<sup>390</sup> He denounces the West as a menace to the German language, playing the national card to bind non-socialists to the GDR which allegedly deals with the dangerous legacy of the Nazis in a better way than its Western counterpart.

One example he gives of a word endangered by its use in present debates echoes Herzfelde's earlier criticism of dominant conceptions of realism in aesthetic discourses. He refers to the use of the term realism:

Das sehr exakte und daher nützliche Wort Realismus in der Literatur- und Kunstkritik ist in einem solchen Uebermass [*sic*] gebraucht worden, dass man es für eine Weile aus dem Verkehr ziehen müsste, damit es sich wieder erholt.<sup>391</sup>

As he does not explain if he is referring to the use of this term in East or West Germany, as he does for the other examples he gives, this statement can be read as a concealed criticism of SED campaigns for socialist realism. Thus, in a speech which immediately serves particular SED policies towards West Germany, Herzfelde alludes to his divergent aesthetic positions. This allusion functions on the one hand as an attempt to influence aesthetic discourses from within, on the other it demonstrates to the West German audience the possibility of critical discussion in the GDR.

Addressing an audience mainly consisting of East German intellectuals, the article in *Aufbau* is more pronounced in its negative imaging of West Germany and in praising the GDR leadership than the speech at the

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

‘Dichtertreffen’. It criticises West German visitors who complained that the political propaganda they encountered at the border was a breach of their freedom:

Auf die Frage, ob sie die kommerzielle Reklame, wie sie in Westdeutschland üblich ist, auch als solche Vergewaltigung ansahen, erwiderten sie: nein, denn es stünde ihnen doch frei, unter den angebotenen Waren zu wählen. Wir beschränkten uns darauf zu erwähnen, daß wir über den Wert der Freiheit, zwischen Coca Cola und Pepsi Cola zu wählen, nicht streiten möchten.<sup>392</sup>

This passage is notable for the exclusionary use of ‘wir’ and ‘sie’, which contrasts with the objective of seeking allies in the West. It replicates the criticism of Western capitalism in his lectures, which is central to his critique of the West, claiming it offers only a fictitious form of freedom.

But the article also makes an appeal to non-communists, this time by reaching out to Christians in East and West. In the context of the Evangelical ‘Kirchentag’, bringing together Protestants from East and West in Leipzig a few days after the ‘Dichtertreffen’,<sup>393</sup> Herzfelde praises the GDR government for ensuring religious freedom. He relates the astonishment of Western guests about the lack of restrictions at this event – symbolised by banners with biblical quotations hanging all around the city. He comments that the ‘Kirchentag’ had full support of ‘unsere Regierung’ which guaranteed the

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<sup>392</sup> Herzfelde, ‘Die Macht des Wortes’, p. 673.

<sup>393</sup> See Hermann Wentker, ‘1954: Kirchentag in Leipzig: Kontakte und wechselseitige Wahrnehmungen der evangelischen Kirchen in Ost und West’, in *Das doppelte Deutschland: 40 Jahre Systemkonkurrenz: Eine Veröffentlichung des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte*, ed. by Udo Wengst & Hermann Wentker (Berlin: Links, 2008), pp. 65-85 (p. 65).

constitutional right of assembly and religion.<sup>394</sup> By juxtaposing an image of restricted liberty within the capitalist system with praise of the GDR as free and tolerant, Herzfelde constructs an affirmative narrative, denying Western accusations of suppression in East Germany.

Herzfelde draws attention to such charges, again playing the national card to reach out to West Germans while dismissing the FRG government. He claims Western anti-GDR propaganda fails to break the longing for unity and peace in both East and West. In other words: the German people does not support the FRG's attempt to breach national unity. Most West German reporters were allegedly persuaded by the inter-German discussion which had taken place at the 'Dichtertreffen'. Herzfelde attributes this success to Becher, who reportedly reacted 'bescheiden, freundlich und praktisch' to different opinions and 'öffentliche Kritik'. This, Herzfelde claims, is precisely the attitude needed for the profoundly desired exchange of ideas between the German states.<sup>395</sup> By claiming the national success of the meeting as the achievement of a member of the East German government, Herzfelde presents the GDR as the driving force of national unity. By contrast, he states that the 'Bonner Regierung', alarmed by the positive depiction of the 'Kirchentag' in the West German press, failed in its attempt to order a more critical judgment: 'Denn, was in Leipzig geschah, kann kein Dementi ungeschehen machen.'<sup>396</sup> Whereas the GDR reached out to patriots in East and West, the FRG government is presented as a threat to the process of a national dialogue.

This line of argument – namely that the FRG is a threat to the nation, which is strong enough to withstand it – fits neatly into the programme of the

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<sup>394</sup> Herzfelde, 'Die Macht des Wortes', p. 674.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid., pp. 674-675.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., p. 675.

Ministry of Culture of the GDR from February 1954. The Ministry alleged that the 'Regierung Adenauer' intimidated and silenced 'klarblickende Deutsche' in West Germany who defended German unity and peace (threatened by Americanisation) by communicating across the inner-German border.<sup>397</sup> Herzfelde explicitly refers to this programme, which he presents as a clear delineation of what must be done 'im Interesse der Einheit der deutschen Kultur'.<sup>398</sup> Indeed, Herzfelde's article and speech are both in line with the policies laid down in the programme, which reached out to West German intellectuals, highlighted their artistic achievements and stated the 'Kulturministerium' was there to help 'Geistesschaffenden in ganz Deutschland'.<sup>399</sup> Permissions given to hold the 'Dichtertreffen' as well as the 'Kirchentag' were part of this policy.

### 7.3 Patriotism and antifascism

In the context of the national appeal of the GDR, Herzfelde repeatedly referred to communist exile writers and presented their antifascism as the true expression of patriotism, reinforcing antifascist foundational narratives of the GDR. In his 1949 inaugural lecture, in the wake of the state's foundation, Herzfelde praised (among others) Bodo Uhse's 1944 exile novel *Leutnant Bertram* as an example of the 'Geist, der für die Auferstehung der Heimat gewirkt hat und heute noch wirkt'.<sup>400</sup> To emphasise these writers' national allegiance, he refers to Germany as 'die Heimat' throughout the lecture.

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<sup>397</sup> 'Programmerklärung des Ministeriums für Kultur der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik', *Sinn und Form: Beiträge zur Literatur*, 6.2 (1954), 277-321 (pp. 283-284).

<sup>398</sup> Herzfelde, 'Die Macht des Wortes', p. 675.

<sup>399</sup> 'Programmerklärung des Ministeriums für Kultur', p. 285.

<sup>400</sup> Herzfelde, 'Die Deutsche Literatur im Exil', p. 213.

Another example of such a narrative is Herzfelde's 1950 introduction to Seghers's *Das siebte Kreuz*. The title 'Liebe zu Deutschland' characterises this seminal novel of communist exile as an expression of patriotism, or in his words: 'eine Hymne an die Heimat'. He argues that Seghers's novel aims to protect 'ihr Volk' against 'eine Verurteilung, der nicht antifaschistische, sondern imperialistisch-chauvinistische Anschauungen zugrunde lagen'.<sup>401</sup> A novel written in exile is thus put into a post-war context of antifascist socialism versus imperialism, where it is supposed to support a particular view of the past context in which it was written, namely that the German people are not collectively liable for the Nazi atrocities. Touching on the question of German guilt, Herzfelde warns against a generic, indiscriminate condemnation of all Germans, which he argues would actually favour new chauvinism and imperialism. Such a collective condemnation would conceal the necessity of social change and justify taking sovereignty away instead of bestowing it upon the antifascist working-class movement. Herzfelde's argument – drawing on the authoritative status of Seghers's book – legitimises GDR patriotism through a connection with exile *Heimat* discourses, legitimising GDR antifascism as true love for the fatherland. The texts on Becher and Brecht cited above also contain examples of such a connection between antifascist-socialist engagement and the patriotism ascribed to communist exiles.

In the 1954 poem 'Das ferne Lied', Herzfelde visualizes his life and struggle as guided and inspired by a 'fernes Lied' of a better land. The fourth stanza of the poem, dealing with the experiences of Nazism and exile, connects

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<sup>401</sup> Herzfelde, 'Liebe zu Deutschland', p. 232.



the communist convictions symbolised in the faraway song with consoling and encouraging visions of a better Germany:

*Das ferne Lied*

*Nahm sanft mich an der Hand*

*Als Unverstand mir, was ich liebte, stahl*

*Und sich ins Herz mir fraßen Gram und Qual.*

*Es zeigte mir am Horizont das Land*

*In das seit je mich zieht*

*Das ferne Lied.*<sup>402</sup>

With its expression of love for Germany, notwithstanding Nazi ‘Unverstand’, and its vision of a better land at the horizon, this poem is exemplary of a narrative pattern common in Party poetry of the early GDR: expressions of ‘romantic longings’ for a better Germany.<sup>403</sup> If the faraway song symbolises Herzfelde’s socialist ideals, the country beckoning at the horizon can be nothing other than the Party’s proclaimed goal of a socialist unified Germany. The poem concludes by stating that to contribute just a single tone to this song would ensure a meaningful life – making clear that the individual is subordinated to the socialist cause.

An example of how Herzfelde combined GDR patriotism with claims that socialism secures peace, is the 1955 march ‘Des Friedens Soldaten’, written to music by Hanns Eisler in the context of West German rearmament

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<sup>402</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, ‘Das ferne Lied’, *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 2.11 (1954), 69.

<sup>403</sup> Orlow, ‘The GDR’s Failed Search for a National Identity, 1945-1989’, p. 543. Orlow cites an anthem composed for the SED’s second congress in 1947: ‘Heimat, wir lassen dich nicht! Du, unser Traum unser Sehnen, Land, du des Lachens, der Tränen, Du, unser Lied, unser Licht!’

and the preparations for the same step in the GDR.<sup>404</sup> The march invokes a narrative focusing on children to justify socialism as the force of the future: in the first stanza it connects the proclaimed struggle for peace between nations and races with care for the younger generation.<sup>405</sup> There is a similarity here to the poem ‘Die Augen des Kindes’, which he wrote for his newborn grandson in 1950, whom Herzfelde promises: ‘Die Heimat zu verwandeln dir | In eine bessere Welt’.<sup>406</sup> This poem presents engagement for a socialist Germany as the primary task in taking care of the future of the children.

In the second stanza of the 1955 march (‘Wir sind der Freiheit Soldaten’) Herzfelde conceives of the protection of freedom as a service to the ‘Heimatland’ and, by alleging that the West is solely concerned with serving capitalism, reserves the cause of freedom for East Germany:

Händler nicht und Magnaten,  
 Heimatland dir,  
 Deutschland, dir dienen wir.  
*Deutschland, deinen Kindern*  
*bleibe erspart der Krieg.*  
*Den Krieg zu verhindern,*  
*sei unser Sieg!*<sup>407</sup>

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<sup>404</sup> Peter Fauser, ‘Friedensthematik und soldatische Prägung: Zum politischen Lied in der DDR’, in *Die Entdeckung des sozialkritischen Lieds*, ed. by Eckhardt John, Volksliedstudien, 7 (Münster: Waxmann, 2006), pp. 97-120 (p. 99).

<sup>405</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, ‘Des Friedens Soldaten’, in *Im Gehen geschrieben: Verse aus vierundvierzig Jahren* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1956), pp. 87-88.

<sup>406</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, ‘Die Augen des Kindes’, in *Im Gehen geschrieben*, p. 78.

<sup>407</sup> Herzfelde, ‘Des Friedens Soldaten’, pp. 88. (Reprinted with a slight adaptation in *Blau und Rot: Gedichte* (Leipzig: Insel, 1986), pp. 79-80, where the third line of this quote goes: ‘dir, Heimat, dienen wir.’)

The march presents the longing for peace as specific to the working class, a common pattern to peace songs from the early GDR.<sup>408</sup>

The final stanza presents the ‘guter Sache Soldaten’ as ‘Söhne des Volkes’ – identifying antifascist communist activists as male fighters – who protect ‘des Volkes Macht’. The ambiguous meaning of the word ‘Volk’ means that it can be used to connect a socialist concern for the lower classes with a nationalist sense of belonging. The march closes with an internationalist outlook: the ‘Friedenswacht’ is imagined as protecting the ‘keimenden Staaten’ and their ‘Völker’ against war.<sup>409</sup> The paradox between the militaristic imagery of soldiers and the message of peace, like the assertion that peace needs to be defended with force, fits in with East German assertions that its own military development was only a reaction to West German rearmament.<sup>410</sup>

The connection of exile and Cold War patriotism thus contributed to Herzfelde’s support of current nationalist rhetoric. This can also be seen in his poem ‘Ballade von der Liebe’ of 1959.<sup>411</sup> In a pathetic tone the ballad conceives of the GDR as the fulfilment of the long-lasting struggle of the German working class. The ballad revolves around a proletarian couple whose dreams and ideals are shattered by the Nazis. After years of suffering under Nazism, they finally come to build ‘mit ihresgleichen ihren eigenen Staat’. They address the ‘junge Macht’ following the same pattern as in the description of their blossoming love (during the hardships of capitalism) in the first part of the poem:

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<sup>408</sup> See Fauser, ‘Friedensthematik und soldatische Prägung’, p. 100.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

<sup>410</sup> See Ross, ‘Protecting the Accomplishments of Socialism?’, p. 80.

<sup>411</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, ‘Ballade von der Liebe’, in *Blau und Rot*, pp. 45-50; also in *Unterwegs: Blätter aus fünfzig Jahren* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1961), pp. 387-393.

Tust manchmal du  
uns weh – es sei vergessen

Wer könnte das  
was dich bedrückt, ermessen?

Es hat, wer dich  
verletzt, auch uns verwundet

und Freund ist uns  
wer Freundschaft dir bekundet<sup>412</sup>

These lines are especially significant bearing in mind the repressive measures against intellectuals two years before the writing of this poem, as they put the interests of the young state clearly above the individual. The lyrical voice of the proletarian couple constitutes them as subordinate parts of the state. A threat to the superior state is one to the individual as well. The couple's voice acknowledges that measures taken might hurt, but the state would still have its reasons for taking them, which is a sufficient justification. As in two poems cited above, children symbolise the future and are looked after by the paternalistic state which takes over the role of the parents who fought and suffered to realise this state. The proletarian couple's lyrical voice addresses the state: 'Du planst mit uns | für uns und unsere Kinder'.<sup>413</sup> This amounts to a double legitimisation of the GDR as the achievement of the class struggle and the safeguard for future generations.

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<sup>412</sup> Ibid., pp. 48-49.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

The final part of the ballad legitimises the GDR in a patriotic narrative. The narrative voice takes over and states that ‘Ungezählte’ felt the same way as the protagonists, and that they were all ‘getragen von der Sehnsucht | ganz Deutschland einst so brüderlich zu sehn’.<sup>414</sup> The poem presents a united socialist Germany as a guarantee against a return of fascism. In the final two stanzas, the narrator presents the fulfilment of this dream as imminent:

Da wußten sie  
ihr Traum geht in Erfüllung:  
die kalte Zeit kommt nicht zurück.

‘Geliebtes Land!’  
Zwei Worte der Versöhnung  
begleiteten ein niegekanntes Glück.<sup>415</sup>

This conclusion presents a vision of reconciliation between the nation and the proletarian protagonists who are finally able to identify with their renewed country. Reconciliation is also a theme in the 1949 narrative of homecoming, when Herzfelde envisioned reconciliation with the victims of Nazism as the precondition of creating a new Germany. He moreover takes account of the difficulty of identifying with the German nation in view of its complicity with Nazi crimes. In the 1959 ballad however, the imminent fulfilment of socialism restores the nation. It unfolds a patriotic legitimacy narrative of the GDR.

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<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

## 8. The contexts of criticism in 1956-1957

The apparent discontinuity between the critical statements mainly in the early aesthetic texts and the more affirmative positions such as those cited in the previous section reflects an ambiguity towards official communist cultural policies that is already present in Herzfelde's Weimar years and that reflects two sides of his engagement for socialism and the GDR; he attempted to influence Party discourses from the inside, and was simultaneously determined to adhere to them. Moreover, the attempts to intervene in public debates affirmed the discursive consensus. It is striking that, regardless of the differing contexts of publication, the texts containing bold negotiations with SED aesthetic discourses are mainly written in the very early years; it became more difficult to challenge aesthetic orthodoxies in the wake of the formalism campaign after 1951, which enforced normative aesthetics as official policy, creating a context less suited for Herzfelde's negotiating strategies.

The ambiguity in his self-positioning, depending on context, informed Herzfelde's stances during the crisis unfolding in 1956, when a space opened up for GDR intellectuals to articulate divergent ideas after Khrushchev's Secret Speech in February. Herzfelde's role during the conflicts between critical intellectuals and the Party, which went on into 1957, is ambiguous, and has been interpreted in divergent political ways. Whereas Mark Lehmstedt highlights Herzfelde's alliance with oppositionists such as Gerhard Zwerenz, Conelly gives a less favourable account of his attitude. Lehmstedt notes that Herzfelde defended Zwerenz when he was attacked by Party functionary Siegfried Wagner at a Leipzig SED meeting in January 1957,<sup>416</sup> but Connelly

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<sup>416</sup> Lehmstedt, *Der Fall Hans Mayer*, p. 254.

stresses his retreat at that same meeting.<sup>417</sup> Connelly's emphasis on Herzfelde's international reputation insists that he should have been more confident in raising criticism. But Herzfelde was vulnerable himself, as he was attacked at a local Party meeting in February.<sup>418</sup> As the following section shows, Herzfelde sympathised with the intellectual opposition of 1956-1957, but was reluctant to take his support for reforms into a wider context than the semi-public meetings of the Party and the Writers' Union.

### 8.1 Silent support of reformists

In 1956, Herzfelde taught seminars to young writers at the newly founded Literaturinstitut Leipzig, which was directed by Kurella. In this context, Herzfelde stopped short of taking dissenting positions and defended political and cultural orthodoxies, as two of his students, Loest and Adolf Endler, recall. Looking back in 2010, the writer Endler highlights Herzfelde's dogmatic stance and calls him 'völlig linientreu'.<sup>419</sup> He reports on Herzfelde's comments about US American literature and the revelations of Stalinist atrocities in the wake of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union:

Fast noch schlimmer [als Kurella] war Wieland Herzfelde, der in seinen Seminaren in unsäglich Weise über die amerikanische Literatur hergezogen ist. Auch er wollte von den stalinistischen Verbrechen nichts wissen, auch später nicht. 'Wissen Sie was?' hat er einmal erklärt. 'All diese angeblich zu Tode Verurteilten leben noch. Die leben in Sibirien, aber nicht im Lager.'

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<sup>417</sup> Connelly, *Captive University*, pp. 196-197. Connelly makes the same point in: 'Ulbricht and the Intellectuals', p. 347.

<sup>418</sup> Lehmstedt, *Der Fall Hans Mayer*, p. 254.

<sup>419</sup> Adolf Endler, *Dies Sirren: Gespräche mit Renatus Deckert* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010), p. 142.

Denen geht es gut.' Er hat sich beruhigt mit solchen Lügen, das war auch eine Art Selbstbetrug.<sup>420</sup>

Endler's account of Herzfelde's orthodox statements concerning American literature is congruent with his Cold War images of the US, and his strategy of taking an affirmative position in aesthetic issues in the context of his role as an academic teacher. However, Herzfelde's more modernist stances were apparently well-known, as Endler reports that he expected an 'anderen Ton' from this former Dadaist. Failing to meet such expectations, Herzfelde must have made a more dogmatic impression on Endler: 'Doch dann war das von allen der langweiligste und dogmatischste.' He reportedly railed against 'alles Moderne in der amerikanischen Literatur' and was not open to any form of discussion.<sup>421</sup>

Endler's account is supported by Loest, who also attended Herzfelde's seminars at the 'Literaturinstitut', and had known him more closely since their collaboration in the Leipzig Writers' Union. In his 1981 autobiography *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, Loest notes that in both institutions, Herzfelde was reticent, anxious not to divert from Party directives. Loest draws attention to Herzfelde's vulnerable position in these years: 'Jeden Augenblick konnte Herzfelde verhaftet und mit anderen Westemigranten zusammen angeklagt werden'.<sup>422</sup> Herzfelde found his position under constant threat, which resulted in his cautious strategy. Loest names events from the first years after his return as possible explanations for Herzfelde's disappointing appearance at the institute: his expulsion from the Party in 1950 because of ties to Field, and the

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<sup>420</sup> Ibid., pp. 142-143.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., pp. 143-144.

<sup>422</sup> Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, p. 260.



official denunciation of his brother's art during the 1951 formalism campaign.<sup>423</sup> This supposition corresponds to the apparent shift in his positioning in aesthetic discourses: from active engagement to shape and alter these discourses in the first years to a more withdrawn position after around 1951/1952. Even though Herzfelde was reinstated as a Party member in July 1956,<sup>424</sup> Loest calls the idea that he would have opposed the dogmatic director Kurella unthinkable. He portrays Herzfelde as '[k]ein glücklicher Mensch', who taught his seminars 'ohne innere Sicherheit' and avoided any discussion or argument.<sup>425</sup>

Endler points at the same reasons for Herzfelde's reported stringency as Loest does: fear resulting from experience with 'terroristische Elemente des Stalinismus' during exile, with explicit reference to the 1933 denunciation by Becher mentioned in the introduction of this chapter.<sup>426</sup> Both Loest and Endler believe that Herzfelde's dogmatism and orthodoxy as a teacher at the Literaturinstitut, and reticence in the wider public sphere during this crisis, are caused by fear rather than a conscious choice to give support to the Party as it was under threat.

Despite the dogmatic position that Herzfelde reportedly took within the context of the 'Literaturinstitut', he showed sympathy for critics of the regime in different institutional contexts: private conversations as well as Party meetings. Prokop discusses Herzfelde's contacts to the dissident Wolfgang Harich, whom he met in August 1956 during vacation in the coastal town of Ahrenshoop. During their discussions they agreed on their disapproval of

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid., pp. 260-261.

<sup>424</sup> Prokop, *1956 – DDR am Scheideweg*, p. 86.

<sup>425</sup> Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, pp. 260, 261.

<sup>426</sup> Endler, *Dies Sirren*, pp. 142-143.

Ulbricht.<sup>427</sup> Picking up on Anton Ackermann's 1940s notion of a special German path to socialism, which was taken up by the intellectual movement for reforms,<sup>428</sup> Herzfelde objected to the implementation of the Soviet model of the construction of socialism (i.e. the primacy of heavy industry and the imposition of production norms) in the GDR.<sup>429</sup> His objection follows on from his criticism in the aftermath of the 1953 uprising of the way in which the Party ran the planned economy, so it appears that Herzfelde retained his disagreement with this key aspect of SED policies. But his discussions with Harich also indicate that he refused to enter into opposition to his Party, as he turned down Harich's suggestion to form a reformist discussion group at the university of Leipzig, similar to the one Harich ran at the Aufbau Verlag.<sup>430</sup> These reports by Harich confirm the view that Herzfelde shared much of the disapproval of SED policies, but was reluctant to pronounce his criticism in a wider public sphere.

Aside from the fear Loest and Endler point at, this absence of criticism outside the inner circles of Party comrades can also be seen as a consequence of the strategy Herzfelde adopted after his return to Germany, which becomes most apparent in his aesthetic texts, namely to shape public discourses and alter them from the inside, through participation in them. Such a tactic meant voicing dissent only in particular contexts and using particular vocabulary. Publishing his criticism of the Party line, or even joining circles like Harich's discussion group, would have meant assuming a much more radical tactic than the one followed hitherto.

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<sup>427</sup> Prokop, *1956 – DDR am Scheideweg*, pp. 134-135.

<sup>428</sup> See Mittenzwei, *Die Intellektuellen*, p. 135.

<sup>429</sup> Prokop, *1956 – DDR am Scheideweg*, pp. 134-135.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

## 8.2 Positioning as editor of *NDL*

Herzfelde's work during the crisis years 1956-1957 as editor of *NDL* provided a context to continue the negotiating tactics from his aesthetic essays. Two articles on authors he also wrote about in the early years, Brecht and Becher, indicate a continuity to these texts. Moreover, he directly counteracted Party directives when he pushed forward a publication which the SED Kulturabteilung sought to prevent in late 1957, which led to his being removed from his position at *NDL*.

In his obituary for Brecht in October 1956, Herzfelde writes that Brecht rejected both purely rhetorical ('[p]hrasenhafte') and purely ornamental ('[n]ur-[d]ekorative') works of literature.<sup>431</sup> He refers negatively to two terms which correspond to the extremes in contemporary aesthetic discussions that formed a large part of the tensions between intellectuals and the Party, using pejoratives that official discourses would agree on. Taking the middle ground in these debates attests both to his cautious positioning as well as to his tactics of alteration through affirmation. He goes on to argue in the same vein that Brecht pursued 'Klarheit', which was not to be attained through 'deklamatorische[n] Behauptungen'.<sup>432</sup>

The argument refers to the debate on 'ideologische Klarheit' that took place within the Writers' Union in the lead-up to the Fourth Writers' Congress of January 1956.<sup>433</sup> The secretary of the Union, Walther Victor, had criticised the emphasis on ideological clarity in SED literary policies, and proposed

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<sup>431</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, 'Über Bertolt Brecht', *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 4.10 (1956), 11-17 (p. 14)

<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

<sup>433</sup> Schiller, *Hoffnung auf Tauwetter*, pp. 23-25.

paying more attention to developing artistic talent. Victor was reprimanded by Wilhelm Girnus who claimed literary mastery without ideological clarity was impossible.<sup>434</sup> In the obituary, Herzfelde implicitly critiques the primacy of ideological correctness, which he argues would lead to declamations which were less clear than Brecht's methods.<sup>435</sup> His opposition to 'deklamatorischen Behauptungen' represents a continuity to the criticism he raised in the aftermath of the 1953 uprising, namely that unsubstantiated propaganda claims did not convince the working class of the Party's correctness.

Herzfelde goes on in his vigilant manner as he refers euphemistically to the conflicts between Brecht and KPD/SED cultural officials, and claims that the particular theoretical terminology that Brecht created provoked 'manches Mißverständnis'.<sup>436</sup> He thus grants Brecht – and writers in general – the right to create their own methodological terminology. However, he makes sure to uphold Party authority as he assures his readers that Brecht had never been an anarchist, but rather had a 'starkes Gefühl für revolutionäre Autorität'. The obituary concludes by characterising Brecht's use of language as a clear 'Ordnung zwischen Empfindungen und Gedanken'.<sup>437</sup> He ascribes to Brecht's method, an alternative to officially preferred styles, the ideological clarity that the Party demanded of writers.

To mark the poet and minister Becher's 65th birthday in May 1956, Herzfelde published a short appraisal in *NDL*.<sup>438</sup> This text is considerably less positive about Becher's past expressionist poetry than the speech from July 1950. For instance, he claims that 'klare Formulierungen' are scarce in

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<sup>434</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 23-25.

<sup>435</sup> Herzfelde, 'Über Bertolt Brecht', p. 14.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>438</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, 'Zum Bild eines Dichters', *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 4.5 (1956), 82.

Becher's early poetry, an exception being Becher's poem 'An den Frieden' from 1916: '*Ertön o Wort, das gleich zur Tat gerinnt! | Das Wort muß wirken! Also laßt uns reden!!*' Herzfelde then sketches the poet's development as a consequence of his engagement for the proletariat, which meant abandoning expressionism, but resulted in works that were allegedly too saturated with everyday politics to impact on the toiling masses:

Es vergingen noch Jahre, ehe er [Becher] ganz begriff, daß er mit expressionistischen Versen nicht auf die Massen wirken konnte. Aus den Werken, die er in den zwanziger Jahren und zu Beginn der dreißiger Jahre geschrieben hat [...], ist ersichtlich, daß Becher die Sache des revolutionären Proletariats zu seiner eigenen gemacht hatte. In dieser Periode änderte sich auch sein Stil. Aber immer noch drang sein dichterisches Wort kaum weiter als bis in die Reihen der literarischen und politischen Avantgarde. Denn er begeisterte sich nunmehr zu spontan für propagandistische und organisatorische Aufgaben des Tages.<sup>439</sup>

As in his obituary for Brecht, Herzfelde is critical of literature that wants to be no more than political propaganda. This assertion corresponds to the condemnation of leftist art movements from the 1920s, such as Proletkult, that allegedly abandoned traditional established (bourgeois) aesthetic forms and therefore fell short of their goals. Moreover, he rejects expressionism without trying to legitimise it as part of the socialist cultural heritage. He affirms the heritage concept which he sought to alter previously, signalling his inability or reluctance to challenge the discourses within which he functioned during the

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<sup>439</sup> Herzfelde, 'Zum Bild eines Dichters', p. 82.

years of crisis. Indeed, a few years after the crisis, in 1959, Herzfelde published a lengthy article on Becher, in which he returned to his 1950 appreciation of the young Becher's expressionism, literally repeating passages from his previous argument.<sup>440</sup> Indicating his persisting ambiguity, it is striking that he felt able to take his more positive approach again so soon after 1957, while he stuck to the same strategies as in the 1950 speech. This confirms the supposition that he kept adapting his stances to different historical and institutional contexts.

The publication that led to Herzfelde's being removed from the editorship of *NDL* was printed a year after these two articles. It is a discussion by a number of authors of the addresses of Kuba and Abusch at the 32<sup>nd</sup> plenary meeting of the Central Committee in July 1957, where the leading cultural functionaries insisted on the doctrine of socialist realism and assigning arts and literature the task of spreading Party propaganda.<sup>441</sup> Whereas the discussion's general tendency was affirmative of the decisions, the contributions did contain some harsh criticisms.<sup>442</sup> For instance, Harald Hauser criticised Kuba's condemnation of writers who had failed to unravel the Hungarian Uprising as a counter-revolutionary plot, and his unwillingness to reflect on Khrushchev's revelations at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Soviet Union.<sup>443</sup> Karl Kleinschmidt asked rhetorically if Kuba's criticism

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<sup>440</sup> Wieland Herzfelde, 'Wandelbar und stetig: Zum Werk Johannes R. Bechers', *Sinn und Form: Beiträge zur Literatur: Zweites Sonderheft Johannes R. Becher* (1959), 44-79.

<sup>441</sup> Schiller, *Der verweigerte Dialog*, pp. 136-138.

<sup>442</sup> Uwe Berger, Hans Jürgen Geerdts, Harald Hauser, Karl Kleinschmidt, Hermann Werner Kubsch, Manfred Künne, Kurt Liebmann, Hildegard Maria Rauchfuß, Max Schroeder & Max Zimmering, 'Diskussionsbeiträge zu den Referaten von Alexander Abusch und Kuba auf dem 32. Plenum des ZK der SED', *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 5.10 (1957), 111-127.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115.

helped the development of qualitative ‘Gegenwartsliteratur’ and argued that such literature could only develop if authors and the Party worked together.<sup>444</sup>

Prior to publication, on 29 August 1957, Herzfelde met with Willi Lewin of the SED’s Kulturbteilung, who accused the editors of *NDL* of creating a ‘gegen die sozialistische Entwicklung der Literatur gerichtetes Zentrum’, because they planned to publish these criticisms. Herzfelde ignored Lewin’s advice not to publish the discussion in its present format.<sup>445</sup> Shortly after the publication of this issue, *NDL* was officially reprimanded. On 18 October 1957, Rudolf Hoffmann of *ND* blamed it for a fixation on the past, for lacking socialist ‘Gepräge’, and for neglecting ‘die neueste sozialistische Literatur’ in its reviews.<sup>446</sup> In January 1958, Herzfelde was removed from his position as editor at *NDL* as a result of this affair.<sup>447</sup>

### 8.3 Veiled criticism

While, in the context of the ‘Literaturinstitut’, Herzfelde appeared to his students Loest and Endler as fearful and dogmatic, and his essays indicate his cautious positioning while retaining his former strategies in aesthetic discourses, he did express direct criticism in the context of Writers’ Union meetings. At the ‘Delegiertenkonferenz’ of 5 December 1956 in Berlin, after critical intellectuals like Harich had been arrested, he was critical of Party officials’ use of the term ‘decadence’ in aesthetic debates. The conference of

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<sup>444</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>445</sup> Quoted in Gansel, *Parlament des Geistes*, pp. 193-194.

<sup>446</sup> Rudolf Hoffmann, ‘Wo steht die “Neue deutsche Literatur?” Aufsatz von Rudolf Hoffmann, 18. Oktober 1957, Auszug’, in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur-, und Kulturpolitik der SED*, pp. 486-489.

<sup>447</sup> Schiller, *Der verweigerte Dialog*, p. 139.

delegates of the Writers' Union with the SED functionaries Kurella and Abusch was intended to instruct writers about the official Party line.<sup>448</sup>

The two Party functionaries railed against Mayer's recent criticism of contemporaneous GDR literature 'Zur Gegenwartslage unserer Literatur',<sup>449</sup> and announced that the doctrine of socialist realism was to remain in place. Abusch and Kurella debunked Mayer's criticism of the stagnating effects of the Party's use of the term 'decadence'. Herzfelde and Seghers opposed them, rejecting the Party's use of this term as they found that it did away with past literature which assessed declining bourgeois society in a historically legitimate way.<sup>450</sup> Their criticism of the official use of the term 'decadence' is in line with Herzfelde's defence of Joyce's *Ulysses* in 1934 and reinforces the supposition that, with the texts from the early 1950s, he negotiated to preserve aspects of modernism for the socialist literary canon.

It is in the light of Herzfelde's tactic to express criticism mainly in the semi-public context of Writers' Union and Party meetings, that his support of Zwerenz at a local Leipzig Party meeting of 30 January 1957 must be seen.<sup>451</sup> As an indication of his reluctance to publicly challenge the Party, he defended Zwerenz only in this semi-public context, and retreated after a functionary exclaimed that Zwerenz was an enemy of the Party.<sup>452</sup> Bearing in mind Herzfelde's tactics of affirmation over the years since his return, and his resulting reticence in public debates, his withdrawal at this meeting is not as surprising as it is presented by Connelly.

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<sup>448</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>449</sup> Mayer, 'Zur Gegenwartslage unserer Literatur', pp. 449, 450.

<sup>450</sup> Schiller, *Der verweigerte Dialog*, p. 123.

<sup>451</sup> See Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, pp. 303-305.

<sup>452</sup> Quoted in Connelly, *Captive University*, p. 197.



Herzfelde's critical stance at this Party meeting was reason for a reprimand from the Leipzig Party leadership. At the 'Bezirksleitungssitzung' in February 1957, shortly before the trial against Harich began, the first secretary of the SED in Leipzig, Paul Fröhlich attacked Herzfelde, Karola Bloch, Zwerenz and Loest. Fröhlich exclaimed that these persons, 'die unter dem Deckmantel der Wissenschaft bei uns konterrevolutionäre Tätigkeit organisieren', had to be arrested.<sup>453</sup> It appears that Herzfelde's criticism of SED cultural policies, e.g. the official use of the term 'decadence', and his contacts to dissidents like Harich, Zwerenz, Loest and Ernst Bloch had rendered him suspect as well.

Herzfelde's conduct at a meeting of the Leipzig University Party group with the 'Bezirksleitung' in March 1957, at which the group denounced Mayer and discussed a solution to the problem this critical professor posed, shows his tactic of going along with the discussion in order to influence it.<sup>454</sup> He had to be cautious since Fröhlich, who had called for his arrest at the meeting of the 'Bezirksleitung' one month earlier, was present as well. Herzfelde sought to temper the discussion. He declares that he has only a 'lose Bekanntschaft' with Mayer – thus trying to avoid having the criticism of his colleague directed at himself. But he is also the only person in attendance to point at GDR policies as reasons for the problem Mayer poses, namely the 'Grundfehler' in 'unserer Universitätspolitik' to pursue 'internationalen Ruhm'. Furthermore, he seeks to avoid disciplinary measures against his colleague as he goes on to argue that, since Mayer wanted to be an 'international anerkannter Mann', he would only benefit in the West from pressure put upon him by the Party. Instead,

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<sup>453</sup> Quoted in Lehmstedt, *Der Fall Hans Mayer*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>454</sup> 'Protokoll einer Aussprache in der SED-Bezirksleitung Leipzig: 26. März 1957', in *Der Fall Hans Mayer*, pp. 71-83.

Herzfelde pleads for a less aggressive way of undermining Mayer's position when he proposes appointing a strong academic figure who could oppose him.<sup>455</sup> Herzfelde does not resist the denunciatory tone of the discussion directly, but does intervene to achieve a more moderate outcome.

## 9. Conclusion

After Herzfelde came to East Germany in 1949, the ambiguity towards communist cultural policies that was characteristic of his position during the 1920s and 1930s, remained in place. He worked in essential agreement with official GDR political discourses, as suggested by the legitimacy narratives which he constructed. His failure to take the reformist impetus of his engagement for socialism to the wider public sphere in 1956, as well as his support for day to day politics in the Cold War context, reflect this engagement for the socialist state.

Yet there was no place for his modernist aesthetic ideas in official SED cultural discourses. The fundamental disagreement with official Party cultural policies from the Weimar years had not disappeared. While his modernist credentials were under scrutiny, he sought to integrate modernist art movements, expressionism and the Weimar avant-garde, into dominant discourses on the cultural heritage a socialist national culture should build upon – as complementary, not in opposition to the official canon. His complex negotiating strategy was to employ authority figures and quote core aspects of official discourses in order to justify controversial ideas and express approval for outsiders such as Grosz.

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<sup>455</sup> Ibid., pp. 75-76.

The tactic of influencing public discourses through participation had a double effect: on the one hand this meant functioning within the consensus dominated by official discourses, contributing to their dominance in the official public spheres. In this respect it is worth noting that the essays on aesthetics from the early 1950s, which contained critical interventions, were directed at an audience consisting of East German intellectuals and Party functionaries, and that he was more consistently affirmative when addressing an audience of outsiders. On the other hand, Herzfelde's tactic meant voicing dissent only inside the limits of public discourses. In order to be heard, he had to continuously affirm the ever changing consensus, which meant becoming ever more restricted to official terminology in the context of the radical turn taken with the announcement of the formalism campaign in 1951. Although his interventions became less frequent after his first years in East Germany, a shift which must be seen in the context of the increasing restrictions on aesthetic matters, as well as his threatened status as a returnee from Western exile, his strategies remain similar over the years. His tactic of alteration through affirmation was increasingly restricting him to the official language.

Herzfelde's involvement in the East German public spheres did not mean capitulation to the authoritarian regime, but something more ambiguous: his involvement must be understood as an endeavour to help shape discourses, rather than being governed by them. This led to a restriction which was possibly self-imposed, but it is worth asking what choice a communist intellectual had if he wanted to have a voice in these debates. Instead of simply conforming to the ruling discourses, he tried to alter them from the inside, but this simultaneously required a willingness to adhere to them.

### 3. Erich Loest

#### Dissidence and conformity

##### 1. Introduction

In the early 1950s, Erich Loest (1926-2013) quickly rose to prominence as a socialist realist writer, literary critic, and chair of the Leipzig subdivision of the Writers' Union. After his officially criticised debut novel *Jungen die übrigblieben* (1949),<sup>456</sup> which drew on his war experiences, Loest was successful with short stories,<sup>457</sup> and the novels *Die Westmark fällt weiter* (1952) and *Das Jahr der Prüfung* (1954), which, published by the SED-owned Mitteldeutsche Verlag Halle (MDV), conveyed narratives legitimising GDR socialism and took a partisan line on contemporaneous political issues.<sup>458</sup> He returned to the theme of war with a volume of stories in 1957.<sup>459</sup> He published in such diverse outlets as *Neue deutsche Literatur* (NDL), *Neues Deutschland* (ND) and the Leipzig *Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel*.

In 1957, Loest was sentenced to seven years imprisonment for his criticism of the state's leadership during the 1956-1957 crisis.<sup>460</sup> Whereas historical analyses of the crisis recognise his role as a critic of SED policies,<sup>461</sup>

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<sup>456</sup> Erich Loest, *Jungen die übrigblieben: Roman* (Göttingen: Steidl, 1996) [first edition Leipzig: Volk und Buch, 1950]. Whereas the imprint of the first edition displays the year 1950, the book was actually published in late 1949. See Sabine Brandt, *Vom Schwarzmarkt nach St. Nikolai: Erich Loest und seine Romane* (Leipzig: Linden, 1998), p. 17.

<sup>457</sup> Erich Loest, *Liebesgeschichten* (Leipzig: Volk und Buch, 1951); *Sportgeschichten* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1953).

<sup>458</sup> Erich Loest, *Die Westmark fällt weiter: Roman* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1952); *Das Jahr der Prüfung: Roman* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1954).

<sup>459</sup> Erich Loest, *Aktion Bumerang: Erzählungen* (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1957).

<sup>460</sup> Carsten Gansel, "'Ihr habt keine Ahnung, Kinder': Erich Loest im Kontext der Literatur in der DDR", in *Geschichte, die noch qualmt: Erich Loest und sein Werk*, ed. by Carsten Gansel & Joachim Jacob (Göttingen: Steidl, 2011), pp. 16-35 (p. 18).

<sup>461</sup> e.g. Herzberg, *Anpassung und Aufbegehren*, p. 237.

a thorough study of his positions throughout the 1950s, in their various historical, political, and institutional contexts has not been carried out.

Investigating how Loest functioned as a writer in the East German public spheres of the 1950s, this chapter argues that his 1953 and 1956 conflicts with Party policies cannot be seen in isolation from his more affirmative or consensual texts. Hence this analysis breaks with binaries of opposition and obedience, which currently prevail in research on East German intellectuals. Loest's opposition and his affirmative positions are both consequences of a set of narratives that he constructed in the majority of his texts from the 1950s, and the dynamic discursive context in which these narratives functioned.

Scholarly interest in Loest focuses mainly on his later work, for instance the banned 1977 novel *Es geht seinen Gang oder Mühen in unserer Ebene*, on his three autobiographical books *Durch die Erde ein Riß* (1981), *Der Zorn des Schafes* (1990) and *Prozesskosten* (2007),<sup>462</sup> and his role as a critical intellectual in 1953 and 1956-1957. As Loest was one of the intellectuals who stood out in the aftermath of the June 1953 uprising, criticising the official press for glossing over problems causing the uprising in his essay 'Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne' of 4 July in the *Börsenblatt*,<sup>463</sup> his response has attracted some attention in books published on the occasion of the event's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrating its alleged national importance.<sup>464</sup> Such

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<sup>462</sup> See Peter Braun, 'Durch die Texte ein Riss: Beobachtungen zu den autobiographischen Büchern von Erich Loest', in *Geschichte, die noch qualmt: Erich Loest und sein Werk*, ed. by Carsten Gansel & Joachim Jacob (Göttingen: Steidl, 2011), pp. 130-153; Theo Honnef, '"Wir haben schon wieder weisse Flecke": Die Anfangsjahre der DDR in Werken Loests, Heyms und Heins', *German Life and Letters*, 44.1 (1990-1991), 143-164.

<sup>463</sup> Loest, 'Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne'.

<sup>464</sup> See Knabe, *17. Juni 1953*, pp. 259-260; see also Neubert, 'Der 17. Juni zwischen Verdammung und Verdrängung', pp. 129-158; Eisenfeld, Kowalczuk & Neubert, *Die verdrängte Revolution*.

publications, apart from being informed by a teleological view of the political aims of the demonstrations, do not consider Loest's stance in the light of his other writings from the 1950s, and often construct a one-sided image of intellectual complicity without considering how criticism and complicity were interwoven. Erhart Neubert for instance laments the didactic tone of Loest's essay, which he claims was exemplary of 'DDR-Schriftsteller, die oft Konflikte mit der SED heraufbeschworen, wenn die Partei nur andeutungsweise auf ihre kommunikative Schwäche im Umgang mit dem Volk angesprochen wurde'.<sup>465</sup> Neubert's criticism disregards the fact that Loest's essay meant that he risked losing his living as a writer as he was excluded from the Writers' Union by his Leipzig colleagues, a decision which was overturned by the Union's Secretary Kuba and President Seghers.<sup>466</sup> Four years later, the essay served as evidence of his allegedly hostile attitude to the state. Moreover, Neubert's claim ignores the complex interaction between official Party discourses and the individual intellectual's critical self-positioning, in which what Neubert dismisses as a mere suggestion (an underestimation of Loest's attack on the SED press) may have been the most effective way of pointing out deficiencies and failures in Party policies.<sup>467</sup>

This chapter aims to contribute to a better understanding of the ambiguous positions adopted by Loest in 1953 and 1956, by an analysis of these positions in the context of his other 1950s texts. Little attention has been

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<sup>465</sup> Neubert, 'Der 17. Juni zwischen Verdammung und Verdrängung', p. 135.

<sup>466</sup> Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, pp. 237-249.

<sup>467</sup> See for another example of Neubert's interpretation of 'Elfenbein und rote Fahne' as didactic and dogmatic, disregarding the genuine disruption caused by it: Eisenfeld, Kowalczyk & Neubert, *Die verdrängte Revolution*, p. 598.

paid so far to Loest's more affirmative stances.<sup>468</sup> For example, writing about the political Loest, Regine Möbius only mentions Loest's critical positions in 1953 and 1956.<sup>469</sup> Moreover, Möbius' book lacks critical distance and merely repeats the narrative Loest constructed of the 1950s in his 1981 autobiography *Durch die Erde ein Riß*. Research on Loest often fails to move beyond the autobiography and to take primary texts from the 1950s into account.<sup>470</sup> An example of this deficiency is Gudrun Schneider-Nehls's biographical study, which moreover constructs a questionable generational narrative (Loest as a representative or 'Generationengestalt' of a 'skeptische Generation'). On top of that, Schneider-Nehls takes great pains to make Loest fit her concept of 'Grenzgänger', and relies on a simplistic, top-down model of the GDR literary public spheres as a place where an intellectual could only reject or affirm a set ideology.<sup>471</sup>

Little scholarly attention has been paid to Loest's pre-1957 novels and stories. Martin Kane's essay on the 1952 novel *Die Westmark fällt weiter* is an exception to this. It analyses the novel as an example of how official views on the West found their way into early GDR literature, but does not investigate other narrative patterns in the novel and fails to make a connection to Loest's other publications.<sup>472</sup> Other scholars who have written about *Die Westmark fällt weiter* and Loest's other 1950s novel *Das Jahr der Prüfung* (1954) have

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<sup>468</sup> At a 2009 conference on Erich Loest at the University of Gießen, my paper (which is integrated into this chapter) was the only one to focus on his 1950s positioning and discuss two of his affirmative texts. See Hidde van der Wall, 'Konsens und Dissens: Drei Publikationen Erich Loests aus dem Jahr 1953', in *Geschichte, die noch qualmt: Erich Loest und sein Werk*, ed. by Carsten Gansel & Joachim Jacob (Göttingen: Steidl, 2011), pp. 62-72.

<sup>469</sup> Regine Möbius, *Wortmacht und Machtwort: Der politische Loest* (Leipzig: Plödtner, 2009).

<sup>470</sup> For instance Friedrich Dieckmann, 'Der Realist als Frontkämpfer: Über Erich Loest', *Sinn und Form: Beiträge zur Literatur*, 48.2 (1996), 316-321.

<sup>471</sup> Schneider-Nehls, *Grenzgänger in Deutschland*, pp. 271-311.

<sup>472</sup> Martin Kane, 'East German Literature and the Cold War: The Example of Erich Loest's *Die Westmark fällt weiter*', in *The Challenge of German Culture: Essays Presented to Wilfried van der Will*, ed. by Michael Butler & Robert Evans (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 134-143.

done so with a clear interest in the later Loest.<sup>473</sup> Michael O’Pecko investigates these two novels for thematic continuities connecting them to Loest’s controversial 1977 novel *Es geht seinen Gang oder Mühen in unserer Ebene*, particularly his preference for outsider characters as protagonists. Looking for precursors to Wolfgang Wülff, the anti-hero of *Es geht seinen Gang*, O’Pecko notes that, unlike Wülff, the outsider characters in the 1950s novels finally integrate into East German socialist society.<sup>474</sup> Indeed, the hero of *Die Westmark fällt weiter*, Bernd Ahlsen gradually becomes aware of political and class relations, and finally acts accordingly by joining the Party youth organisation FDJ. But O’Pecko, primarily interested in the 1970s novel, stops short of connecting the 1950s protagonists to Loest’s socialist realist aesthetic positions of the time, particularly Loest’s conception of the positive hero as a character who attains class consciousness and subsequently takes the right political action.

Another example of how Loest’s 1950s novels are mainly read as mere predecessors of the more critical later ones, is Sabine Brandt’s analysis of these novels and the biographical context in which they were written. Apart from expressing a clear preference for the later Loest, her book is largely governed by the narrative of Loest’s autobiography and relies on a top-down concept of the GDR literary public sphere in the 1950s.<sup>475</sup>

The disregard for Loest’s 1950s positions except for the instances where he challenged SED authority, signals a problematic tendency to divide

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<sup>473</sup> e.g. Manuela Lück, “‘...ein zu großes Wort’: Erich Loest und das Exil”, in *Deutsch-deutsches Literaturexil: Schriftstellerinnen und Schriftsteller aus der DDR in der Bundesrepublik*, ed. by Walter Schmitz & Jörg Bernig (Dresden: Thelem, 2009), pp. 582-605.

<sup>474</sup> Michael T. O’Pecko, ‘Thematic Continuity in the Novels of Erich Loest’, *The International Fiction Review* 18.1 (1991), pp. 21-24.

<sup>475</sup> Brandt, *Vom Schwarzmarkt nach St. Nikolai*.



the author into two parts: the interesting critic and the negligible loyalist. Such a dichotomy does not account for the synchronism of consensus and conflict in Loest's supposedly critical texts; both strands are intertwined in most of his essays and reportages, as well as his fiction (genres which often merge in Loest's work from the 1950s). To examine this complex interplay, this chapter works with a set of texts which have been largely ignored by research on Loest: his novels, stories and essays published in the 1950s. These sources are complemented by his autobiographies, especially the two books which culminate in his imprisonment: *Durch die Erde ein Riß* and *Prozesskosten*.<sup>476</sup>

I will start by analysing Loest's aesthetic positions, with which he sought to create a socialist realist method, and to meet the demands of official aesthetic discourses in the context of the construction of socialism. Subsequently, I will explore the narratives Loest constructed in three texts about the political situation in contemporary Germany: *Die Westmark fällt weiter* (1952), and the stories 'Und dazwischen die Grenze' (1951) and 'Einladung von drüben' (1953).<sup>477</sup> These texts illustrate Loest's self-positioning in cultural and political discourses on West Germany and the Cold War, German division, the working class, and socialist construction. Focusing on his response to the uprising of June 1953, I subsequently argue that many of the narratives and images that supported official discourses before the uprising, formed the basis of his criticism of Party policies afterwards, particularly in the 1953 essay 'Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne' which brought him into his first conflict with SED officials. Loest's fiction from the years before his imprisonment can be divided into two distinct categories: apart from accounts

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<sup>476</sup> Erich Loest, *Prozesskosten: Bericht* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2007).

<sup>477</sup> Erich Loest, 'Und dazwischen die Grenze', in *Liebesgeschichten*, pp. 188-287; 'Einladung von drüben', in *Sportgeschichten*, pp. 215-280.

of the political situation in contemporary Germany, he wrote more problematic war stories. After his 1949 debut *Jungen die übrigblieben* was heavily criticised in the official press, it took seven years for Loest to return to his initial thematic interest around 1956. Section 5 will explore how the war stories from the mid-1950s fit in with official discourses about the Nazi past, the GDR's transition to socialism and its Western opponent. The final section will investigate how Loest's 1956 dissidence related to the texts discussed here.

## 2. Aesthetics: Entertainment, positive heroes, factography

Unlike Wieland Herzfelde and Peter Hacks, Loest did not write essays dealing directly with aesthetic questions. His ideas on writing methods are to be found in a few book reviews and in a programmatic passage from his 1954 novel *Das Jahr der Prüfung*. An analysis of his texts will also reveal his writing strategies. Loest's aesthetics in the 1950s contain fewer ruptures with official literary doctrines than those of Hacks or Herzfelde. In response to what he regarded as a tendency towards uninteresting, shallow narratives in GDR literature, he advocated a form of socialist realism, which he conceived as entertaining literature depicting the diversity and totality of life and inspiring its readers. At the centre of Loest's model of socialist realism stand positive heroes and the development of their consciousness. This, he argued, was the only way to grasp the conflicts between 'old' and 'new' that characterised society.

In 1953 Loest wrote book reviews for the newly founded journal of the Writers' Union, *NDL*.<sup>478</sup> In these reviews he promulgated two principles: if it was to inspire and educate people, literature should be exciting, but also have a clear Marxist-Leninist ideological perspective. Illustrative of the first principle, his 1953 criticism of Bodo Uhse's grand resistance novel *Die Patrioten* – of which first sections had just been published<sup>479</sup> – had the title 'Nicht spannend genug'. Drawing on standard terminology of official aesthetics, Loest wrote about this prestigious project: 'Richtig ist alles, was Uhse schreibt, es ist geschehen und war typisch [...]. Aber was Uhse geschrieben hat, läßt kalt, es begeistert nicht, also erzieht es auch nicht.'<sup>480</sup> This quotation indicates how Loest's understanding of socialist realism draws on his study of canonical theories: the typical and the educational function of literature. The connection Loest makes between this educational task of socialist realism and the notion of 'Begeisterung' is in line with Ulbricht's address to the Second Party Congress of 1952.<sup>481</sup>

A review of the proletarian writer Theo Harych's novel *Im Geiseltal* (1953), the sequel to his successful *Hinter den schwarzen Wäldern* (1951), is exemplary of the second principle, the need for a clear ideological perspective. Loest called the novel exciting, but claimed that its lack of a Marxist-Leninist

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<sup>478</sup> Erich Loest, 'Nicht spannend genug', *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 1.4 (1953), 136-138; 'Im Geiseltal', *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 1.2 (1953), 189-191.

<sup>479</sup> Simone Barck, 'Widerstands-Geschichten und Helden-Berichte: Momentaufnahmen antifaschistischer Diskurse in den fünfziger Jahren', in *Geschichte als Herrschaftsdiskurs: Der Umgang mit der Vergangenheit in der DDR*, ed. by Martin Sabrow (Cologne: Böhlau, 2000), pp. 119-173 (p. 167).

<sup>480</sup> Loest, 'Nicht spannend genug', p. 137.

<sup>481</sup> Ulbricht called for partisan art and literature to educate the people 'im Geiste des Sozialismus'. Such realism should be ahead of societal developments and it should 'begeistern' for the construction of socialism. See Walter Ulbricht, 'Die gegenwärtige Lage und die neuen Aufgaben der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands: Aus dem Referat auf der II. Parteikonferenz der SED. Berlin, 9. bis 12. Juli 1952', in *Zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung: Aus Reden und Aufsätzen: Band IV: 1950-1954* (Berlin: Dietz, 1958), pp. 371-499 (pp. 466-467).

theoretical basis resulted in a schematic, pale depiction of the positive forces in the story.<sup>482</sup> Loest uses the notion of a schematic, i.e. conflict-free depiction of heroes, to criticise a proletarian writer who was actively endorsed by the GDR authorities: in 1951 for instance, Harych was commissioned to write an *Aufbau* novel about the construction of the Stalinallee.<sup>483</sup> As set out in the introductory chapter, the allegation of *Schematismus* served in the aesthetic debates of the 1950s to criticise the static narratives underpinning much *Aufbau* literature, and was to become a main point of controversy at the Fourth Writers' Congress in 1956.<sup>484</sup> Loest alleged that a proper Marxist-Leninist depiction of reality should show conflicts also among and within positive characters, and hence break with such static schemes.

Loest's 1954 novel *Das Jahr der Prüfung* contains a passage dealing with aesthetic questions. Set in the Leipzig Arbeiter-und-Bauern-Fakultät (ABF), the novel follows the development of a group of working-class students into a collective – defying their narcissistic and dominant FDJ secretary Rudolf Pronberg –, as well as of individual students developing a political consciousness. The novel itself depicts the type of positive heroes that Loest puts forward in the programmatic scene. The passage describes a discussion about Seghers's novel *Das siebte Kreuz* during a literature class. The teacher asks the students why Seghers has chosen Georg Heisler as her hero, considering that Wallau is a more intelligent and reliable character. One of the students, Jochen Grieselang, a 'Phrasendrescher' under the spell of the FDJ

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<sup>482</sup> Loest, 'Im Geiseltal', pp. 190-191.

<sup>483</sup> Greg Castillo, 'Promoting Socialist Cities and Citizens: East Germany's National Building Program', in *Selling Modernity: Advertising in Twentieth-Century Germany*, ed. by Pamela E. Swett, S. Jonathan Wiesen & Jonathan R. Zatlin (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. 287-306 (p. 297).

<sup>484</sup> See Seghers, 'Der Anteil der Literatur an der Bewußtseinsbildung des Volkes', pp. 156-157.

secretary Rudolf, denounces the novel altogether. This negative character champions the conception of the impeccable positive hero, which the narrative thus opposes.<sup>485</sup> The narrative then expresses Loest's favoured conception of positive heroes through the words of such a positive hero:

Nun meldete sich Inge Teubner. Es käme doch, entwickelte sie, so habe sie den Begriff des positiven Helden wenigstens aufgefaßt, nicht auf seinen absoluten Bewußtseinsstand an, sondern auf die Entwicklung, die er nehme. [...] 'Wenn er immer der gleiche bleibt', beendete sie ihren Beitrag, 'wird er doch für den Leser langweilig, wenigsten geht es mir so, und ich kann mir nicht vorstellen, dass jemand anders empfindet. Und jemand, der langweilig ist, kann doch niemals Held sein.'<sup>486</sup>

The teacher, Frau Wunderlich, endorses this position. The narrator states that she is delighted with this lively discussion, as literature classes are usually dry, because they are approached as a social science. The narrator's comment indicates that this narrative can be read as an intervention in aesthetic debates. The teacher's summary of the insight attained by the students through this discussion, reads as a programmatic statement:

Es käme beim positiven Helden nicht in erster Linie auf seinen Bewußtseinsstand an, sondern auf die Entwicklung seines Bewußtseins. Es anders zu sehen, würde eine Verarmung der Literatur nach sich ziehen, würde die wirklichen Konflikte innerhalb einer Gesellschaftordnung, die Konflikte zwischen Altem und Neuem, verwässern und vertuschen. Und dies sei

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<sup>485</sup> Loest, *Das Jahr der Prüfung*, p. 142.

<sup>486</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

keinesfalls das Ziel des sozialistischen Realismus. Dieser wollte ja gerade das Leben in seiner Vielfalt darstellen. Ein Kriterium des positiven Helden sei es doch, auf die Leser begeisternd zu wirken. Und könne etwas mehr begeistern als das Wachsen eines Menschen, die Anstrengung seines Willens, Widerstände zu überwinden?<sup>487</sup>

The passage advocates a notion of socialist realism which emphasises the portrayal of conflicts. These conflicts are central to socialist realism's task to portray life in all its variety. True conflict, for Loest, is to be shown in the changing consciousness of a novel's hero. Attaining insight into class relations and coming to political consciousness are the prime characteristics of Loest's conception of the positive hero.

Loest's conception differs from the impeccable heroes who dominate the canon of Soviet socialist realism.<sup>488</sup> But it does relate to Lukács's 1937 concept of the 'mittlere Held' as the central character of a (historical) novel, with whom the reader can identify and who mediates between historical conflicts.<sup>489</sup> The heroes who gain class consciousness and insight into political relations, central to most of Loest's 1950s fiction as will be discussed in the next sections of this chapter, can be regarded as his application of the notion of the 'mittlere Held' to literature about the present political conflict with its socialist perspective. Particularly the stories with contemporary settings, depicting the transition to socialism, often have average characters as their protagonists, whose maturing political consciousness is narrated.

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<sup>487</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>488</sup> Nicholas Luker, *From Furmanov to Sholokhov: An Anthology of the Classics of Socialist Realism* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1988), p. 25.

<sup>489</sup> See Georg Lukács, *Der historische Roman* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1955), p. 131.

The decision to write a novel about the ABF was in keeping with SED notions of the function of literature in the construction of socialism. These new educational institutions were established to give working-class youths the opportunity to study and as a consequence create a proletarian intelligentsia. Especially the former objective constituted a legitimatory function of the ABF in official discourses.<sup>490</sup> Loest writes in his autobiography that his plan received full support from his publisher MDV, which arranged an internship for him at the Leipzig ABF.<sup>491</sup> The practice of having writers observe the struggle for socialism on the spot was stimulated by the Party Congress of 1952, where Ulbricht summoned ‘Kulturschaffende[n]’ to examine ‘die gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit an ihren Quellen’.<sup>492</sup> Loest had followed this advice by applying for the ABF internship, and writing his 1953 reportage of a visit to the guards at the inner-German border in Thuringia.<sup>493</sup> Reportages were a favoured genre in the emergent socialist literature of East Germany, well-suited to the depiction of the *Aufbau* of socialism and the threats allegedly posed to it.<sup>494</sup>

Loest’s use of the reportage genre relates to a feature of 1920s Soviet avant-garde literature that was used in Soviet socialist realism: ‘factography’, a ‘journalistic ideal of art’ that emerged in the context of industrialisation.<sup>495</sup>

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<sup>490</sup> Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, *Geist im Dienste der Macht: Hochschulpolitik in der SBZ/DDR 1945 bis 1961* (Berlin: Links, 2003), p. 142.

<sup>491</sup> Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, p. 182.

<sup>492</sup> Walter Ulbricht, ‘Die gegenwärtige Lage und die neuen Aufgaben der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands: Aus dem Referat auf der II. Parteikonferenz der SED: Berlin, 9. bis 12. Juli 1952’, in *Zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung: Aus Reden und Aufsätzen: Band IV: 1950-1954* (Berlin: Dietz, 1958), pp. 371-499 (pp. 466-467).

<sup>493</sup> Loest, ‘Dienst an der Grenze’, pp. 138-145.

<sup>494</sup> Ralf Schnell, *Geschichte der deutschsprachigen Literatur seit 1945* (Stuttgart & Weimar: Metzler, 1993), pp. 145-146.

<sup>495</sup> Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, ‘From Faktura to Factography’, *October*, 30 (1984), 82-119 (p. 84).

This practice of fictionalising real events<sup>496</sup> was taken up in the early GDR by writers portraying socialist construction. For example, in his 1951 novel about the Stalinallee, Harych derived his characters, events and plot lines directly from the many newspaper articles that he collected.<sup>497</sup>

Loest used a similar strategy when he worked on his novel *Die Westmark fällt weiter* (1952).<sup>498</sup> The narrative combines recent factual events with fictional characters and story lines. Drawing on real events of that year, the novel attempts to give a comprehensive view of divided Berlin in 1951, which results in a clear contrast: peaceful socialist construction and growing prosperity in the East versus unemployment,<sup>499</sup> economic despair, crime, corruption, and preparation for a new war in the West.

An example of how Loest put his own demand for exciting literature into practice, he based this novel on a widely known crime story. The plot revolves around the case of the young gangster Egon Kamm, whose criminal behaviour is envisaged as a direct result of American cultural influences. The character Kamm is based on the example of the adolescent criminal Werner Gladow, who operated in Berlin in 1949-1950. Loest integrates details from numerous contemporaneous press reports of Gladow's crimes into his novel.<sup>500</sup> But he locates Kamm's home in the West Berlin district of Kreuzberg as

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<sup>496</sup> Luker, *From Furmanov to Sholokhov*, p. 25.

<sup>497</sup> Castillo, 'Promoting Socialist Cities and Citizens' p. 297.

<sup>498</sup> Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, pp. 158-159.

<sup>499</sup> In 1950, 300 000 citizens of West Berlin were registered as unemployed. See Georg Kotowski, 'Geschichte Berlins seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg', in *Berlin: Vom Brennpunkt der Teilung zur Brücke der Einheit*, ed. by Gerd Langguth (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1990), pp. 48-68 (p. 57).

<sup>500</sup> For instance, Loest's descriptions of a taxi robbery, the robbery and shooting in a local bar, of Kamm's torture of one of his victims with a burning cigarette, and other crimes all are minor adaptations of crimes Gladow was found guilty of by East German judges, as reported in 'Feuer unter Kaufmannsfüße', *Der Spiegel*, 6 April 1950, 7-9.



opposed to Gladow's actual home in Friedrichshain in the East. This spatial shift presents crime as a product of Western capitalism.

Integrating the news of the day into fictional narrative, the novel tracks many of the political events and campaigns of the year 1951, culminating in the third 'Weltfestspiele der Jugend und Studenten'. Held in August, this sports event for communist youth movements from around the world was seized upon by the GDR leadership as an opportunity to present their state as young, peaceful, and forward-thinking.<sup>501</sup> For instance, when denouncing Western accusations of the political exploitation of art in the GDR, Grotewohl cited the event as an example of its great and spontaneous artistic achievements.<sup>502</sup> The account of the event in Loest's novel reflects such official presentations. It regularly stresses the variety of nationalities among the guests, all of whom are presented as heroic peace activists. Defining an international gathering of communist youth movements as a demonstration for peace, complies with SED discourses claiming the peace movement exclusively for the GDR and its allies.

Press campaigns preceding the 'Weltfestspiele' celebrated the 'Sonderbauprogramm' commissioned by the FDJ in the run-up to the event, and its meaning for the construction of a new city.<sup>503</sup> One of the many

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<sup>501</sup> Ina Rossow, "...alles nett, schön und gefühlsbetont, mit viel Absicht": Die III. Weltfestspiele der Jugend und Studenten 1951 im Kalten Krieg', in *Fortschritt, Norm und Eigensinn. Erkundungen im Alltag der DDR*, ed. by Andreas Ludwig (Berlin: Links, 1999), pp. 17-38 (p. 21).

<sup>502</sup> Otto Grotewohl, 'Die Kunst im Kampf für Deutschlands Zukunft: Rede Otto Grotewohls zur Berufung der Staatlichen Kommission für Kunstangelegenheiten am 31. August 1951, Auszug', in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED*, pp. 205-209 (p. 205).

<sup>503</sup> For example, *Neues Deutschland* launched a series 'Berlins Friedensbauten' stating that these buildings demonstrate that 'das deutsche Volk seine immer wieder für Krieg und Zerstörung mißbrauchte Energie, Hingabe und Begeisterungsfähigkeit in den Dienst einer neuen Aufbau stellte: Arbeit für den Frieden'. Quoted in Rossow, 'Die III. Weltfestspiele', p. 22.

narratives in the novel highlights the socialist reconstruction. In this *Aufbau* narrative, the preparations for the ‘Weltfestspiele’ function to illustrate the peaceful reconstruction of East Berlin. The novel describes the building of massive new sports facilities and other buildings, and the enthusiasm the population of East Berlin shows for them.<sup>504</sup> In his description of the preparations of the eager working-class people of Berlin for the ‘Weltfestspiele’, Loest echoes reports in the official East German media demonstrating the willingness of the population to contribute to the ‘Weltfestspiele’ and to peace in general. The scene in which the inhabitants of a house in Prenzlauer Berg prepare their attic as accommodation for international guests,<sup>505</sup> is taken from a report in the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*:

Ein munteres Treiben wird auf dem Dachboden herrschen. Das geräumige Massenquartier bietet 20 Jugendlichen Platz. Die ganze Hausgemeinschaft will sie gemeinsam aufs beste betreuen, um so einen Beitrag zum Gelingen der Weltfestspiele und somit auch zum Erfolg der Friedensbewegung zu leisten.<sup>506</sup>

Loest incorporated actual topical events into his text, and particularly the versions of these events as reported by the official East German media. For instance, he reworked media coverage of an incident on 15 August 1951 at Gesundbrunnen in West Berlin, during which, according to FDJ reports, 850 of

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<sup>504</sup> The names of the two major venues of the ‘Weltfestspiele’ give the leaders of the SED and the Soviet Union a positive symbolic role in the novel: Walter-Ulbricht-Stadion and the Deutsche Sporthalle in der Stalinallee.

<sup>505</sup> Loest, *Westmark*, pp. 402-404.

<sup>506</sup> Quoted in Rossow, ‘Die III. Weltfestspiele’, p. 23.

its members were maltreated and 150 arrested by the West Berlin police.<sup>507</sup>

The date and location are identical to those in Loest's narrative, which integrates the official version of the events: the narrator describes how the West Berlin policemen 'schlagen so lange auf Köpfe und hochgehobene Arme ein, wie ihr Offizier befiehlt'.<sup>508</sup> The description picks up on the *ND* report of the riot at Gesundbrunnen, which spoke of 'Polizei-Terror'.<sup>509</sup>

In grounding the narrative thoroughly in reported events, Loest gives his novel an aura of authenticity, and affirms not only the ideological project of the GDR but also its day-to-day politics vis-à-vis West Berlin.<sup>510</sup> Moreover Loest's novel conforms to guidelines such as the demand in the 1951 formalism resolution for 'wahrheitsgetreue und historisch konkrete künstlerische Darstellung'.<sup>511</sup> The fictionalisation of the topical events of the year in which the novel is set, and the use of media reports, mark Loest's eagerness to meet such demands. To achieve this goal, he made use of the tradition of socialist realist factography, derived from Soviet literature, but opposed to a Lukácsian emphasis on 'Gestaltung' over 'Reportage'.<sup>512</sup> Such an approach was reflected in the formalism resolution, as the Central Committee demanded 'künstlerische Gestaltung von Gegenwartsthemen'.<sup>513</sup>

In 1950, Loest's debut novel *Jungen die übrigblieben* received harsh criticism in the *Tägliche Rundschau* (*TR*), because, as Loest remembers, it

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<sup>507</sup> Kimberly Ann Redding, *Growing up in Hitler's Shadow: Remembering Youth in Postwar Berlin* (Westport CT: Praeger, 2004), p. 148.

<sup>508</sup> Loest, *Westmark*, p. 571.

<sup>509</sup> Quoted in Rossow, 'Die III. Weltfestspiele', p. 31.

<sup>510</sup> Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, p. 159.

<sup>511</sup> 'Der Kampf gegen den Formalismus in Kunst und Literatur, für eine fortschrittliche deutsche Kultur', pp. 182, 184.

<sup>512</sup> See Georg Lukács, 'Reportage oder Gestaltung?' (1932), in *Essays über Realismus*, pp. 35-68.

<sup>513</sup> 'Der Kampf gegen den Formalismus in Kunst und Literatur, für eine fortschrittliche deutsche Kultur', pp. 182, 184.

lacked an omniscient narrator to expose the protagonist's 'schwächliche Haltung'.<sup>514</sup> Gansel calls the narrative mode of *Jungen die übrigblieben* 'Mitsicht'.<sup>515</sup> It seems that Loest learned from the verdict against his debut, for *Die Westmark fällt weiter* has an extradiegetic narrator who frequently guides the reader's judgement, for example as the crowd watching the construction of the Deutsche Sporthalle in the Stalinallee spontaneously joins the construction workers to help with the building work, the narrator explains their enthusiasm by stating it is 'Ihre Halle'.<sup>516</sup> The reader is encouraged to believe that such construction efforts were in the people's interest. The same technique, which accorded with requirements of partisanship in literature, is used in *Das Jahr der Prüfung* as well as the stories set in the present.

A less conventional method he drew on in writing *Die Westmark fällt weiter* is montage, which according to his autobiography was inspired by films he saw in West Berlin.<sup>517</sup> The novel consists of short scenes, with rapid focus shifts, giving the reader a sense of the urgency and simultaneity of events. The result of these combined techniques is a thrilling novel that gives the reader a sense of direct involvement, even if its embellishment of the reported events is obvious. *Die Westmark fällt weiter* was accordingly acclaimed by *Neues Deutschland* for its gripping style.<sup>518</sup>

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<sup>514</sup> Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, pp. 147-150.

<sup>515</sup> Gansel, 'Ihr habt keine Ahnung, Kinder', p. 23.

<sup>516</sup> Loest, *Westmark*, p. 467. Emphasis in original.

<sup>517</sup> Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, p. 160.

<sup>518</sup> Erich Loest, 'Mit Provokateuren wird nicht diskutiert!', *Neues Deutschland*, 21 June 1953, p. 4. The editors of *ND* introduce the author of this article by mentioning his 'packend geschriebenen Roman "Die Westmark fällt weiter"'.

### 3. Narrative fiction

Even if he set his own accents, such as the use of montage, most of Loest's aesthetics from the early 1950s comply with Party discourses, as does his choice of subject: the novels and stories published in the years immediately after 1950 fictionalise the contemporary political situation in ways that are largely affirmative of GDR socialism and specific SED policies. As demonstrated for *Die Westmark fällt weiter*, these texts are notable for the way in which they integrate real and topical political events into fictional narratives, which can be traced back to practices in Soviet socialist realism as well as East German novels on socialist construction. Moreover, these texts contain examples of Loest's conception of the positive heroes as by no means perfect, but undergoing a process of coming to consciousness, resulting in political action. A pattern derived from the *Bildungsroman*, these narratives of coming to a socialist class consciousness relate to narratives of socialist conversions in *Jungen die übrigblieben* and the 1956-57 war stories. As the following section will show, the discourses in which Loest's texts operate started to shift after the uprising of 17 June 1953, causing discrepancies between Loest's perspective and official discourses. Finally these stories show how Loest put his demand that socialist realist literature be entertaining into practice: the titles of his volumes *Liebesgeschichten* (1951) and *Sportgeschichten* (1953) exemplify this as well as the decision to make a crime story the central narrative of *Die Westmark fällt weiter*.

### 3.1 Narratives of German division

The stories ‘Und dazwischen die Grenze’ (1951) and ‘Einladung von drüben’ (1953) are set in West Germany (the Ruhr Area and Braunschweig respectively) and deal directly with the problem of German division.<sup>519</sup> Both employ a national narrative claiming that the GDR is the legitimate German state defending national unity against Western imperialism, which they, in parallel with the imagery of East Germany in *Die Westmark fällt weiter*, connect with an *Aufbau* narrative, i.e. visions of the GDR socialist construction attaining prosperity for all, and a criticism of capitalist West German society.

The legitimacy national narrative is already apparent in the first pages of ‘Und dazwischen die Grenze’. The protagonist Paul Heinke, a returning POW recently released from captivity in the Soviet Union, visits the parents of an army comrade in the East German city of Merseburg on his way back home to the Ruhr Area. Merseburg is a significant place because of the chemical plant ‘Leuna-Werke “Walter Ulbricht”’, the largest East German factory, which rapidly recovered from severe war-time destruction<sup>520</sup> and a subsequent partial dismantling by the Soviets.<sup>521</sup> The prestigious factory functions as symbol of socialist construction in Loest’s narrative.

As the conversation stumbles on ‘diese Zonengrenzen’, the father of this working-class family connects the topics of division and construction, introducing the image of the divided country that constitutes the story: he speaks ‘von den harten Anstrengungen, von der langsamen Besserung. Von der

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<sup>519</sup> Loest, ‘Und dazwischen die Grenze’, in *Liebesgeschichten*, pp. 188-287; ‘Einladung von drüben’, in *Sportgeschichten*, pp. 215-280

<sup>520</sup> Raymond G. Stokes, ‘Autarky, Ideology, and Technological Lag: The Case of the East German Chemical Industry, 1945-1964’, *Central European History*, 28 (1995), 29-45 (pp. 31-34).

<sup>521</sup> Werner Abelshauser, *Deutsche Wirtschaftsgeschichte seit 1945* (Munich: Beck, 2004), p. 386.

Arbeitslosigkeit drüben in Westdeutschland. “Wenn Sie nicht verheiratet wären, würde ich Ihnen raten: Bleiben Sie hier.”<sup>522</sup> Unemployment and continuing capitalist misery on one side of the border, slow but sure socialist recovery on the other – this is the image the story constructs of Germany around 1950.

In doing so, Loest tackles the actual economic situation of the Western zones and FRG in the late 1940s and early 1950s, where unemployment remained high in spite of economic growth.<sup>523</sup> In this context, the story presents German division as a problem for those living in the West: they cannot profit from the successful construction of the East. It is indeed his persistent unemployment and poverty after returning to the Ruhr, that cause Heinke’s distress about German division. After many miserable months, he receives two letters from his army comrade Willi Brenzat who returned to Merseburg in the meantime and whose parents Heinke visited in the first scene. Brenzat writes about his successful reintegration in the swiftly developing East German society:

Ich habe mich erst vierzehn Tage lang ausgeruht. Jetzt arbeite ich im Chemiewerk Leuna, in meinem alten Beruf. Mit Wohnung ist es hier schlecht. [...] Es sind nach dem Kriege viele Arbeiter hierhergekommen, nun ist alles überfüllt. Es war auch viel kaputt. [...] Aber es wird überall gebaut [...]. Von Trümmern sieht man fast nichts mehr.<sup>524</sup>

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<sup>522</sup> Loest, ‘Und dazwischen die Grenze’, p. 192.

<sup>523</sup> Abelshauser, *Deutsche Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, pp. 298-299.

<sup>524</sup> Loest, ‘Und dazwischen die Grenze’, p. 216.

By integrating such letters into the story, Loest produces an effect of authenticity which underpins his narrative of socialist construction. The letter provokes an outburst of rage by Heinke, who is not infuriated by his friend's success, but by his own misery:

Seit drei Wochen ist der Willi zu Hause [...] und schon hat er Arbeit. [...] Alles ist vielleicht auch nicht so, wie es sein muß, aber er hat wenigstens Arbeit. Er verdient, und er weiß, was er den ganzen Tag machen soll.<sup>525</sup>

Life in the West for Heinke means poverty and boredom, both resulting from his being unemployed. His thoughts after reading Brenzat's second letter challenge division and once more connect it directly with the *Aufbau* narrative and criticism of Western capitalism:

Muß das denn sein? Ein Land, und zwischendurch eine dämliche Grenze, die kein vernünftiger Mensch haben will. Auf der einen Seite Arbeit in Hülle und Fülle, auf der anderen nichts zu tun.<sup>526</sup>

Drawing on a nationalist discourse, Loest's narrative questions the division and emphasises, in accordance with SED policies, that Germany is one country.<sup>527</sup> The scene in which a well-dressed, class-conscious Brenzat visits Heinke and invites him over to the East introduces a narrative of belonging to the local community, associated with a particular *Heimat* discourse:

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<sup>525</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid., p. 239.

<sup>527</sup> e.g. Otto Grotewohl, 'Die deutsche Kultur ist unteilbar: Rede Otto Grotewohls zur Kulturverordnung 1950, gehalten auf der 13. Tagung der Volkskammer, 22. März 1950, Auszug', in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED*, p. 136.



‘Komm doch mal eine Zeitlang ‘rüber zu uns!’

‘Ich habe auch schon daran gedacht’, sagte Heinke. ‘Aber ich habe doch meine Frau hier. [...] Und außerdem bin ich doch hier zu Hause, ich habe doch immer in dieser Stadt gewohnt.’

‘Aber ehe du vor die Hunde gehst...’<sup>528</sup>

The idyllic associations of *Heimat* are disturbed by the reality of Brenzat’s reply. Moreover, Heinke’s unemployment alienates him increasingly from his materialistic wife – thus disrupting his family, an important feature associated with a narrative of belonging. The sense of belonging in the Ruhr Area becomes problematic in the light of the deprived situation of the protagonist, which is caused by capitalism. The border in the title of the story not only separates the protagonist from his friend, but also Western unemployment from Eastern economic construction, which secures jobs for all. His deprivation is contrasted with the situation of workers in the East, represented by the friend from Merseburg and his job at Leuna.

The story ‘Einladung von drüben’, published two years after ‘Und dazwischen die Grenze’, also presents German division in the light of successful construction in the East. Following the announcement of the construction of socialism in July 1952, it emphasises the socialist nature of the GDR more strongly and in a jubilant manner. Loest wrote the story that same month, which also witnessed the ‘Beschlüsse von Oberwesel’, a set of decisions taken by the West German sports association to end all contacts with East Germany, including competitions. Mentioning this decision in the opening scenes, Loest tells the story of a swimming relay team from the West

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<sup>528</sup> Loest, ‘Und dazwischen die Grenze’, pp. 252-253.

German city of Braunschweig, which receives an invitation to compete at a tournament in Leipzig.<sup>529</sup> The hero of the story, Jürgen Schimmel is one of the team members and comes from a class-conscious proletarian family. Defying the club's sponsor, the city's major factory owner Leska, and his son, who is a member of the relay team as well, Schimmel eventually convinces four teammates to travel to East Germany. In so doing, he upholds the unity of German sports against alleged FRG efforts to split it.

Earning him praise from a reviewer of the Leipzig *Börsenblatt*,<sup>530</sup> Loest's narrative is embedded in official discourses which accuse the FRG of breaching national unity. For instance, the official reaction of the GDR sports association called the decisions of Oberwesel 'ein Glied in der großen Kette der Spaltungspolitik der Adenauerregierung'.<sup>531</sup> As the proletarian hero of the story makes sure that the team travels to Leipzig irrespective of the directives from the sponsor, the story transmits an image of the (male) working class as the patriotic force of national unity. In the scene where the hero is encouraged to travel to Leipzig by his uncle Willi, the connection with the *Aufbau* narrative (defining the nature of the GDR) becomes clear:

‘Das ist sehr wichtig, daß ihr fahrt’, sagt er. ‘Das möchte dem Leska passen! Kein Mensch soll dort hinüberkommen, kein Mensch aus Westdeutschland

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<sup>529</sup> Loest, 'Einladung von drüben', pp. 226-227.

<sup>530</sup> Günther Berthin, 'Erich Loest: "Sportgeschichten"', *Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel: Zeitschrift für die Verbreitung des fortschrittlichen Buches, für Literaturkritik und Bibliographie*, 6 February 1954, 129-130.

<sup>531</sup> Quoted in Kristin Rybicki, 'Sportler an einen Tisch! Berlin und die "Westarbeit" des Deutschen Sportausschusses in den frühen 1950er Jahren', in *Sportstadt Berlin im Kalten Krieg: Prestigekämpfe und Systemwettstreit*, ed. by Jutta Braun & Hans Joachim Teichler (Berlin: Links, 2006) pp. 66-95 (p. 90).

soll sehen, wie es drüben aussieht. Drüben bauen sie den Sozialismus auf, und ihr sollt nicht wissen, was das ist. Nee, [...] ihr müßt unbedingt hin.’<sup>532</sup>

With the patriarchal authority of the uncle and proletarian activist, this character (rather than a neutral narrative voice) pronounces the issue at stake: the capitalist elites in the West seeking to prevent West Germans from witnessing the construction of socialism in the GDR. This *Aufbau* narrative is therefore in line with Ulbricht’s appeal to artists at the 1952 Party Congress, to fill the people with enthusiasm for the construction of socialism. The uncle’s speech also echoes the connection made by Ulbricht between nationalism and the construction of socialism, as it blames Western capitalists for sacrificing national unity in order to preserve their privileged positions.<sup>533</sup>

In the figure of Onkel Willi, speaking with the authority of the old proletarian fighter, the narrative conveys a naturalisation of patriarchal power relations, which makes these relations appear natural to a readership which is to be constituted as subjects. Masculine images of the heroic working class thus affirm a certain, patriarchal image of socialist construction.

### 3.2 Masculine working-class imagery

‘Einladung von drüben’ contains more examples of the gendered working-class imagery Loest applies in much of his prose from the 1950s. As the relay team anchor Joachim Klepsch discusses the invitation to come to Leipzig with

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<sup>532</sup> Loest, ‘Einladung von drüben’, p. 239.

<sup>533</sup> Walter Ulbricht, ‘Kampf um ein realistisches Kunstschaffen: Referat Walter Ulbrichts auf der II. Parteikonferenz der SED, 9. bis 12. Juli 1952, Auszug’, in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED*, pp. 239-240 (p. 239).

Schimmel, the narrator presents an image of the story's hero which demonstrates his working-class confidence:

‘Es wird schon klappen’, sagt Schimmel langsam, und blickt dabei von dem Brief und von Klepsch weg, er sieht die Straße entlang, aber so, als gäbe es das, was er wahrnimmt, gar nicht in dieser Straße, und sein Blick ist dabei nicht träumerisch, nicht staunend, er ist so, wie Klepsch sich nicht besinnen kann, ihn jemals an Jürgen Schimmel wahrgenommen zu haben.<sup>534</sup>

Given the final sentence of this quotation, the confident look, the gaze into a better future, is a new quality for Schimmel. The focalisation through Klepsch prevents the audience from learning what Schimmel is looking at: in the course of the story it becomes clearer that the idea of witnessing the construction of socialism, and of demonstrating the unity of German sports, forms the starting point for his development of a proletarian class consciousness. The character of Schimmel therefore complies with Ulbricht's 1952 demand for literature about the ‘Kämpfer für ein einheitliches, demokratisches Deutschland’.<sup>535</sup>

Inherent in this working-class imagery of Loest's positive hero are certain notions of masculinity, as the key scene of the story reveals. Leska junior, wanting to prevent his team-mates from travelling to the GDR, confronts Schimmel before swimming practice – at the side of the pool, with the girls' team watching. After Schimmel wins the confrontation, the narrative portrays the hero from the perspective of one of the girls:

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<sup>534</sup> Loest, ‘Einladung’, p. 228.

<sup>535</sup> Ulbricht, ‘Kampf um ein realistisches Kunstschaffen’, p. 239.

Aus seinen Augen ist jeder Rest von Träumerei gewichen, sie strahlen zornig und trotzig, und eines der Mädchen findet, daß der lange Schimmel, der immer einen so schlacksigen Eindruck macht, eigentlich doch recht männlich aussieht.<sup>536</sup>

This unwittingly comical image of the victorious proletarian champion in swimwear is emblematic of the working-class narratives that Loest employs. The admiring female gaze affirms the heroic masculinity attained in winning the poolside confrontation, asserting that Schimmel was not a proper man before he decided to resist the Leska family, i.e. before he joined the struggle of the proletariat. As will be shown, this kind of masculinity in young proletarian fighters can be found in other texts by Loest from the 1950s as well, for instance in *Die Westmark fällt weiter* or the 1953 reportage ‘Dienst an der Grenze’, which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

His newfound working-class consciousness provides Schimmel with a sense of empowerment. When he visits his team-mate Weigel, an ‘Oberschüler’ and son of a teacher, his developing working-class consciousness becomes apparent. When Schimmel sees the nameplate on the door saying ‘Friedrich Weigel, Studienrat’, he feels inhibited, but soon takes on a defiant attitude: ‘Wie kommt er dazu, vor einem Studienrat Hemmungen zu empfinden? Muß er sich nicht einem Studienrat gegenüber überlegen fühlen, einem Kleinbürger, er als klassenbewußter Proletarier?’<sup>537</sup> Using a class-struggle pattern, Loest stages a conflict within his working-class

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<sup>536</sup> Loest, ‘Einladung’, p. 260.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid., p. 244.

character confronted with a representative of the petty bourgeoisie. In solving this inner conflict, Schimmel asserts his working-class superiority.

The narrative conceives of the proletariat as a force which is stronger than the individuals involved. Towards the end of the story, the younger Leska realises that he is helpless in his fight against the proletarian hero Schimmel:

Leska fühlt, [...] daß Schimmel gar nicht die Hauptsache ist. [...] Hinter Schimmel steht eine Kraft, das spürt Leska heraus, bekommt es auch zu spüren. Und diese Kraft, die Leska mit kaum zu begreifendem Unbehagen erfüllt, diese Kraft heißt Proletariat.<sup>538</sup>

This passage also provides an example of how the narrative voice stands between the story's villain and the reader, providing a clear perspective on Leska's thoughts, which makes the reader aware that his fright is caused by his recognition of the enormous, victorious force of the proletariat.

Drawing on the apparently natural authority of older proletarian male activists, such as Onkel Willi, the story utilises a patriarchal working-class family narrative. This narrative is introduced in the scene in which Schimmel tries to persuade his petty-bourgeois team-mate Weigel to join the trip to Leipzig. Due to his class background, Schimmel imagines, Weigel would not understand the affection members of the working class almost naturally have for socialism:

[Schimmel] überlegt, ob er das Wort Sozialismus in die Waagschale werfen soll. Säße ihm ein Arbeiter gegenüber, er würde es unbedenklich tun. Für ihn

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<sup>538</sup> Ibid., p. 262.

selbst ist es ein Wort, das ihn von Kind auf umgibt, das Bruder und Onkel gebrauchten, das einen schönen, warmen und strahlenden Klang besitzt. Aber was kann es für den Sohn eines Studienrates bedeuten?<sup>539</sup>

This narrative associates socialism with patriarchal authority and with a feeling of warm, homely affection for a son of the working class. The gendered family narrative relies on the absence of female family members in the recollection of the child's ideological formation. Authority lies with the older male family members. The affirmation of a paternalistic model of socialism is reinforced when Onkel Willi invokes the authority of Schimmel's dead father to explain the importance of the trip:

Leska will eben nicht, daß ihr seht, was der Sozialismus ist. Er hat seine Fabriken, seine Ländereien. Und er will nicht, daß ihr seht, wie das Leben drüben ist. Sieh dir das an! Denk an deinen Vater und sieh dir das an! Dein Vater wollte das so... Sperr die Augen auf, Junge! Sperr die Augen ganz weit auf! Und dann mußt du mir alles haarklein erzählen, hörst du? [...] Wenn dein Vater wüßte, daß du den Sozialismus siehst!<sup>540</sup>

Schimmel's father died, as we learn, when he was a child. Considering Schimmel's age, this is likely to have happened in the period of Nazi terror against socialists. Consequently, the narrative evokes the dead father as an antifascist martyr, lending double authority to this exaltation of paternalistic GDR socialism. Hell argues that 'foundational texts' by Seghers, Bredel and Gotsche 'grounded the new ideological formation in the power of the symbolic

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<sup>539</sup> Loest, 'Einladung', p. 247.

<sup>540</sup> Ibid., p. 263.

father' – and in the cases of Gotsche and Bredel this power is increased by 'identification' with dead fathers.<sup>541</sup> In this respect, Loest's invocation of paternal authority is consistent with legitimatory narratives by these canonical authors.

### 3.3 Cold War narratives of the West

As he locates 'Einladung von drüben' in the West, Loest offers insight into the machinations of capitalist society. The main negative character in the story is the factory owner Leska, who embodies the ruling class of the FRG. With his hardline anti-communist opinions, he also represents the Adenauer government's actual rhetoric towards East Germany. As the narrative exposes Leska's conduct as unpatriotic, it simultaneously comments on the politics of the West German government.

Being its sponsor, Leska has great influence on the swimming club and dictates its political line. When the club's chairman Blachnik visits Leska to ask for more financial support, the narrative depicts them in explicit contrast to the working-class protagonists: 'wohlgenährt, gut gekleidet'.<sup>542</sup> The text asserts a correlation between the poverty of the West German working class and the wealth of the capitalists. The club's limited resources testify to the purportedly poor state of sports in the West – illustrating a downside of West German capitalism. It emerges that Blachnik has to beg regularly for financial support, which results in the capitalist Leska's negative influence on the club. The narrative presents Leska as morally flawed:

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<sup>541</sup> Hell, *Post-Fascist Fantasies*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>542</sup> Loest, 'Einladung', p. 231.



Da sagt Leska [...]: ‘die Menschen in unserem Verein haben bisher [...] eine gesunde patriotische Einstellung bewiesen. Ich glaube, Sie sind sich Ihrer Aufgabe bewußt, diesen Verein im Sinne christlicher Verantwortung, im Sinne der Moral und der Vaterlandsliebe zu leiten. [...] Und weil Sie [...] den Verein immer im Sinne der Vaterlandstreue und der Abwehr des Bolschewismus geleitet haben, deshalb kann man mit Ihnen ruhig einmal über eine finanzielle Unterstützung reden.’<sup>543</sup>

As the narrator makes clear, Blachnik listens to these words ‘argwöhnisch’. He is aware of the discrepancy between ‘diesen Vokabeln’ and his sportsmanship, and remains unconvinced that sport is connected to ‘Christentum, Moral [...] und jenem Begriff “Vaterlandsliebe”, der nun schon dreimal in seinem Leben einen anderen Akzent bekommen hat’.<sup>544</sup> The narrative seeks to unmask the values of the West German ruling class as corrupted, in particular FRG patriotic rhetoric. As is implied in the reference to three disruptions in recent German history, the same capitalists who used the term ‘Vaterlandsliebe’ to deceive the German people in Wilhelmine Germany, the Weimar Republic and Nazi Germany, have now adapted its meaning to serve their interests in the FRG. With the catastrophic wars that resulted from this corrupted patriotism still fresh in any contemporaneous readers’ minds, the quoted passage serves as a reminder of the direction West Germany was allegedly taking. After the national cause was betrayed by the declining bourgeoisie, SED discourses at the time argued, the proletariat became its rightful champion.<sup>545</sup>

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<sup>543</sup> Ibid., pp. 234-235.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>545</sup> See Erpenbeck, ‘Formalismus und Dekadenz’, p. 114.

Even though he is not at ease with the capitalist's use of nationalist rhetoric, the petty-bourgeois Blachnik remains unaware of this background and does not adopt the East German version of patriotism. For despite his doubts, Blachnik's petty-bourgeois mindset leads him to be convinced by the money offered and by the social status of Leska. Blachnik's calculated submission and Leska's arrogance towards him – he calls him 'Kleinbürger' and 'Speichellecker' – symbolise the perfidious nature of a society in which money rules.<sup>546</sup> In turn, these characteristics expose the phrases used by Leska, and consequently the bourgeois morality of Christianity and corrupted patriotism that he – as a member of the West German ruling class – utilises to justify his anti-GDR actions.

Indeed, their hostility to communism disqualifies the Leskas – and with them the ruling class in West Germany – as patriots. Their fury at discovering the plan to go to Leipzig illustrates the dishonesty of their patriotism. After losing the poolside confrontation with Schimmel, Leska junior is determined to prevent, 'daß einige Leute von "Neptun" Braunschweig in die Ostzone [...] fahren [und daß] sie dann kommunistische Ideen mitschleppen'.<sup>547</sup> He informs his father about the plan, who orders chairman Blachnik to suspend the members willing to travel. Leska Sr. exclaims: 'Sie schleppen uns den Kommunismus ein. Einheit Deutschlands? Nee, meine Herren! Man muß diese Dinge im Keim ersticken!'.<sup>548</sup>

Loest's story employs a nationalist narrative which disparages the West German ruling class, embodied in the figure of Leska: he prefers fighting communism over achieving national unity. Even if they indulge in patriotic

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<sup>546</sup> Loest, 'Einladung', p. 235.

<sup>547</sup> Ibid., p. 257.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

terms such as ‘Vaterlandsliebe’, he and his class are actually unpatriotic. As emerges from the thoughts of the young Leska, these capitalists deliberately seek to destroy national consciousness:

Es muß aus dem Bewußtsein der Menschen ausradiert werden, daß Leipzig eine deutsche Stadt ist, in der Deutsche wohnen und deutsch sprechen, an Deutschland denken und Deutschland wollen. Leipzig, das muß das sein und bleiben, was die Zeitungen täglich aus ihm machen: eine Stadt des Terrors wie jede andere Stadt in der ‘Ostzone’ auch, der Not, der Unterdrückung und des dumpfen Stöhnens nach ‘Befreiung’.<sup>549</sup>

With its reference to Leipzig, the location of the 1813 Battle of the Nations, and its use of the word ‘Befreiung’, the quotation evokes the Wars of Liberation against Napoleon. It is implied that Leska and his class are plotting another war to liberate East Germany from what they contend is Soviet occupation. The narrative presents the idea that the East German people are terrorised and suppressed as a lie spread by the Western press, intended to destroy national and class consciousness, and to prepare West German minds for a new war. The hero Schimmel and the masculine working-class activists surrounding him are the true patriots in the story, upholding German unity.

From unravelling propaganda and prejudices against the GDR, the narrative moves to addressing prejudices against the working class in Weigel’s petty-bourgeois milieu. Weigel questions his girlfriend’s objections to the trip and explores her disapproval of his friendship with Schimmel, whom she degradingly refers to as ‘ein Arbeiter’. From Weigel’s perspective, Schimmel

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<sup>549</sup> Ibid., pp. 261-262.

is characterised as a decent man, whereas Weigel's girlfriend could be seen to represent a consumerist, superficial petty bourgeois way of thinking, as his thought processes in the following extract show. Weigel reflects on a conversation with Schimmel:

Dabei ist Schimmel gar nicht laut und roh, ungebildet und schmutzig. [...]

[M]an könnte sich bestimmt nicht so ruhig mit ihr über dieses Thema unterhalten, wie man es mit Schimmel kann. Sie würde schimpfen, und dann wäre sie gleich bei einem anderen Thema. Sie würde sehr bald wieder von einem Film reden oder von einem Kleid oder von einer neuen Eisdiele.<sup>550</sup>

The discussion with Schimmel, which Weigel thinks of as 'ernsthaft und sachlich',<sup>551</sup> focuses Weigel's awareness of class relationships: by juxtaposing the decent earnest and masculine Schimmel with his superficial, ranting girlfriend, the narrative characterises the working class as masculine, but feminises the petty bourgeois milieu. The role of this female character is limited to illustrating the superficial consumerism of West German society, of which Weigel becomes aware. The same image is found in 'Und dazwischen die Grenze', when the jobless Heinke becomes estranged from his consumerist wife who eventually finds a more well-off man. Female characters such as Weigel's girlfriend and the girl who admires Schimmel after the poolside confrontation function as projections of a turning point in the male characters' development of political awareness.

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<sup>550</sup> Loest, 'Einladung', p. 248.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid.

Loest's other story set in West Germany, 'Und dazwischen die Grenze' presents an image of the West characterised by the unemployment and degradation of the upright proletarian discussed above, and by the militarism of its occupying powers who exploit the fascist mindsets ingrained in the West German population. The British army training ground that the jobless steelworker Heinke encounters on his bored strolls through his hometown in the Ruhrgebiet, is a tangible symbol of Western militarism. Full of disgust he watches the 'Tommies' exercise for the next great war:

Heinke geht dorthin, um sich anwidern zu lassen, um die ganze Wut auszukotzen, daß hier wieder für den Krieg geübt wird. Am nächsten Tag streitet er sich dann an den Straßenecken mit denen, die meinen, nur ein Krieg könne Elend und Arbeitslosigkeit abschaffen.<sup>552</sup>

The latter sentence of this quotation implies that militarism is not only apparent in the military presence of the Western Allies, but also in a fascist mindset still present in West German society – and exploited by the Allies. The vision of demoralised jobless West Germans being used as 'Kriegsmaterial' in the next war was also used by Prime Minister Grotewohl in his address to the Volkskammer in March 1950.<sup>553</sup>

In the Cold War context of Western militarism, Loest returns to the nationalist discourses he employs throughout the story and constructs a narrative of the *Heimat* being brusquely disturbed by military developments. The episode in which Heinke finally finds employment in the construction of a British ammunition depot in the forested hills, expands the disruption of the

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<sup>552</sup> Loest, 'Und dazwischen die Grenze', pp. 246-247.

<sup>553</sup> Grotewohl, 'Die deutsche Kultur ist unteilbar', p. 136.

nation to the local *Heimat* associated with the German landscape.<sup>554</sup> As the workers discover what they are building, the hard ‘reality’ of Western militarism and imperialism destroys the idyllic setting.<sup>555</sup>

The novel *Die Westmark fällt weiter* conveys Cold War narratives of West Berlin, rather than West Germany. It appears as a place where ruthless capitalists, corrupt politicians, and American imperialists are in charge. In this regard it fits into a range of East German novels from the 1950s portraying this city as an example of the desperate state of Western capitalism.<sup>556</sup> The title refers to the West German currency which – according to the narrative – is kept artificially high by corrupt politicians who make huge profits in the currency markets. The one-sided implementation of the separate Western currency reform of 1948 in West Berlin was indeed an important step in the division of the city.<sup>557</sup> The value of the West German Mark was certainly increasing fast in relation to the East German currency.<sup>558</sup> However, blaming Western conspiracies for the resulting inequalities and economic problems was part of official East German efforts to make sabotage responsible for the GDR’s own (economic) shortcomings. Kane notes rightly that the ‘conspirational [...] tale [the novel] tells of American policy towards Germany in the immediate post-war period’, can be related to 1951-1952 trials in East Berlin of suspected members of American sabotage groups operating against the GDR.<sup>559</sup>

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<sup>554</sup> Loest, ‘Und dazwischen die Grenze’, p. 258.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>556</sup> See Ursula Reinhold, ‘Berlin-Ansichten’, in *Deutsche Erinnerung: Berliner Beiträge zur Prosa der Nachkriegsjahre (1945-1960)*, ed. by Ursula Heukenkamp (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2000), pp. 199-238 (pp. 210-211).

<sup>557</sup> Udo Wetzlaugk, *Berlin und die deutsche Frage* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1985), pp. 40-42.

<sup>558</sup> Kotowski, ‘Geschichte Berlins seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg’, p. 56.

<sup>559</sup> Kane, ‘East German Literature and the Cold War’, p. 141.

Loest's novel is suffused with examples of the corrupting Western influence on Germany as a whole. It fits in with a particular anti-Western discourse, which blames American cultural influences for crime and 'decadence' among the German youth. Loest envisages the young gangster Kamm as a direct product of American cultural influences, particularly of Western crime fiction meant to distract the German youth from communist propaganda and to prepare their minds for the next war. Dismissing crime fiction, the narrative relates to official SED discourses against West German cultural 'decadence'. The 1951 resolution on formalism, for instance, denounced what it called the massive spread of various forms of decadent 'Kitsch', also 'Kriminal- und Kolportageromanen übelster Sorte', which were supposedly an instrument of 'Imperialismus' and 'Kriegsbrandstiftung'.<sup>560</sup> Loest's narrative is embedded in this discourse: the spread of crime literature amongst the population of West Berlin is promoted by Colonel Clark Haydock and his department of 'Psychologische Kriegsvorbereitung'.<sup>561</sup> This narrative fits neatly into what Uta G. Poiger calls a discourse of 'cultural anti-Americanism' which served to attack 'West Germany's transformation into a capitalist liberal democracy and Bonn's growing military and political association with the United States'. In this discourse the Gladow case served to expose 'gangster stories as part of an American cultural attack on Germany'.<sup>562</sup>

In the same discursive strand as 'Und dazwischen die Grenze', the narrative emphasises West Berlin's poverty and unemployment, caused by the greed of capitalists and politicians. Unemployment forces Kamm's friend

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<sup>560</sup> 'Der Kampf gegen den Formalismus', p. 182.

<sup>561</sup> Loest, *Westmark*, p. 170.

<sup>562</sup> Uta G. Poiger, 'A New, "Western" Hero? Reconstructing German Masculinity in the 1950s', *Signs*, 24 (1998), 147-162 (p. 149).

Joachim Pfaffner to become his accomplice in his illegal activities. After Joachim's death, his younger and (due to his friendship with a working-class boy) politically conscious brother Günther is convinced it was suicide caused by his economic hardship. As he passes by the 'Schöneberger Rathaus', the seat of the West Berlin magistrate, the narrative approvingly relates his bitter thoughts: 'Die dort drüben haben Joachim ermordet.'<sup>563</sup>

The true perpetrators of the narrative are therefore not Kamm and his gang of petty criminals, but the political and industrial elite of West Berlin and the American occupiers they cooperate with. This accusation – implicit throughout the story – is finally pronounced after Kamm has been killed by police bullets:

'Wenn er wenigstens schuldig wäre', sagt Pennkuven. 'Nein, er ist schuldig, aber er ist es nicht allein. Die ihn dorthin gebracht haben, die laufen herum, die fahren in schweren Wagen, und denen tut keiner was.'<sup>564</sup>

Strikingly, it is the West Berlin police detective Ewald Pennkuven, a sincere, but rather naive man from a petty-bourgeois class background, who draws this conclusion. His observation that other powers are to blame for Kamm's crimes, marks his conversion to the East, his newfound consciousness of actual political relations, which lends his statement extra force. The fact that the two petty criminal main characters of the novel eventually die, indicates that they are effectively victims of capitalism as well, and underlines the fact that the true perpetrators are those in power in the West.

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<sup>563</sup> Loest, *Westmark*, p. 449.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid., p. 575.



### 3.4 Political interventions across the East-West divide

A remarkable feature of Loest's fiction about the contemporary political situation in Germany is its intervention in political issues in West Germany and West Berlin. His representations of the social-democratic SPD in *Die Westmark fällt weiter* and 'Einladung von drüben' are striking examples. In both texts, Loest seeks to maintain the unity of the German working class by reaching out to grassroots SPD members, while dismissing its leadership. A similar appeal to the social-democratic workers not to follow their party leaders' turning away from their communist 'brothers', was already made in communist policies after 1924, following Comintern's adoption of an 'Einheitsfront von unten'.<sup>565</sup> In the 1950s context of SED *Bündnispolitik* and patriotic appeal, it takes on another dimension as a means of seeking allies in the West.

In this respect it is notable that the authoritative figure of Onkel Willi in 'Einladung von drüben' is a grassroots member of the SPD. He introduces Schimmel to other working-class activists who help him organise the transportation for the relay team to travel to East Germany. One of them appears to be a member of the KPD:

[...] der sitzt in einem Büro am Rande der Stadt, und er ist nicht einmal von der Partei, der Onkel Willi angehört. Und doch sagt auch zu diesem Mann Onkel Willi 'Genosse'.<sup>566</sup>

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<sup>565</sup> Siegfried Bahne, *Die KPD und das Ende von Weimar: Das Scheitern einer Politik* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1976), p. 22.

<sup>566</sup> Loest, 'Einladung', p. 269.

Note the peripheral location of the communist activist, which is symbolic of the secondary position of communists in West Germany – bearing in mind the continuous efforts of the Federal Government since 1951 to ban the KPD.<sup>567</sup> Against this background, Loest makes fictional West German communists and Social Democrats join forces to achieve a common patriotic and socialist goal: to make sure a local sports team can compete in the East. In so doing he proposes a grassroots unity of German proletarians, irrespective of their political party allegiance.

The representation of West Berlin SPD members in *Die Westmark fällt weiter* accords with the strategy to reach out to Social Democrats. Loest portrays the class-conscious proletarian father Bienalt, a member of the SPD who, unaware of the corruption in the top ranks of his party, engages with his son Wolfgang in the struggle for peace – leaving mother Bienalt at home worrying about her son's safety.<sup>568</sup> They align their efforts increasingly with those coming from the East, and come to recognise the SED as the force for peace, unity, and socialism in Germany. They come to this conclusion during one of the topical events that Loest integrates into his narrative: the 1951 campaign for a 'Volksbefragung gegen Remilitarisierung und für einen Friedensvertrag mit Deutschland'.<sup>569</sup>

The official prohibition of this referendum by the Federal government, which regarded it as a move against its democratic order,<sup>570</sup> provided the SED with the opportunity to rage against the allegedly separatist and militaristic

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<sup>567</sup> Klaus Joachim Grigoleit, *Bundesverfassungsgericht und deutsche Frage* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), p. 241.

<sup>568</sup> Again the female character serves to reflect the heroism of the masculine proletarian fighters. The mother's fear emphasises the dangers her son and husband are determined to defy in their righteous struggle.

<sup>569</sup> Loest, *Westmark*, p. 279.

<sup>570</sup> Michael Lemke, *Einheit oder Sozialismus? Die Deutschlandpolitik der SED 1949-1961* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2001), pp. 143-145.

nature of the FRG. The leadership of the SPD supported the prohibition, but many of its subdivisions did not.<sup>571</sup> Loest picks up on this situation as he describes father Bienalt's determination to execute the 'Volksbefragung' against the will of those in power, even the leadership of his own party. He demands assistance from a community 'Aufklärungslokal' in the Eastern district of Prenzlauer Berg, which provides campaign materials to disseminate in the factory where he works. Such West German activists are valued highly, as the thoughts of their Eastern contact reveal: 'Wenn wir in jedem Westberliner Betrieb zehn solcher Kerle hätten, wären wir halb am Ziel.'<sup>572</sup>

Whereas the narrative rates West German Social Democratic grassroots activists positively, it is less positive about the higher SPD cadres, represented by the character Maximilian Kröninger. This corrupt and powerful SPD politician is a shareholder in the currency business. His riches contrast to the hardships of the common West Berliners portrayed in the novel.<sup>573</sup> He counteracts all activities promoting peace and national unity, in cooperation with Haydock, the American officer for 'Psychologische Kriegsvorbereitung'.<sup>574</sup> They stop the detective Pennkuven's efforts to prevent the spread of crime literature.<sup>575</sup> In addition, Kröninger repeatedly orders the police to transfer manpower from the investigation into the Kamm case, in order to hunt down peace activists such as his low-ranking party comrade Bienalt, whose workplace is searched twice.<sup>576</sup>

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<sup>571</sup> Thomas Klein, *SEW – die Westberliner Einheitssozialisten: Eine "ostdeutsche" Partei als Stachel im Fleische der "Frontstadt"?* (Berlin: Links, 2009), p. 227.

<sup>572</sup> Loest, *Westmark*, p. 279.

<sup>573</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 180-181

<sup>574</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>575</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 189-191.

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 335-341; pp. 547-559.

The West Berlin branch of the SPD operated at the frontline of the Cold War. Considering its rejection of communism,<sup>577</sup> the West Berlin SPD leadership was a feasible target, while the SED's proclaimed goal of national unity demanded reaching out to those SPD grassroots activists who had not broken with the East and communism altogether. Loest's critique of the SPD intervenes in West German politics; something similar can be observed in one of the war stories I will discuss below, 'Hitler's Befehl' (1957).

### 3.5 Narratives of socialist conversion

In accordance with Loest's notion of the positive hero, the narratives with a contemporaneous setting contain accounts of some of their characters' conversion to a socialist consciousness of actual political and economic relations. A striking example of such a character is the detective Pennkuven from *Die Westmark fällt weiter*, whose efforts to fight crime among the youth of West Berlin are constantly frustrated by the massive rise in popularity of crime fiction and by the regular removal of manpower from his department to hunt down socialist peace activists. These experiences and his cooperation with the East German Volkspolizei in the Kamm case open his eyes to the relationship between the high crime rate and the political system in West Berlin. As FDJ victims of the police raid at Gesundbrunnen of 15 August are brought into the East Berlin hospital where he visits Kamm's dead body, he realises their injuries were inflicted by his men; he resigns from the West

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<sup>577</sup> Richard L. Merritt & Ronald A. Francisco, 'The SPD of East Berlin, 1945-1961', *Comparative Politics*, 5 (1972), pp. 1-28 (p.17).

Berlin police force and sides with the East, feeling relieved and finally free.<sup>578</sup>

His story is one of the narratives of conversion that run through the novel.

As most of Loest's heroes are young men, the narratives of conversion culminate in the hero's maturity and attainment of a masculine self-confidence. One of the protagonists from *Die Westmark fällt weiter* is the reluctant young waiter Berndt Ahlsen from Prenzlauer Berg, who slowly changes from an enthusiastic reader of Western crime fiction to a convinced FDJ activist. As O'Pecko notes, Ahlsen functions as the counterpart to the gangster Kamm in the narrative.<sup>579</sup> He fails to mention, though, that the storyline of their divergent paths is also a statement about the two political systems they live in. Both are interested in crime fiction, and Ahlsen even joins Kamm on his first robbery. But whereas Kamm seeks adventure and puts his gangster fantasies into practice, Ahlsen falls in love with his colleague Margot Bornemann, an exemplary working-class girl: hardworking, decent, and a devout member of the FDJ. This female character inspires the hero Ahlsen's conversion, which takes the length of the novel to complete. Moreover, the figure of Margot reflects the troublesome nature of his conversion, withdrawing her love when he remains a reluctant outsider who does not join the FDJ. Unhappy that he does not contribute his share to the new society he benefits from, Margot leaves Berndt: 'Die anderen bauen dir hier einen neuen Staat und eine neue Wirtschaft auf [...] und du setzt dich einfach ins warme Nest!'<sup>580</sup>

Berndt finally persuades himself of his duty when he gets a new job at a hotel of the 'Handelsorganisation', the state-owned East German retail organisation. Here he is impressed by the guests of the 'Weltfestspiele' –

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<sup>578</sup> Loest, *Westmark*, pp. 576-580.

<sup>579</sup> O'Pecko, 'Thematic Continuity', p. 24.

<sup>580</sup> Loest, *Westmark*, p. 327.

antifascist peace activists from all over the world – and wants to belong to their movement. When he admits to his Italian guest Luigi that he is not a member of the FDJ, the narrative relates his feeling of shame. Margot's words resound in his contempt for his own inactivity:

Der kommt von Italien extra hierher, um für den Frieden zu demonstrieren, der riskiert seine Freiheit und seinen Arbeitsplatz – und hier läuft einer herum, der das alles so hinnimmt, der zusieht, wie sich die anderen um sich herum abmühen, wie sie sich drüben in West-Berlin einsperren lassen, der läßt sich einen schönen Arbeitsplatz in einem volkseigenen Betrieb geben; und was tut er? Nichts tut er!<sup>581</sup>

Following this insight, Berndt instantly applies for FDJ membership, for which he is rewarded with Margot's love. Whereas Margot functions in Berndt's conversion as inspiration, mirror and finally as trophy, affirming his attained status as a masculine activist worthy of her love, the figure of the Italian activist Luigi plays a guiding, father-like role in his transition process. The fatherly image of Luigi becomes most apparent when Luigi smuggles Berndt into the crowded Walter-Ulbricht-Stadion for the opening ceremony of the 'Weltfestspiele'. The two are described in a way similar to the conventional picture of a father taking his son to a stadium. In the crush at the gates Berndt 'hält sich an Luigis Jacke fest, um ihn nicht zu verlieren', and when seated: 'Er blickt Luigi oft an und lacht.'<sup>582</sup> Berndt's conversion thus needed guidance by a heroic male proletarian activist.

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<sup>581</sup> Ibid., p. 505.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid., p. 509.

In ‘Einladung von drüben’, Schimmel experiences a conversion to a political class consciousness as well: from an average working-class boy he changes into a proletarian activist. Again, the conversion is inspired by paternalistic guiding figures, and culminates in the hero’s achievement of full masculinity. Loest describes the instance Schimmel realises that he is part of a community of masculine working-class activists as a moment of bliss. When Schimmel and his uncle organise the team’s transportation with one of his ‘Genossen’ who is a truck driver, the narrator notes:

Es erfüllt ihn mit Freude und Dankbarkeit, daß er hier sitzen kann, planen, besprechen, beschließen. [...] Und er nimmt sich vor: Ich will auch so werden wie die beiden, so ruhig, so sicher, so mutig, und ich will genauso dieser großen Sache dienen, wie es die beiden tun! Das will ich. – Es ist ihm sehr feierlich zumute in diesem Augenblick.<sup>583</sup>

Schimmel’s solemn joy underlines the importance of this event; his development in political awareness means he is admitted to the male world. Becoming a proletarian is thus associated with becoming a man. As with the other examples discussed in this section, his change is guided by a more conscious and mature character: Onkel Willi, a paternalistic mentor and role model.

#### 4. Consensus *and* dissent: 1953

In the aftermath of the uprising of 17 June 1953, Loest wrote two different reactions. Initially, he dismissed the uprising in his reportage ‘Mit

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<sup>583</sup> Loest, ‘Einladung’, p. 270.

Provokateuren wird nicht diskutiert!’ (*ND*, 21 June).<sup>584</sup> But in July he published the essay ‘Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne’ in the Leipzig *Börsenblatt*, which brought him into conflict with Party officials. As the following section argues, he based his opposition to official policies after the uprising on the same (consensual) narrative patterns as his affirmative stances in the reportage ‘Dienst an der Grenze’, published in *NDL* in February 1953, and his initial response to the uprising.

#### 4.1 Proletarian heroes at the border

The reportage ‘Dienst an der Grenze’ (*NDL*, February 1953) contains many of the narrative patterns that are also present in Loest’s stories and novels: the admiration of the working class as expressed in heroic, masculine proletarian imagery; visions of the GDR as a socialist society; and negative imagery of the West as aggressive, imperialist, and militaristic. The reportage portrays the border guards as a collective of heroes protecting the GDR against the perceived Western threat.

Parallel to the story ‘Und dazwischen die Grenze’, Loest reflects on the artificiality of the border separating Germany. ‘Dieser Wald war durch Jahrhunderte hindurch Grenzwald’, he concedes, but:

heute zieht sich über diese Höhe wieder eine Grenze, unsinniger, schädlicher noch als die frühere, und diese Grenze wird von den Bauern hüben und drüben ärger verflucht als die vergangene von ihren Großvätern. Sie trennt

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<sup>584</sup> Erich Loest, ‘Mit Provokateuren wird nicht diskutiert!’, *Neues Deutschland*, 21 June 1953, p. 4.



nicht mehr Thüringen von Bayern, sie trennt die Deutsche Demokratische Republik von dem amerikanisch besetzten Teil Deutschlands.<sup>585</sup>

In his condemnation of the existence of the border Loest invokes the authority of local peasants. Read against the political background of the rejection of the Stalin Note of March 1952, the text denounces the FRG as an illegal state under US occupation. In this context, Loest presents a Cold War narrative of a persistent Western threat against East Germany, emphasising the probability of provocations:

[...] das alles *könnte sein!* Denn das alles ist schon gewesen. Schüsse sind gefallen, Grenzpolizisten sind heimtückisch ermordet worden. Und wenn man mit den Offizieren der Deutschen Grenzpolizei in M. spricht, dann erfährt man, daß nicht nur einer von denen, die aus dem amerikanisch besetzten Gebiet herüberkamen und [...] gestellt wurden, Geld, Waffen, Pläne und Aufträge in der Tasche und die Absicht im Hirn trugen, Sabotage, Diversion und Hetze in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik zu entfachen.<sup>586</sup>

Loest's reportage conforms with the narrative pattern of a Western threat in his novels and stories. With this threat presented as very real, Loest describes night-time patrol at the border as a heroic sacrifice to defend the GDR, which, in view of the disqualification of the other state as occupied territory, emerges as the only legitimate German state.

The depiction of the border guards – who protect the state against Western imperialism – as loyal, determined and self-sacrificing members of

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<sup>585</sup> Loest, 'Dienst an der Grenze', p. 139.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid., pp. 139-140. Emphasis in the original.

the working class, enhances this legitimacy. When introducing an older border officer, who remembers of the even greater hardships the guards had to undergo in the early post-war years, the narrator describes him as a fatherly, assured, and steadfast proletarian hero. His leadership bears similarities to the depiction of the guiding figures in Loest's novels and stories:

Er stammt [...] aus einer Familie, in der es beinahe niemanden gab, der nicht der KPD angehörte. Er selbst war Mitglied des Kommunistischen Jugendverbandes. Er arbeitete als Werkzeugschlosser, und nach dem Kriege trat er der Partei bei, die seine Interessen vertritt und für deren Interessen er sich heute auf Schritt und Tritt einsetzt. Mit welcher Ruhe, mit welcher Sicherheit und mit welchem Einfühlungsvermögen er mit den Grenzpolizisten spricht, das nötigt Bewunderung ab.<sup>587</sup>

Whereas the narrative emphasises his hero's membership of the communist youth association before Hitler's rise to power, it leaves his activities during the Third Reich unspecified. Loest's eloquent silence raises the possibility that something suspicious is hidden in this man's history, which cannot be integrated into the glorifying discursive pattern of the proletarian hero. It is impossible to pinpoint what this might have been, but Loest would certainly have strongly focused on any form of resistance against the Nazis.

If this fatherly officer functions as the paternalistic, guiding hero in the reportage, the subsequent paragraph introduces the heroic image of the young male proletarian fighter: an eighteen year old from a Thuringian village, who (before joining the border police) had worked at an FDJ project in the

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<sup>587</sup> Ibid., pp. 140-142.

Maxhütte steel mill, and lived there ‘im besten Lehrlingswohnheim’.<sup>588</sup> In a typical *Aufbau* narrative, the Party youth organisation is presented as engaging in industrial production. Unsurprisingly, Loest perceives his young hero’s contribution to socialist construction in the steel industry as the greatest conceivable joy and accomplishment:

Wie eine große Welle des Glücks muß das Leben in diesem Heim, die Arbeit in der Hütte damals in diesen Jungen hineingeflutet sein; heute noch strahlt er, wenn er davon spricht. Was war das für ein Leben, was für ein Lernen, was machte die FDJ-Arbeit Spaß!<sup>589</sup>

In accordance with Loest’s notion of the positive hero, the soldier has undergone a process of ideological maturation; narrated in flashbacks and hinted at in his reaction to the narrator’s question why he left this wonderful way of life for the tough service at the border, which is met with ‘ein wenig Verwunderung auf dem kräftigen Jungengesicht unter blonden Haaren’. The answer, that his contribution was necessary to defend his country against imperialism, tempts the author to celebrate his hero as an example of the proletariat’s ‘Opferbereitschaft für das Vaterland’.<sup>590</sup> In this way the text works in accordance with SED appeals to patriotism. Following this pattern, the nation requires sacrifices from its members, who are conceived of as proletarian males and soldiers. The imagery of the soldier’s masculine strong face and blond hair – shows elements of Nazi discourses, which indicate subconscious remnants of certain thought patterns and gender constructions. At

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<sup>588</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>589</sup> Ibid.

<sup>590</sup> Ibid.

the same time it is reminiscent of the imagery Loest used in the portrayal of the masculine proletarian heroes in his novels and stories, such as the swimmer Schimmel in 'Einladung von drüben'.

In its description of a discussion between the visiting writer and the border guards, the reportage underlines Loest's agreement with official notions of the role literature is supposed to play in socialism. The soldiers show vivid interest in literature and great awareness of issues of socialist realism and the role of literature in a socialist society:

Es gibt eine rege Diskussion über den positiven Helden, über typische Charaktere, über Realismus. Die Grenzpolizisten zeigen ein gutes Gefühl dafür, was unsere Literatur erzielen kann und erreichen soll. Dann fragen wir, wie sie sich einen Roman über die Grenzpolizei vorstellen. [...] Der Roman muß die Bevölkerung der DDR über die Arbeit der Grenzpolizei aufklären. Und außerdem muß er der Grenzpolizei selbst helfen. Er muß ihren Patriotismus stärken, muß die Entwicklung eines Kollektivs schildern, damit sich andere ein Beispiel daran nehmen können.<sup>591</sup>

Not just the enthusiasm for and the knowledge of literature these proletarians show is in accordance with official notions, but also the aesthetic concepts they uphold: the positive hero, typical characters and realism. The reportage presents the aesthetic-political programme of the SED as a genuine desire of the glorified collective of working-class heroes. Their endorsement grants it particular persuasiveness. Appropriating the authority of the heroic male border guards to endorse his vision, Loest's reportage envisions GDR society

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<sup>591</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

as a common project to which each has to contribute their particular share. The narrator demands that his audience be conscious of the achievements defended by the heroic border guards. Note the amalgamation of the narrator's voice with those of his heroes:

[...] du lebst in Frieden. Und du überlegst dir vielleicht nicht oder nicht oft genug, wem du es verdankst, daß kein Sand in die Lager deiner Maschine geschüttet wird, daß der Zug nicht entgleist, mit dem du zur Arbeit fährst [...]. [Die Grenzpolizisten] nehmen Opfer und Entbehrungen auf sich, sie führen ein hartes entsagungsvolles Leben, und sie führen es für dich [...]. Sie haben vieles nicht, was du hast. Aber sie denken an dich. Wenn einer mit seinen Stiefel, seinem Mantel, einem Buch aus der Bibliothek nicht sorgfältig umgeht, dann ist sein Kamerad sehr ungehalten. 'Du vergißt wohl', belehrt er ihn dann, 'wem du das verdankst? Du vergißt wohl, wer dir das gegeben hat?' Ja, du hast es ihm gegeben durch deine Arbeit. Und er schützt dich, damit du weiterarbeiten kannst, für dich, für ihn, für alle.<sup>592</sup>

The narrator appears to be addressing a working-class audience, despite the fact that the readership of *NDL* consisted mainly of writers and others working in the literary public spheres.<sup>593</sup> This intellectual readership is addressed here as if it were a working-class audience. Furthermore, given that the voices of the reporter and the border policemen are mingled, Loest identifies his argument with that of his heroes, which bestows their authority on his narrative.

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<sup>592</sup> Ibid., pp. 144-145.

<sup>593</sup> Barck, Langermann & Lokatis, '*Jedes Buch ein Abenteuer*', p. 363.

Loest's vision combines a number of narrative patterns which legitimise GDR socialism and appeal to his readers. The peaceful East is defended against the aggressive West through the heroic sacrifices of the border guards, who protect the working population. In an image of socialist society as an organic unity in which everyone contributes their share,<sup>594</sup> work is presented as fulfilment, but moreover as an obligation to and demand of the antifascist-proletarian fighters at the border. The comradeship of these heroes, as well as the mutual help of the guards and factory workers, symbolise the sense of community amongst the East German proletariat. With authority in the hands of the (essentially military) border guards, the narrative presents a vision of society which draws heavily on militaristic terminology and concepts. Finally, the narrator mentions the library book which is part of the guard's equipment just as much as his coat and boots, legitimising an East German socialism which reportedly holds literature in such high esteem that it becomes an essential characteristic of its masculine heroic fighters.

#### 4.2 Reactions to the uprising of June 1953

After 17 June 1953, Loest developed a critical stance which brought him into disagreement with the Party leadership, but simultaneously affirmed the Party's claim to command and its view of the uprising as an attempted putsch by Western fascists aiming to provoke a new World War. The two sides of his stance do not reflect a dichotomy of consensus and dissidence, instead his interpretation of the uprising caused some of the narrative patterns he

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<sup>594</sup> An image which is also presented in *Die Westmark fällt weiter*, pp. 461-462.

employed (in particular the authority of the working class) to collide with its affirmation of Party positions.

Loest's initial published reaction was fully compatible with official responses to the uprising. On 17 June, he was in Berlin to attend a meeting of the Writers' Union.<sup>595</sup> Four days later, *ND* published his eyewitness report 'Mit Provokateuren wird nicht diskutiert!' Loest's report indicates how his being embedded in official SED discourses governed his perception of the events:

In der Friedrichstraße wohnt ein bekannter Journalist. Er steckte die Rote Fahne aus dem Fenster. Er nahm sie auch nicht herein, als sich eine Menschenmenge vor seinem Haus sammelte, er nahm sie nicht herein, als geschrien und gepfiffen wurde. Da drang eine Handvoll junger Burschen in das Haus ein, stürmte die Wohnung, warf die Fahne herunter, unten ging sie in Flammen auf. Zehn Minuten später hing eine neue Fahne aus dem Fenster.

Waren es die Bauarbeiter von der Stalinallee, die in diese Wohnung einbrachen? Unten wurde geholt und gepfiffen. Pfiffen alle hundert, die unten standen? Es pfiff ein knappes Dutzend. Waren das... Zum Teufel nochmal, ich kann nicht so weiter schreiben, so ruhig und mit der immer wiederholten rhetorischen Frage, ob das die Bauarbeiter der Stalinallee waren. Zum Teufel, natürlich waren sie es nicht. Aber was haben die Hunderte und Tausende gemacht, die all dem zusahen? Und was hat die Partei in dieser Stunde gemacht? Die Genossen haben diskutiert. Sie haben geglaubt, man könne gegen Gewalt, Brand, Plünderung und Überfälle mit Argumenten auskommen. Wo ein Trupp von 20, 30 FDJ-Freunden auf die Straße ging, wich der Mob pfeifend beiseite. Wo die Genossen zu verstehen gaben

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<sup>595</sup> Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, pp. 206-207.

[...]‘wer hier eindringt, dem schlagen wir den Schädel ein’, dort blieben die Fensterscheiben ganz, dort wurde nicht geplündert, dort wurden die Möbel nicht zerschlagen. Viele Parteieinheiten haben eine Stunde lang versagt, versagt haben auch viele Angestellte und nicht wenig Arbeiter von Berlin, denn sie haben zugesehen, wie der Faschismus versuchte, die Straßen von Berlin in seine Gewalt zu bekommen. Dann rollten die Fahrzeuge der Sowjetarmee durch die Straßen, dann wurden die Sektorengrenzen abgeriegelt – erst dann wurde Ruhe.<sup>596</sup>

Loest makes a clear distinction between workers on strike and provocateurs, a distinction that would inform much of his critical stance in the following weeks. He blames all the use of violence on provocateurs, whereas he perceives the East German workers and Party activists as peaceful. As his reportage demonstrates, he could not consider the possibility of violent protest by the construction workers from the prestigious Stalinallee. His denial of this possibility needed no explanation: in his perception this was obvious, since the thought of workers attacking their own state did not fit into the ideological context in which his text stands. In the same manner, he presented the communists as non-violent. But he alleges that this non-violence of the workers and Party activists benefited the provocateurs. With his subsequent examples of FDJ and Party resistance against the mob, and the resolute action of the Soviets he advocates a militant defence of socialism and peace.

Loest’s description of the provocateurs is ambivalent: on the one hand he identifies them as organised agents; on the other he depicts them as an

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<sup>596</sup> Loest, ‘Mit Provokateuren wird nicht diskutiert!’, p. 4.



unruly mob. This ambivalence is rooted in his invocation of a particular image of the decadent West. Loest comments on the appearance of the provocateurs:

Heruntergekommene Jugendliche, Strolche, ‘Bubis’ mit chromblitzenden Rädern, Mädchen, denen man nicht im Dunkeln begegnen möchte – was in Westberlin an Abschaum aufzubieten war, hatte versucht, die Arbeiter des demokratischen Sektors vor den Kriegskarren ihrer Hintermänner zu spannen. Agentenminister Kaiser war in Westberlin eingetroffen und hatte seine zuverlässigen Truppen den Arbeitern auf den Hals gehetzt.<sup>597</sup>

The explanation for the paradox mentioned above can thus be found in a narrative similar to the one in *Die Westmark fällt weiter*, a narrative which relies on cultural images of Western moral degeneration. According to this narrative, the horde of degenerate youths – of petty criminal boys and sexually perverted, seductive girls – is actually the product of a scheme implemented by shady ‘Hintermänner’ to morally corrupt the German youth and deploy them for war purposes. Hence, the apparently uncontrollable mob is simultaneously a reliable militia threatening the rule of the working class in the GDR.

The suggestion in ‘Mit Provokateuren wird nicht diskutiert!’ that the workers on strike had not done enough to resist the supposed fascist provocateurs, is reminiscent of Kuba’s notorious allegations against the workers on strike, published one day previously in the same newspaper. But the conclusion Loest drew was completely different from Kuba’s. The secretary of the Writers’ Union argued that the striking workers, by not standing firm against the provocateurs, had lost the confidence of the Party:

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<sup>597</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

‘Da werdet ihr sehr viel und sehr gut mauern und künftig sehr klug handeln müssen, ehe euch diese Schmach vergessen wird.’<sup>598</sup> Kuba’s indictment prompted Brecht to write his famous parody ‘Die Lösung’.<sup>599</sup>

Neubert’s claim that Loest followed the same patronising stance as Kuba is invalid.<sup>600</sup> On the contrary, Loest drafted the critical resolution adopted by the Leipzig members of the Writers’ Union, which I quoted in the previous chapter on Herzfelde, and wrote the essay ‘Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne’.<sup>601</sup> Both publications demanded a radical change from the GDR leadership to regain the confidence of the working class who were right to go on strike.<sup>602</sup> This demand is the consequence of his admiration of the working class, which establishes masculine proletarians as an authoritative voice, as can be seen for instance in his stories and the reportage ‘Dienst an der Grenze’.

‘Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne’ brought Loest into conflict with Party officials, who accused him of defending a ‘kapitulantenhafte, ja sogar feindliche Linie’.<sup>603</sup> Loest recalls this conflict in his autobiography: after returning from a trip as representative of the Writers’ Union to Hungary, he reportedly found himself expelled from the Union by its Leipzig branch. The Leipzig SED leadership had denounced him as a fascist provocateur and urged his colleagues to oust him. Because Seghers, Gustav Just and Kuba, the Union’s secretary, supported him he was finally re-established as member, and got only a minor punishment (‘Rüge’) from the SED.<sup>604</sup>

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<sup>598</sup> Kuba, ‘Wie ich mich schäme’, *Neues Deutschland*, 20 June 1953, p. 3.

<sup>599</sup> Bertolt Brecht, ‘Die Lösung’, in *Buckower Elegien und andere Gedichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1964), p. 11.

<sup>600</sup> Neubert, ‘Der 17. Juni zwischen Verdammung und Verdrängung’, p. 135.

<sup>601</sup> See ‘DSV, Bezirksverband Leipzig: Resolution zum 17. Juni 1953’, pp. 303-304; Loest, *Prozesskosten*, pp. 113-115.

<sup>602</sup> Loest, ‘Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne’, pp. 548-549.

<sup>603</sup> Quoted in Gansel, *Parlament des Geistes*, p. 176.

<sup>604</sup> Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, pp. 237-249; *Prozesskosten*, p. 115.

The argument in ‘Elfenbein und rote Fahne’ draws on the distinction, also made in the *ND* reportage, between demonstrating workers and fascist provocateurs. But Loest departs from officially accepted discourse when he states that the latter would not have been able to exploit the justified demonstration, ‘wenn nicht von Regierung und Partei, wenn nicht von allen führenden und leitenden Organen in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik Fehler von zum Teil erstem Ausmaß begangen worden wären’.<sup>605</sup> He focuses on the failures of the press, which he accuses of giving attention only to ‘kritiklosen Ja-Sager’, while ignoring the more constructive and progressive critical opinions:

Es ist der am wertvollsten für unseren Staat, der sich Gedanken macht, der verbessern will, den Maßnahmen, die er für schädlich halt, mit Schmerz erfüllen. Aber die ehrliche Meinung dieses Mannes war kaum zu lesen. Kritik in der Presse war nicht gefragt.<sup>606</sup>

Note the male connotation of the constructive critical voice, which is consistent with the portrayal of authoritative masculine proletarian activists in Loest’s stories. Aside from the lack of space allowed for such criticisms, Loest deplores the failed integration of groups with different political views: ‘Sie rissen die Zurückgebliebenen nicht mit, sie drückten sie in die Ecke. Wer irgendwelche Maßnahmen nicht verstand, hatte ein schlechtes Bewußtsein und war Mensch zweiter Klasse.’ Moreover, he goes on to argue, insufficient information from the East German press created a situation in which the audience, let down by journalists, turned towards the Western media: ‘Die

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<sup>605</sup> Loest, ‘Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne’, p. 548

<sup>606</sup> Ibid.

Folge davon war, daß die Rias-Argumente munter im Volk wucherten.<sup>607</sup> The popular susceptibility to Western propaganda was in Loest's view ultimately a result of failures made by the Party and state leadership.

As Loest subsequently laments the 'Verschweigen von Mißständen',<sup>608</sup> there is a striking inconsistency with the *Aufbau* narrative of his 1951 story 'Und dazwischen die Grenze'. The jobless West German protagonist of the story reads a letter from his East German friend about the production norms: 'Wir haben hier Leistungslohn. [...] Es gibt da Normen, die technisch begründet sind, und es wird keiner übers Ohr gehauen.'<sup>609</sup> Two years later, Loest uses exactly the same expression to criticise the lack of information about workers who were opposed to 'Funktionäre [...], die sie in der Normenfrage übers Ohr hauen wollten'.<sup>610</sup> His criticism not only concerns the media, but also the economic policies of the SED – which adds to the tension caused by Loest's claim that the failures he discusses were primarily made by Party newspapers: 'Diese Redakteure [...] hatten sich kilometerweit von den Realitäten entfernt. Sie boten ein gleich lächerliches und beklagenswertes Bild: sie saßen im Elfenbeinturm und schwangen die rote Fahne.'<sup>611</sup>

The image of journalists flying a red flag in an ivory tower bears similarities to the opening image of the *ND* reportage, but has a strikingly different symbolic meaning. Both images show a red flag flying high above a restless crowd, and in both cases it is a journalist who raised the flag. But whereas the flag in 'Mit Provokateuren wird nicht diskutiert!' symbolises the resolute supremacy of socialism in the face of a Western attack, the red flag in

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<sup>607</sup> Ibid.

<sup>608</sup> Ibid.

<sup>609</sup> Loest, 'Und dazwischen die Grenze', pp. 238-239.

<sup>610</sup> Loest, 'Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne', p. 548.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid.

the later text is a symbol of the hypocrisy of the East German socialist press. And since the essay points out that failures were made across all of the state and Party apparatuses, his criticism concerns the GDR regime as a whole.

Loest's line of argument is not far from the official stance of the SED in the first days after the uprising: the Party leadership conceded that it was at fault if workers did not understand its policies.<sup>612</sup> On 3 July, just one day before publication of Loest's essay, Kulturbund President Becher argued for a truly new politics in the 'neue Kurs' – which was proclaimed shortly before the uprising by Ulbricht – and proposed to investigate how the 'Versagen' of the Kulturbund contributed to a situation in which the uprising could occur.<sup>613</sup> Loest upheld the official reading of the uprising as an attempted fascist provocation. But his insistence on failures made by the Party and the government as the main cause of the workers' susceptibility to provocations, and on the persistence of these failures, conflicted with this interpretation. The same can be said about his view that many protested 'für eine anständige Sache', and were now unfairly treated by *Neues Deutschland* and other Party newspapers. Loest concludes that these protesters rightly felt that they were 'mit den Faschisten in einen Topf geworfen', and that this approach did not help 'das verlorengegangene Vertrauen weiter Teile der Bevölkerung wiederzugewinnen'.<sup>614</sup> Assuming that the people's trust was to be regained by the Party press contradicts official discourse as pronounced in the Kuba

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<sup>612</sup> For example in *Neues Deutschland*, 23 June 1953, p. 1.

<sup>613</sup> 'Sitzung des Präsidialrates des Kulturbundes zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands am Freitag, den 3. Juli 1953, 10.30 Uhr: Stenografisches Protokoll', in *SED und Intellektuelle in der DDR der fünfziger Jahre: Kulturbundprotokolle*, ed. by Magdalena Heider & Kerstin Thöns (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1990), pp. 13-59 (p. 13).

<sup>614</sup> Loest, 'Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne', p. 549.

essay,<sup>615</sup> and Loest moreover criticises the Party flagship newspaper directly.

As Wolfgang Böhme pointed out in an article in which the editors of the *Börsenblatt* distanced themselves from Loest's essay, his statements were now to be interpreted as a dangerous underestimation of an attempted fascist coup.<sup>616</sup>

Loest had no intention of having a subversive effect on the established order. On the contrary, he wanted to consolidate it through an uninhibited discussion of the GDR leadership's responsibilities for the discontent of the working class:

Die Schuld von Partei und Regierung, unser aller Schuld wurde erheblich verkleinert – und dies liegt am allerwenigsten im Sinne der Regierung und der Partei! Und dann kamen sie wieder, die überschwenglichen Begeisterungserklärungen einzelner. Wie schön wäre es gewesen, eine Zeitung hätte das Bild eines Arbeiters etwa mit folgender Unterschrift gebracht: 'Ich habe demonstriert. Ich will mit Provokateuren nichts zu tun haben; aber ich kann auch nicht verschweigen, daß ich mit vielem, was Partei und Regierung bisher getan haben, nicht einverstanden gewesen bin. Ich bin skeptisch geworden wie viele meiner Kollegen. Regierung und Partei werden sich anstrengen müssen, wenn ich ihnen wieder vertrauen soll.' Diese Stellungnahme hätte der Meinung vieler Arbeiter entsprochen.<sup>617</sup>

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<sup>615</sup> Loest claims that Kuba's essay was altered without the author's consent by the editors of *Neues Deutschland*, but does not specify what changes were made: 'Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne', p. 549.

<sup>616</sup> Wolfgang Böhme, 'Für eine konsequente Haltung der Presse! Eine notwendige Klarstellung zum Artikel "Elfenbein und rote Fahne" im Bbl. Nr. 27', *Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel: Zeitschrift für die Verbreitung des fortschrittlichen Buches, für Literaturkritik und Bibliographie*, 1 August 1953, 626-627.

<sup>617</sup> Loest, 'Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne', p. 549.

The reference to Kuba is obvious. As this quotation indicates, the authority of the male proletarian – as Loest had constructed in his stories and novels as well as in the two 1953 reportages – remained intact in his positions after the uprising. Loest's criticism is the consequence of this continuity.

#### 4.3 *Das Jahr der Prüfung*

Loest wrote his novel about the ABF, *Das Jahr der Prüfung* over the course of the year 1953, which was marked by the row over 'Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne'. Referring to the context of Loest's critical stance in this essay, Brandt argues that the novel shows how Loest's 'DDR-Engagement von seiner grundsätzlichen Aufrichtigkeit in Schach gehalten wurde' and how 'er mit dem Zwang zur Lüge nicht zurecht kam'.<sup>618</sup> But, as my analysis of 'Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne' indicates, the situation of a writer like Loest was much more complicated than the term 'Zwang zur Lüge' or a simplistic opposition of GDR-commitment and sincerity suggest.

Loest's novel constructs a narrative of the ABF as an educational breakthrough in the class struggle, and was sincerely committed to celebrating its success. In consequence, it operates within schemes put in place by official discourses, in a way similar to Brecht's poem 'An die Studenten der Arbeiter- und Bauern-Fakultäten', published in the same year as Loest's novel (1954).<sup>619</sup> Both Brecht's poem and Loest's novel conceive of the ABF as an achievement of the class struggle, with its martyrs obliging students to be diligent and

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<sup>618</sup> Brandt, *Vom Schwarzmarkt nach St. Nikolai*, p. 37.

<sup>619</sup> 'Daß ihr hier sitzen könnt: so manche Schlacht | Wurd drum gewagt. Ihr mögt sie gern vergessen. | Nun wißt: hier haben andre schon gesessen | Die saßen über Menschen dann. Gebt acht! || Was immer ihr erforscht einst und erfindet | Euch wird nicht nützen, was ihr auch erkennt | So es euch nicht zu klugem Kampf verbindet | Und euch von allen Menschenfeinden trennt. || Vergeßt nicht: mancher euresgleichen stritt | Daß ihr hier sitzen könnt und nicht mehr sie. | Und vergrabt euch nicht und kämpft mit | Und lernt das Lernen und verlernt es nie!' Quoted in Kowalczyk, *Geist im Dienste der Macht*, p. 142.

contribute to socialism. The class struggle perspective becomes clear early on in the novel, when the group of students around which the story revolves, misbehaves. One of them, Harald Bechstätter, calls for order, asserting that proper working-class people should behave decently: ‘da haben wir nun seit hundert Jahren um so etwas gekämpft, und dann sitzt ihr Arbeiterkinder drin und schmeißt mit Papier! Schämen muß man sich, daß es so etwas gibt!’<sup>620</sup>

As the narrator relates the meaning of these words for the group, he presents a paternalistic working-class family narrative establishing their common class identity through the struggle of their male ancestors:

Wir, das war die Arbeiterklasse, das waren die Urgroßväter, die gegen Bismarcks Sozialistengesetz gekämpft haben, die Großväter, die 1916 auf dem Potsdamer Platz in Berlin ihrem Karl Liebknecht zugejubelt und 1918 die Standarte des Kaisers heruntergerissen hatten, das waren die Väter, die Hitler widerstanden, die in seinen Konzentrationslagern ausgehalten und 1945 diesen neuen Staat erbaut hatten. Das waren die Soldaten der Sowjetarmee, die die Freiheit nach Deutschland brachten.<sup>621</sup>

This passage presents a foundational narrative of the GDR as the accomplishment of the class struggle against Bismarck, the Kaiser and Hitler respectively, which it imagines as a fight carried on from father to son. In this paternalistic family narrative, symbolic male ancestors oblige the working-class youth to carry on their struggle by contributing to the success of the GDR. Similar narratives run through the novel, as the family background of the main characters are related.

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<sup>620</sup> Loest, *Das Jahr der Prüfung*, p. 32.

<sup>621</sup> Ibid., p. 34.



The students furthermore feel obliged to the Soviet soldiers, whose depiction as liberators contrasts with Loest's presentation of the Western occupiers, of which this novel contains some examples as well.<sup>622</sup> The novel thus repeats many of the affirmative narratives from the earlier stories. Such thematic continuities confirm the view that there is no clear-cut separation, no binary, between Loest's critical and conformist positions. Brandt's observation is right in the sense that Loest did not take Party directives at face value, but like 'Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne', *Das Jahr der Prüfung* contains both affirmative and critical positions. Both positions are products of a set of narratives and discourses that Loest brought forward, and can be found to a certain extent in each of his texts discussed here.

As recollected in his 1981 autobiography *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, Loest did observe conflicts and problems during his internship at the ABF, specifically the intolerant and dogmatic atmosphere reportedly created by ambitious students seeking to advance in FDJ or Party ranks. He recalls that the public shaming of a student who owned a bible compelled him to write about the danger that communist values could be used for bullying and career making.<sup>623</sup> The intolerance and ambition he recalls observing became central to the plot of his novel: by the end of the process of maturation they undergo individually and as a collective, the students are able to resist the mean, loudmouthed and overambitious classmate Pronberg who dominates the group and abuses his position as their FDJ leader. Unsurprisingly, Pronberg leaves for the West after his downfall. The narrator ironically speaks of 'der

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<sup>622</sup> One of the students is the refugee Herbert Kowalski from Düsseldorf, who was prosecuted at home for his political activities for peace and socialism. Loest, *Das Jahr der Prüfung*, p. 37.

<sup>623</sup> Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, pp. 183-184.

zukünftige politische Flüchtling Pronberg'.<sup>624</sup> The narrative expresses scepticism towards political refugees from the GDR similar to Schimmel's comments in 'Einladung von drüben'.

The plot of *Das Jahr der Prüfung* did turn the problem of intolerance and ambition it addressed in a favourable direction to the Party line. Even so, the mere fact that Loest's novel addressed the issue, and left open the possibility that it was widespread in East Germany, was problematic. This became apparent in early 1954, when Loest discussed a draft of his novel with ABF students, a group of critics selected by his publisher, and four members of the 'Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen' (ALV). The *Börsenblatt* disapproved of some students' criticisms: aside from a 'Hang zur Pikanterie' in the love scenes which did not reflect the decent behaviour of 'die Besten unserer Jugend', the students criticised the lack of enthusiasm of their fictional counterparts.<sup>625</sup> These examples purportedly showed that Loest was right in his criticism of a type of activist 'der es zwar ehrlich meint, der sich aber so viele Phrasen angewöhnt hat, daß er auf andere nicht mehr überzeugend wirken kann'.<sup>626</sup> There is a notable discrepancy between this moderate phrase and the novel's depiction of Pronberg as a ruthless career maker. The *Börsenblatt* only partly agrees with Loest's criticism, as becomes clearer in its agreement with the government bureaucrats of the ALV. Their official criticism was reportedly approved by the entire forum:

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<sup>624</sup> Loest, *Das Jahr der Prüfung*, p. 380.

<sup>625</sup> 'Auch das war eine verlegerische Leistung', *Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel: Zeitschrift für die Verbreitung des fortschrittlichen Buches, für Literaturkritik und Bibliographie*, 27 March 1954, 268-269 (pp. 268, 269).

<sup>626</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

Kollege Hoffmann betonte, daß seiner Meinung nach die Kritik an Superfunktionären, Phrasendreschern und tierischem Ernst durchaus berechtigt sei. Aber Loest hat die Proportionen verschoben. So wird aus seiner kritischen Darstellung nicht gleichzeitig der Glaube an die positiven Kräfte deutlich genug, die unserer Arbeiter-und-Bauern-Fakultät das Gepräge geben.<sup>627</sup>

The conduct of the representatives of the ALV must be regarded as an immediate display of the state's power over literature, since they compelled Loest to change his novel. To what extent he did so would need a precise comparison between his manuscripts and the published novel, which is impossible due to the fact that his manuscripts have not been made available yet, but it is clear that the derided plot was still very much present in the printed version of the novel. Combined with Loest's more vulnerable status after the trouble he went through in the wake of the 1953 uprising, the implicit criticism in his novel is a possible reason for its bleak reception, which contrasts with the success of *Die Westmark fällt weiter*.<sup>628</sup>

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<sup>627</sup> Ibid.

<sup>628</sup> Loest reports the disappointing reception of *Das Jahr der Prüfung* in his autobiography. Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, p. 185. For an example of the critical reception it received, see Annemarie Auer, 'Ein neuer Studentenroman: Erich Loest: "Das Jahr der Prüfungen" [sic], Mitteldeutscher Verlag, Halle 1954', *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 3.4 (1955), 129-136. Auer's criticism points in another direction to the objections reported in the *Leipzig Börsenblatt*. She argues that, apart from the author's insufficient mastering of language, Loest's novel suffers from the mistake of assuming that a novel about places of societal development, such as the ABF, based on intense research on the spot, would automatically be interesting. The latter mistake was allegedly made by a range of authors writing about the present. Auer's criticism of 'kalte rechnerische Überlegungen' and 'ausgeklügelte Konstruktionen' (p. 136) fits in with the criticism by authors like Seghers of such *Aufbauliteratur* as schematic.

## 5. War stories

After making his 1949 debut writing about his war experiences,<sup>629</sup> the former Wehrmacht soldier Loest returned to this subject area in 1956-1957 with the stories 'Mühlsteine',<sup>630</sup> *Der Schnee von Podgonowka*,<sup>631</sup> and the volume of stories *Aktion Bumerang*.<sup>632</sup> The absence of war stories in the early 1950s is in accordance with Party recommendations not to write about the fascist past and war experiences, but rather to focus on the future and contribute to the contemporary ideological struggle.<sup>633</sup> In this context, the 1950 debunking of *Jungen die übrigblieben* by the Soviet-licensed *Tägliche Rundschau* is significant. It was particularly the narrative mode of internal focalisation through the protagonist,<sup>634</sup> that sparked the criticism: it allegedly failed to achieve 'die notwendige moralische Distanzierung' from the protagonist's 'erbärmliche Haltung'.<sup>635</sup>

It is striking that Loest returned to his initial thematic interest at the same time as his involvement in oppositionist circles in 1956-1957, even if in these years there was a rise in publications of stories and novels about the experiences of the war by young writers in East Germany.<sup>636</sup> Is there a correlation between Loest's return to the theme of his war experiences and his critical attitude? Can the war stories be seen as a sign that the less conformist

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<sup>629</sup> Simultaneously with *Jungen die übrigblieben* he published a volume of short stories about the war. See Erich Loest, *Nacht über dem See* (Leipzig: Volk und Buch, 1950).

<sup>630</sup> Erich Loest, 'Mühlsteine', *Neue Deutsche Literatur*, 4.12 (1956), 65-82.

<sup>631</sup> Erich Loest, *Der Schnee von Podgonowka* (Berlin: Verlag des Ministeriums für nationale Verteidigung, 1957); also published in *Aktion Bumerang*.

<sup>632</sup> Loest, *Aktion Bumerang*.

<sup>633</sup> Karin Hirdina, 'Debatten um Politik und Kunst', in *Literatur in der DDR: Rückblicke*, ed. by Heinz Ludwig Arnold & Frauke Meyer-Gosau (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1991), pp. 85-92 (p. 86-87). See also Barck, 'Zum frühen Antifaschismus-Diskurs am Beispiel des VVN-Verlages', pp. 259-292.

<sup>634</sup> Gansel, 'Ihr habt keine Ahnung, Kinder', p. 23.

<sup>635</sup> Quoted in Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, p. 147.

<sup>636</sup> Other examples include Franz Fühmann's *Kameraden* (1955), Harry Thürk's *Die Stunde der toten Augen* (1957), or Karl Mundstock's *Bis zum letzten Mann* (1957).

side of Loest becomes more pronounced in his literary production as well? The following section will show that there is no unambiguous answer to these questions, because these texts bear significant continuities with the stories and novels dealing with contemporaneous issues, especially in the conception of positive heroes as characters undergoing a development in their political consciousness. Moreover, some of these stories support SED policies and discourses towards West Germany, emphasising the continuities between the FRG and the Nazi leadership. Considering the criticism of *Jungen die übrigblieben*, and Gansel's observation that the objections to this novel were similar to those raised against authors like Harry Thürk and Karl Mundstock in the second half of the 1950s,<sup>637</sup> it is interesting to observe a return to internal focalisation in some of these texts.

### 5.1 Conversions of Wehrmacht soldiers

Loest's war literature contains similar narratives of conversion to the ones discussed above. They gain specific importance in the light of the SED political project to integrate former soldiers into society. Frank Biess argues that from 1948 onwards, the Party promoted 'redemptive memories' that envisaged former Wehrmacht soldier as ideal citizens. Such 'narratives of antifascist conversion' were meant to illustrate the 'ideological malleability of human beings on which the SED counted in its attempt to win over ordinary Germans'.<sup>638</sup> Biess's observation helps explain the political context in which the 'narratives of conversion' in some of Loest's soldier stories function.

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<sup>637</sup> Gansel, 'Ihr habt keine Ahnung, Kinder', pp. 22-24.

<sup>638</sup> Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 126.

Emmerich notes that early GDR literature on Nazism and the War was mainly written from two ‘pädagogische’ perspectives: on the one hand it was intended to idealise communist resistance against the Nazi regime, on the other it depicted “‘Wandlungen’ einstiger Nazis und Mitläufer”.<sup>639</sup> *Jungen die übrigblieben* can be read as an example of the latter angle: the former soldier Uhlig finally decides to contribute to post-war reconstruction. But such a reading would ignore the richness of Loest’s detailed account of the doubts, fears and actions of the young soldiers, which make up the major part of the story, and which, its nonjudgmental narrative mode, lacks any ‘educational’ tendency. The novel does not fit Party directives on socialist realism, nor Emmerich’s description which relies too much on top-down models of the reception of such official guidelines by writers. However, the novel does conclude with Uhlig’s conversion, a narrative which supports the political project of integrating Wehrmacht soldiers.

A 1957 example of such a narrative is *Der Schnee von Podgonowka*, the story about the inner struggle of a German soldier named Kuschat on the Eastern Front during the winter of 1941-1942. As he has to lead a group of teenage boys to the front, he starts to see the brutal face of fascism and unravels Nazi propaganda’s claim that the Russians take no prisoners. As they are under attack, he disobeys his orders to fight, instead heroically protecting the youngest boy. In the end he saves both the boy’s life and his own by surrendering to the Red Army, defying the imperative that a German soldier should fight to death rather than capitulate. The final scene shows the POW Kuschat thinking back to these days and understanding ‘daß es vor allem ein

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<sup>639</sup> Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, p. 131.

Kampf mit sich selbst gewesen war'.<sup>640</sup> The final sentence indicates that Kuschat has become conscious of his former political indoctrination. Interestingly, most of the story is characterised by a narrative mode of internal focalisation. But it can hardly be regarded as part of the counter-memory that Gansel identifies for *Jungen die übrigblieben* and authors like Mundstock and Thürk: not only was the story published in the 'Erzählerreihe' of the Ministry of Defence of the GDR, its narrative of conversion also supported the programme of integrating former soldiers and returning POWs into GDR society.

In this respect there is a clear thematic continuity to the stories with a contemporaneous setting, two of which contain narrative patterns that can be related to this programme. The protagonists of the stories 'Und dazwischen die Grenze' (1951) and 'Der Anruf kommt noch zur Zeit' (1953) are former soldiers who experience a process of conversion to a political consciousness along Party lines.<sup>641</sup> As one story is set in West Germany and the other in the East, these ex-soldiers draw distinct consequences from their disgust at the remilitarisation they experience in their respective societies: the hero of 'Und dazwischen die Grenze' finally decides to move to the GDR, the one in 'Der Anruf kommt noch zur Zeit' overcomes his trauma and takes part in the armed defence of socialism by joining a paramilitary FDJ group.

The main character of 'Und dazwischen die Grenze', Heinke, suffers from continuous unemployment, but initially is unable to analyse the reasons for his misery.<sup>642</sup> Under the guidance of his East German friend Brenzat, he gradually becomes aware that unemployment is an inevitable consequence of

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<sup>640</sup> Loest, *Der Schnee von Podgonowka*, p. 38.

<sup>641</sup> Erich Loest, 'Der Anruf kommt noch zur Zeit', in *Sportgeschichten*, pp. 194-214.

<sup>642</sup> Loest, 'Und dazwischen die Grenze', p. 249.

capitalism.<sup>643</sup> The revelation of the true purpose of the construction site he works at (it turns out to be a British ammunitions depot) is another stage in Heinke's maturing political consciousness.<sup>644</sup> Heinke becomes aware of the fateful choice he has to make: working for the militaristic, imperialist class enemy, or a return to unemployment. The former option would bring him good money, but also certain death in the war planned by the imperialists; the latter would result in renewed poverty.<sup>645</sup> It is a sign of his emergent class consciousness that Heinke chooses to quit. When he, jobless and miserable again, watches the British troops exercise, he realises that he made the right choice: 'Hier wird das wieder geübt, denkt Heinke. Genau das gleiche.'<sup>646</sup> In the long run, his choice not to cooperate in the war effort by building the ammunition depot means a choice for the East and against the West. He finally understands that flawed Western political and economic relations are the cause of his poverty, and decides in favour of the East.

In 'Der Anruf kommt noch zur Zeit', the ex-soldier Heinz Dittrich refuses to give firearms training to fellow FDJ members at the collectivised factory where he works. His reasoning is undercut by the narrator's remark that 'ein Stich mit der Nadel der Logik [...] das ganze Gebilde zum Platzen verurteilt' – the kind of comment that the reviewer of the *TR* found lacking in *Jungen die übrigblieben*. It negates Dittrich's invocation of a narrative of trauma: 'Und so begeistert sind sie dabei. Weil sie keine Ahnung haben. Uns kann keiner mehr begeistern, bei dem, was wir durchgemacht haben.'<sup>647</sup> In a similar way to 'Und dazwischen die Grenze', Loest has a former soldier

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<sup>643</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>644</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

<sup>645</sup> Ibid., pp. 261-262.

<sup>646</sup> Ibid., pp. 270-271.

<sup>647</sup> Loest, 'Der Anruf', p. 200.



criticising militarisation, but as this story is set in the GDR, the narrative voice and the following plot reject such pacifism in the face of the alleged Western military threat. Dittrich unravels his own pacifist argument: ‘wer weiß, ob beim nächsten Krieg von diesem Haus noch ein Stein auf dem anderen bliebe’.<sup>648</sup> And as he and a friend order a ‘Bockwurst’ in the pub, Dittrich thinks of how his FDJ leader Siegfried Steller tried to convince him of the necessity of armed defence, and takes over his argument:

Steller sprach heute morgen, so erinnert sich Heinz plötzlich, auch von Bockwürsten. ‘Wir essen doch’, sagte er, ‘schon wieder so viel Fleisch wie vor dem Krieg [...]. Überleg dir doch mal, wie oft jemand eine Bockwurst ißt! So nebenbei, so zwischen den Mahlzeiten – und wir essen mehr Fleisch, als in Westdeutschland gegessen wird. Das sind doch Erfolge!’  
Natürlich sind das Erfolge, denkt Heinz. [...] ‘Wenn man sich überlegt [...] so zwei Bockwürste nebenbei, ist doch allerhand!’  
‘Wieso?’  
‘Ich meine, immer wieder ist dir das doch nicht möglich gewesen. Vor dem Krieg, ich weiß nicht, ob sich dein Vater das leisten konnte.’<sup>649</sup>

The narrative measures working-class prosperity through meat consumption: providing the East German worker with more sausages than before the war, and more than in West Germany, symbolises the progress made by the GDR. In the context of postwar shortages, the importance attached to meat consumption is evident from 1950 GDR policies to considerably raise the

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<sup>648</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

<sup>649</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

rations of meat and fat, which it could not sustain from its own production.<sup>650</sup>

The quoted passage combines an *Aufbau* narrative with one highlighting working-class poverty in capitalism.<sup>651</sup>

The final scene develops a specific aspect of the *Aufbau* narrative: raising awareness that, with the establishment of the ‘Volkseigene Betriebe’ (VEB), the means of production now belonged to the people – and that contributing to the VEB would be for the worker’s own benefit.<sup>652</sup> In this narrative, Dittrich finally achieves a full awareness of the political situation and of the need to defend the GDR against the aggression of Western imperialism after he looks at a picture of himself and two colleagues:

Dieses Bild wurde aufgenommen, als sie einen Kessel vierzehn Tage eher fertigstellten als vorgesehen war [...]. Ich habe eine schöne Arbeit, denkt Heinz. Ich habe prächtige Kollegen, und ich arbeite in einem Volkseigenen Betrieb.<sup>653</sup>

As the narrative emphasises Dittrich’s performance at work, the protagonist obtains heroic status as a model worker, a ‘Held der Arbeit’, of the same sort as the glorified Hans Garbe enjoyed. This heroic quality lends authority to his

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<sup>650</sup> Peter Hübner, *Konsens Konflikt und Kompromiss: Soziale Arbeitsinteressen und Sozialpolitik in der SBZ/DDR, 1945-1970* (Berlin: Akademie, 1995), pp. 146-147.

<sup>651</sup> The story employs a similar narrative of greater consumption opportunities for the working class in the final scene. This narrative helps convince the protagonist Dittrich to reconsider his refusal to give the shooting training. The narrative is pronounced through Dittrich’s wife who expresses her delight at the carpet that he has bought for her, and also brings in a maternal family perspective: ‘in unserer Familie ist es durchaus nicht selbstverständlich, daß man einen Teppich besitzt. Meine Großeltern hatten keinen. Meiner Mutter sehnlichster Wunsch war es durch Jahre hindurch, sich einen Teppich zu kaufen. Meine Eltern haben jahrelang gespart, und die Freude war riesengroß, als sie sich endlich einen anschaffen konnten. Das war 1938. Drei Jahre später ist er dann mit dem Haus zusammen verbrannt.’ Loest, ‘Der Anruf’, pp. 209-210.

<sup>652</sup> Eva Kaufmann, ‘Aufbau-Literatur’, in *Metzler Lexikon DDR-Literatur: Autoren – Institutionen – Debatten*, ed. by Michael Opitz & Michael Hoffmann (Stuttgart: Metzler 2009), pp. 11-13 (p. 12).

<sup>653</sup> Loest, ‘Der Anruf’, p. 210.

resolution to serve the paramilitary defence of socialism. The phone call to tell his FDJ leader that he agrees to give the firearms training completes his transformation from a traumatised ex-soldier whose judgements are blurred by the past to an exemplary socialist citizen willing to take on the political challenges ahead.

Loest's story cannot be seen in isolation from the political context of East German rearmament. Loest completed it in October 1952,<sup>654</sup> shortly after the Soviet Union had decided on the creation of an East German army in April 1952 and the subsequent decision of the Second Party Congress to install the first workers' combat groups ('Betriebskampfgruppen') in July 1952.<sup>655</sup> As 'Und dazwischen die Grenze' was published a year prior to this decision, its hero's lament of rearmament can go without the clarifying comment which is subsequently given in 'Der Anruf kommt noch zur Zeit'. This is an example of how Loest's literary production related directly to actual GDR policies.

Unlike the stories discussed above, the story 'Mühlsteine', about bands of SS men roaming the mountains of Slovakia in the immediate post-war years, does not portray a conversion or change in political consciousness. Its protagonist cannot be seen as a positive hero: as one of these bands threaten to loot his village, Bazálik, a Slovak who fought for the German army in the war and was honoured with an Iron Cross, is confronted with the choice between persisting with his fascist sympathies and the duty of defending his village. He opts for the invaders and against his fellow villagers, who are governed by an exemplary communist mayor who is committed to rebuild the village and make sure there is enough food for its citizens. The narrative depicts the anti-

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<sup>654</sup> This date is printed after the end of the story. Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>655</sup> Oliver C. Prinz, *Der Einfluss von Heeresverfassung und Soldatenbild auf die Entwicklung des Militärstrafrechts* (Osnabrück: V&R Unipress, 2005), p. 259.

hero Bazálik as an outsider, a characteristic symbolised by the fact that he lives with his old mother in the remotest house of the village; he does not interact with the other villagers, nor does he contribute to the positive communist atmosphere that has taken hold of the village. Instead he detests the village leadership who has punished him for his collaboration with the Nazis. The SS band does not let him join their ranks; instead they capture his sheep and beat him to death, along with most other men from his village.<sup>656</sup> The failed integration of Bazálik into the developing communist community, his unwillingness to convert to a socialist consciousness, means he can easily relapse into his old sympathies. This message allows the story implicitly to sustain the programme of actively reintegrating former Nazi sympathisers into the community.

## 5.2 Intervening in West German debates on the Wehrmacht

A narrative of conversion cannot be detected in the war story 'Hitlers Befehl' (1957), nor does the story idealise communist resistance against the Nazis. It therefore does not fit Emmerich's description of the aims of early GDR war literature. Instead, the story contains an interesting perspective on efforts to make a distinction between die-hard Nazis and mere members of the Wehrmacht. The narrative has to be interpreted as a critical comment on a West German discourse which points at Wehrmacht resistance against Hitler, especially the failed plot of 20 July 1944, to legitimise the continuity between the personnel of the Wehrmacht and the Bundeswehr.

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<sup>656</sup> Loest, 'Mühlsteine', p. 66.

Loest narrates the story of Frantisek Homola, a Czech who fled his homeland in 1938 and is now a paratrooper in the British army on a mission behind German lines. He knows of a supposed order from Adolf Hitler to kill all such enemy troops, but his army comrades are unaware of this. This makes the British appear naive in the face of Nazi cruelty, as is also illustrated by a short conversation between one of them and Homola: ‘ehe die Deutschen ihr eigenes Land kaputtmachen lassen, hören sie auf.’ | “Ich glaub’, du kennst die Nazis schlecht.”<sup>657</sup> The combination of an antifascist Czech refugee, British naivety and cunning Nazism cannot be seen in isolation from the British appeasement policy of the 1930s. Whereas the narrative cannot create a link between fascism and British troops still in alliance with the Soviet Union, it does construct a questionable image of the alleged British failure to stand firm against the Nazis.

In terms of their willingness to carry out Hitler’s order, the story makes a distinction between high ranking Nazis and Wehrmacht officers. The major Röder feels unease with the order to shoot the captured British paratroopers:

Ich bin ein deutscher Offizier, sagte er sich, ich bin kein Mörder. Ich werde diesen Befehl nicht befolgen. [...] Er dachte an seine Frau und an seine Kinder, an die Offiziere, die den 20. Juli nicht überlebt hatten.<sup>658</sup>

The narrator does not comment on Röder’s commemoration of the 20 July plot against Hitler, which is potentially problematic in view of GDR foundational narratives claiming antifascist resistance to be primarily a communist affair. In

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<sup>657</sup> Erich Loest, ‘Hitlers Befehl’, in *Aktion Bumerang*, pp. 7-69 (p. 53).

<sup>658</sup> Ibid., pp. 58-59.

*Zur Geschichte der neuesten Zeit* (1955), Ulbricht had dismissed the plot as an attempt to preserve the class relations which caused fascism.<sup>659</sup> But the following narrative reduces the difference between Nazis and Wehrmacht officers to a minor nuance, presenting the Wehrmacht officers as hypocritical and obedient.

The military honour Röder pretends to adhere to turns out to be a farce: what makes him hesitant to carry out Hitler's order is essentially the possibility of prosecution for war crimes rather than a sense of moral obligation. As he eventually concludes that he cannot be held accountable for the order, he passes it on to his subordinate. Loest thus portrays this representative of the Wehrmacht establishment as too hypocritical or cowardly to uphold his self-proclaimed military values.

The narrative of Röder's hypocrisy comments on predominantly West German efforts to establish an image of the Wehrmacht as an institution in which honour and dignity could persist, in which the July Plot was cited as a significant example of the courage and resistance of (parts of) the military establishment. In the wake of the 1952 defamation trial against the former Wehrmacht officer Otto Ernst Remer, who played a central role in suppressing the plot and who now denigrated the plotters as traitors, the FRG political leadership embraced the plot as evidence of an honourable national consciousness, as interior minister Gerhard Schröder proposed during a commemoration in 1954.<sup>660</sup> In the context of West German rearmament and

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<sup>659</sup> See Douglas Peifer, 'Commemoration of Mutiny, Rebellion, and Resistance in Postwar Germany: Public Memory, History, and the Formation of "Memory Beacons"', *The Journal of Military History*, 65 (2001), 1013-1052 (p. 1030).

<sup>660</sup> Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland: Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur in Politik und Justiz*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Munich: Beck, 2007), p. 98; see also Torben Fischer & Matthias N. Lorenz (eds), *Lexikon der Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland:*

NATO membership in 1955, shortly before this story was written, the effort to rehabilitate the Wehrmacht gained momentum and was backed by ‘American and British officials, engaged in the effort to tap German manpower in their attempts to strengthen NATO’.<sup>661</sup> The Western polishing of the Wehrmacht’s reputation served to justify the staff continuity between Wehrmacht and Bundeswehr officers which Hacks also lamented in a satirical poem, which will be discussed in the next chapter.<sup>662</sup> Loest’s narrative forms part of the same discursive strand as Hacks’s poem. It dismisses a positive evaluation of Wehrmacht officers, as it alleges their moral hypocrisy and obedience under Nazism.

The story ‘Linsengericht’ from the same volume, which is set in a military training camp for adolescents, can be interpreted as a similar attempt to blur the distinction between Nazis and Wehrmacht officers.<sup>663</sup> The instructors are reluctant to comply with an order to supply ‘volunteers’ for the SS, but still carry it out relentlessly, forcing dozens of youngsters to join the dangerous elite corps even though they are aware of its high mortality rates. To these traditional German officers, the order is something sacred which one has to obey – irrespective of one’s moral objections. The hero of the story is a working-class boy who outwits the officers and endures the suffering they

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*Debatten- und Diskursgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus nach 1945* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2007), p. 64.

<sup>661</sup> Peifer, ‘Commemoration of Mutiny’, p. 1036; Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland*, p. 100.

<sup>662</sup> Peter Hacks, ‘Die alten Mörder’, *Neues Deutschland: Beilage Kunst und Literatur*, 4/5 May 1957, p. 1.

<sup>663</sup> In the 1960s, Loest reworked this story into the novel *Der Abhang* (1968). In his analysis of the novel Pawel Zymniak seems to be unaware of its earlier version as a short story. See Pawel Zymniak, ‘Zeit zu sterben: Ideologische Indoktrinierung und Generationengedächtnis in Erich Loests *Der Abhang*’, in *Geschichte, die noch qualmt: Erich Loest und sein Werk*, ed. by Carsten Gansel & Joachim Jacob (Göttingen: Steidl, 2011), pp. 73-83.

inflict on him in order to make him 'volunteer'.<sup>664</sup> Both the stories 'Hitlers Befehl' and 'Linsengericht' can thus be understood as part of an intervention across the inner-German border into very topical discussions about the Nazi past. They debunk a conservative view that Wehrmacht officers were not responsible for Nazi crimes, and hence are part of GDR discourses emphasising the continuity between West Germany and fascism.<sup>665</sup> More specifically, they support campaigns against West German rearmament.

With these war stories, Loest contributed to official discourses on West Germany, which focused on its failure to break with Nazism. Whereas Loest's literary output from 1956-57 entails a partial move away from the socialist realist practice of his works from the first half of the decade, it simultaneously supports official policies towards the FRG. As in the earlier texts, these war stories contain both affirmative and dissenting positions. His self-positioning in the crisis following the revelations at the Twentieth Party Congress of the Soviet Union also contains a simultaneity of both positions.

## 6. Political opposition

Loest was among the intellectuals who discussed the necessity of reforming GDR socialism after the revelations Khrushchev made at the Twentieth Party Congress, and in response to the political developments in Poland and Hungary. On 31 October 1956, Loest opened his flat for a discussion evening with a Polish journalist about the developments in Warsaw. During this evening, a discussion unfolded on dogmatism and the 'Personenkult' in East Germany. The participants reportedly agreed that Ulbricht should step down to

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<sup>664</sup> Erich Loest, 'Linsengericht', in *Aktion Bumerang*, pp. 71-129.

<sup>665</sup> Danyel, 'Wer sind wir wieder?', p. 245.



make reforms possible, but that they would stand firmly on his side in case of a counterrevolution by Western powers.<sup>666</sup> Although opposed to the SED leadership, they did not challenge the leading role of the Party itself. The West was still perceived as the enemy, which is consistent with its portrayal in Loest's stories throughout the 1950s.

Shortly afterwards, Loest published an attack on the Leipzig Party leadership and its leader Siegfried Wagner. In the weekly *Sonntag*, he defended his friend Zwerenz who was in conflict with the Party because of his critical essay 'Leipziger Allerlei' in the same paper. Loest criticised the Party's prejudiced handling of intellectuals:

Erfrischend ist es für einen Publizisten, kann er sich unbeschwert an die Maschine setzen und das niedertippen, was er denkt und fühlt.

Beklemmend wirkt es aber auf ihn, wenn er bei jedem Satz argwöhnen muß, man könnte an ihm herumdeuteln [...], um etwas anderes oder gar das Gegenteil des Gesagten herauszulesen. Und wenn ein Leipziger heute etwas zur Ergänzung des Zwerenz-Artikels schreibt, ist er nicht frei von Bedenken, Siegfried Wagner [...] oder andere könnten es unter ein schief gestelltes Mikroskop legen und zu einem Ergebnis kommen, das ihrer eingestandenen Voreingenommenheit [...] in den Kram paßt.<sup>667</sup>

In writing this, Loest is accusing one of the most powerful people in Leipzig of intentionally misrepresenting Zwerenz's words. He additionally questions SED cultural doctrines, presenting the 'Klub junger Künstler' as an attempt to overcome cultural stagnation. Moreover, he signals

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<sup>666</sup> Loest, *Prozesskosten*, pp. 62-64; *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, pp. 288-290.

<sup>667</sup> Erich Loest, 'Junge Künstler und der Weg zur Atmosphäre', republished in *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, pp. 291-293 (pp. 291-292).

deficiencies in GDR culture caused ‘in der Ära des Dogmatismus und des Schlagworts vom falsch ausgelegten “Objektivismus”’. These deficiencies, he argues, should be overcome through a discussion of the works of Kafka and Proust as well as Soviet writers who had fallen victim to the ‘Verletzung der Gesetzlichkeit’, but were rehabilitated in the months since the Secret Speech. They could tell us more about the ‘Sowjetunion und über das Wesen der sozialistischen Literatur’ than the canonised Soviet writers, Loest exclaimed.<sup>668</sup> Through this line of argument, invoking the Soviet political development of de-Stalinisation, Loest makes his attack on GDR cultural policies possible. He underlines his criticism by expressing his concern that his project of a ‘Klub junger Künstler’ would be damaged by the ‘[k]alte Regengüsse’ of cultural policy.<sup>669</sup> Thus, he asserted that East German culture stagnated due to the harsh official cultural policies for which he specifically blamed Wagner. Even if Loest did not question socialism, but rather the prejudices of the Leipzig leadership and its stagnating effects on culture, this criticism brought Loest into Wagner’s line of fire, resulting in his arrest in the summer of 1957.

Loest was criticised at a Leipzig Party gathering in January 1957 because of this essay.<sup>670</sup> Reporting on this meeting, the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* asserted that ‘Genossen Zwerenz und Loest’ had brought opinions into the party, ‘die im wesentlichen mit denen der Konterrevolution [...] übereinstimmen’.<sup>671</sup> Even though he supported SED rule, only questioned certain policies, and even restricted his criticism of Ulbricht to the semi-public

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<sup>668</sup> Ibid., p. 292.

<sup>669</sup> Ibid., p. 293.

<sup>670</sup> Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, pp. 303-305.

<sup>671</sup> Quoted in Ibid., p. 306.

sphere, Loest was branded a renegade. His subsequent refusal to distance himself from the *Sonntag* article and dismiss Zwerenz were important reasons for his being sentenced to seven years' imprisonment.

## 7. Conclusion

No clear distinction can be made between Loest's socialist realist works of literature and the oppositional positions he took in 1953 and 1956-1957. Rather, the dissident Loest cannot be seen in isolation from his compliant texts, and both positions contain elements of the other.

Loest's literature of the 1950s is realist and socialist, but his use of montage and factography in *Die Westmark fällt weiter* means a development away from official notions of socialist realism, which hence appear to have been open for negotiation. His stories and novels convey many narratives which legitimise SED rule and affirm certain policies.

The division of Germany is a major theme in Loest's prose throughout this period. In a Cold War context, he writes about division from a decidedly Eastern perspective. Both Loest's contemporary and war narratives also contain critical interventions in topical West German debates. His treatment of the SPD, dismissing the leadership, while reaching out to the rank-and-file, is informed by SED policies to reach out to allies in the West in order to maintain the unity of the working class. The war stories comment critically on FRG rearmament, as well as the FRG's failure to break with the Nazi past, in the way in which Loest depicts the Wehrmacht officers.

Some contemporary narratives draw closely on topical events which were significant in the political discourses in which Loest's texts participated.

He exploits these events to embed his fictional narrative in reality. This strategy is his way of meeting the demands of socialist realism, but also collides with parts of dominant Lukácsian notions of realism. In the light of doctrinaire socialist realism, and the reprimand Loest received for *Jungen die übrigblieben*, it is also notable that the narrative mode of his stories changes from internal focalisation to an omniscient narrator who comments on the (wrong) attitudes of his characters. The narratives of conversion can also be seen as part of Loest's attempt to arrive at a distinctive form of socialist realism with his novels. In these narratives, the paternalistic guiding figures of experienced male proletarian activists are important: authority lies with them, rather than the abstract Party which is never the main focus of Loest's narratives. The positive heroes who undergo the narrated conversions are almost exclusively male as well; the function of Loest's female characters is limited to reflecting aspects of the masculine heroism of the heroes, or affirming the changes they undergo. *Das Jahr der Prüfung* contains an exception: the character of the ABF student Inge Teubner (who makes the argument for minor characters as positive heroes) undergoes a transformation to a proletarian class consciousness. Still the male characters dominate this novel as well.

The stories and novels generally conceive of the male proletariat as a source of authority and power. The shifting meaning of this aspect would spark his 1953 criticism: he maintained this view of the authority of the working class in 'Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne', leading to the assertion that the discontent of the working class meant that the Party and the government had failed and should win back the confidence of the proletariat. This is the source

of his 1953 criticism, which challenges the infallibility of the Party, but clearly aims at consolidating socialism and SED rule. The same can be said about the conflict in *Das Jahr der Prüfung*, with which Loest criticised career makers abusing socialism to put themselves forward.

With these texts, Loest positioned himself on the reformist side of Party discourses. Hence his support for reforms and his criticism of Stalinist practices of the Party leadership in 1956-1957. At the same time he wrote war stories which are critical of the West and affirmative of socialism. As these stories can be regarded as a move away from his earlier agreement with Party doctrine, they are also embedded in Cold War discourses and impinge on West German political debates. This again indicates the complexity of his stances, but also their coherence: Loest consistently supported a form of socialism which had to be less dogmatic, and in which the working class authority took precedence over the avant-garde Party.

## 4. Peter Hacks

### Political aesthetics

#### 1. Introduction

The playwright Peter Hacks (1928-2003) moved from Bavaria to East Berlin in 1955.<sup>672</sup> A firm supporter of SED rule, Hacks proposed an alternative to SED concepts of socialist realism during debates in the second half of the 1950s. As will be explained in section 3 of this chapter, he argued that the ideal society for which he had moved to the East was not established yet, and his aesthetics would accordingly revolve around the principle that theatre should show the contradictions society necessarily goes through in its development towards socialism. His concept of ‘*dialektischer Realismus*’<sup>673</sup> owed much to Brecht and proletarian-revolutionary theatre of the 1920s.<sup>674</sup> His political affirmation of GDR socialism was partly undercut by his aesthetic disagreement, as the following sections will show.

Before his move to East Berlin, Hacks worked in Munich where he gained a doctorate with a thesis on Biedermeier theatre. Remarkably, as an outspokenly Marxist playwright, he received early acclaim in 1954 when he was awarded the ‘*Dramatikerpreis der Stadt München*’ for his second play

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<sup>672</sup> As Dennis Püllmann notes, not much is known about Hacks’ past before 1945, beyond Hacks’ own repeated assertion that his family was ‘antifaschistisch’, and that his father was a member of the SAP. It has been established that his father was indeed barred from exercising his job as a lawyer in 1933. See Püllmann, *Von Brecht zu Braun*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>673</sup> Peter Hacks, ‘Das Theater der Gegenwart’, *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 5.4 (1957), 127-129 (p. 128).

<sup>674</sup> In the years 1951-1955, Brecht wrote a number of texts on ‘Die Dialektik auf dem Theater’. See Roland Johst, ‘Die Dialektik auf dem Theater’, in *Brecht Handbuch, 4: Schriften, Journale, Briefe*, ed. by Jan Knopf (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003), pp. 362-366.

‘Eröffnung des indischen Zeitalters’,<sup>675</sup> which was staged at the Münchner Kammerspiele in March of that same year.<sup>676</sup> After moving to East Berlin, he was lauded in January 1956 with the ‘Lessing-Preis’, a state prize for works of drama or criticism ‘die für die weitere Entwicklung der deutschen Kunst bedeutungsvoll sind’, for his plays ‘Eröffnung des indischen Zeitalters’ (1954) and ‘Die Schlacht bei Lobositz’ (1955).<sup>677</sup> He worked together with Brecht at the Berliner Ensemble, and plays written by Hacks were staged at the prominent Deutsches Theater (DT), where important dramatists with a modernist profile worked. Wolfgang Langhoff directed ‘Die Schlacht bei Lobositz’ in 1957 and ‘Die Sorgen und die Macht’ in 1959. DT’s chief dramaturgist, the playwright Heinar Kipphardt, became a close friend of Hacks who shared many of his aesthetic viewpoints. Moreover, before June 1955, Hacks published in prestigious East German journals, such as *Neue deutsche Literatur* (NDL), *Theater der Zeit* (TdZ), and *Sinn und Form* (SuF).<sup>678</sup> As a member of the ‘Redaktionskollegium’ of TdZ, he had close contact with its editor Fritz Erpenbeck, the prominent theatre critic and his adversary in aesthetic debates on socialist theatre.<sup>679</sup> Hacks also corresponded with Wieland

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<sup>675</sup> Heidi Urbahn de Jauregui, ‘Idee und Welt: Zu “Columbus, oder: Die Weltidee zu Schiffe”’, in *Zwischen den Stühlen: Der Dichter Peter Hacks* (Berlin: Eulenspiegel, 2006), pp. 38-52 (p. 40). In 1970, Hacks revised this play and gave it the title referred to by Urbahn de Jauregui.

<sup>676</sup> Ronald Weber, *Peter-Hacks-Bibliographie: Verzeichnis aller Schriften von und zu Peter Hacks 1948 bis 2007* (Mainz: André Thiele, 2008), p. 262.

<sup>677</sup> Lothar Fröhlich (ed.), *Literaturpreise der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik: Sonderdruck aus dem ‘Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel’ Heft 44 (30.10.1962) bis Heft 47 (20.11.1962): Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel: Zeitschrift für die Verbreitung des fortschrittlichen Buches, für Literaturkritik und Bibliographie, Beiheft 3 (Oktober 1962)* (Leipzig: Börsenblatt, 1962), pp. 24-25.

<sup>678</sup> For instance in February 1955, NDL printed a part of Hacks’ play ‘Eröffnung des indischen Zeitalters’. Peter Hacks, ‘Eröffnung des indischen Zeitalters: Ein Schauspiel um Christoph Columbus’, *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 3.2 (1955), 16-48. And in April 1955, two acts of ‘Die Schlacht bei Lobositz’ were published in SuF: Peter Hacks, ‘Die Schlacht bei Lobositz: Erster und zweiter Akt der Komödie’, *Sinn und Form: Beiträge zur Literatur*, 7.4 (1955), 502-543.

<sup>679</sup> Hacks joined the ‘Redaktionskollegium’ of TdZ in October 1955, shortly after arriving in the GDR, as a letter to Erpenbeck shows: DLA, A: Hacks, Korrespondenz, ‘Briefe von ihm an

Herzfelde at *NDL* and the editor of *SuF*, Peter Huchel.<sup>680</sup> His status meant that Hacks had considerable influence in the East German literary public spheres. He made use of this influence to propose an alternative to officially endorsed theatrical methods.

### 1.1 Research questions

To examine Hacks's self-positioning in relation to discourses dominant in the East German public spheres during the 1950s, the main focus of the chapter consists of the period after Hacks's move from Bavaria to East Berlin in June 1955, but also examines his increasing Eastern orientation during the years preceding his move. In order to understand his positioning vis à vis dominant (socialist realist) aesthetic discourses, I will investigate how he related to dominant notions such as the idea that art should encourage and depict the changes in present-day society. I will examine his relationship to critical notions like *Schematismus*, and how he referred to disqualifying and exclusionary terms such as formalism and 'decadence', which Party functionaries continued to use against intellectual opposition in 1956-1957.<sup>681</sup> Finally, I will analyse his positioning with regard to official concepts of the cultural heritage (*Erbepolitik*), which is fundamental to understanding his complex relationship with official aesthetics.

With his essays, Hacks contributed to ongoing, highly politicised debates about GDR theatre during the late 1950s.<sup>682</sup> Section 4 will demonstrate

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Theater der Zeit 1955-1980', 'Peter Hacks an Fritz Erpenbeck, Redaktion Theater der Zeit', 14 October 1955.

<sup>680</sup> DLA, A: Huchel, 06.9: 'Peter Hacks an Peter Huchel', 23 May 1955.

<sup>681</sup> Schiller, *Der verweigerter Dialog*, p. 123.

<sup>682</sup> Petra Stuber, *Spielräume und Grenzen: Studien zum DDR-Theater* (Berlin: Links, 1998), pp. 173-177.



how his support for the Brechtian positions taken by Kipphardt meant a breach with the theatrical methods favoured by official SED discourses. I also investigate the strategies Hacks used to make his argument fit in with official discourses and the ways in which his positions actually complied with these discourses. Finally, I will investigate how these ideas fed in to the two plays he wrote in this period: 'Der Müller von Sanssouci' (1958) and 'Die Sorgen und die Macht' (first version 1959),<sup>683</sup> which was to become highly controversial and was finally banned in 1962.<sup>684</sup>

Whilst arguing that aesthetic and political issues cannot be separated, but are closely intertwined for intellectuals like Hacks, I begin the chapter with a set of questions concerned with political discourses. In view of Hacks's 1955 move to the GDR, the context of the Cold War and German division becomes particularly relevant. Therefore I examine how Hacks's positioning towards the FRG's conservative politics of anticommunism, such as the 1956 prohibition of the KPD, Western integration and rearmament (1955) related to narratives dominant in East German public discourses, which conceive of West Germany as essentially fascist, imperialist and militaristic. Furthermore, I will analyse his criticism of progressive West German intellectuals expressed in his polemic against Hans Magnus Enzensberger.

In the Eastern context, the chapter investigates how Hacks's Marxist-Leninist world-views conflicted with the 1956 official recognition of Stalin's terror, the repression of the Hungarian Uprising and the situation in the GDR

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<sup>683</sup> Aside from these plays, his major dramatic works from the second half of the 1950s include an adaptation of Heinrich Leopold Wagner's *Die Kindermörderin* (1959), a translation of John Millington Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* (1956), and a 'Hörspiel' about the Thirty Years War: Peter Hacks, 'Geschichte eines alten Wittibers im Jahre 1637: Hörspiel', *Sinn und Form: Beiträge zur Literatur*, 8.2 (1956), 239-254.

<sup>684</sup> Mittenzwei, *Die Intellektuellen*, pp. 187-188.

where critical intellectuals were silenced and imprisoned. Within this context, it considers how Hacks's dismissive critique of Gerhard Zwerenz in January 1957 relates to the official condemnation of Zwerenz and other intellectuals.

## 1.2 Reception

In research on Hacks, his early aesthetic programme is overshadowed by his later concept of a 'sozialistische Klassik' and his negative reception in West Germany post-1976.<sup>685</sup> His denunciation of Wolf Biermann in the aftermath of his *Ausbürgerung* saddled Hacks with the reputation of an obstinate adherent to the regime, which also made his literature suspect.<sup>686</sup> Contrary to such dismissive attitudes, Christine Cosentino argued in 1977 that the 'widersprüchliche' way Hacks constitutes his heroes gave him an 'antidoktrinäre Stellung' in GDR literature.<sup>687</sup> Another more differentiated account is Peter Schütze's 1976 analysis of Hacks's contribution to theatrical aesthetics from a West German Marxist perspective.<sup>688</sup>

As Philipp Steglich notes, the first decade after the collapse of the GDR is marked by silence around Hacks, resulting from his role in the Biermann affair and his opposition to German unification, whereas in recent years publications about the author have been increasingly numerous – reaching a peak in 2008, the year of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>689</sup> In 2010, an extensive collection

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<sup>685</sup> e.g. Klaus Werner, 'Heitere Renitenz: Goethe, Peter Hacks und das Dörfchen DDR: Klassik-Rezeption als spezifischer Geist-Macht-Diskurs', in *Geist und Macht: Schriftsteller und Staat in Mitteleuropa*, ed. by Marek Zybura, (Dresden: Thelem, 2002), pp. 309-335.

<sup>686</sup> Philipp Steglich, 'Die Hacks-Rezeption nach 1990', in *Staats-Kunst: Der Dramatiker Peter Hacks: Erste wissenschaftliche Tagung der Peter-Hacks-Gesellschaft*, ed. by Kai Köhler (Berlin: Aurora, 2009), pp. 131-143.

<sup>687</sup> Christine Cosentino, 'Geschichte und "Humane Utopie": Zur Heldengestaltung bei Peter Hacks', *The German Quarterly*, 50 (1977), 248-263.

<sup>688</sup> Peter Schütze, *Peter Hacks: Ein Beitrag zur Ästhetik des Dramas: Mit einem Originalbeitrag von Peter Hacks* (Kronberg: Scriptor, 1976).

<sup>689</sup> Steglich, 'Die Hacks-Rezeption nach 1990', pp. 131-132.

of protocols from the dramaturgical workshops Hacks chaired at the Akademie der Künste in the 1970s was published.<sup>690</sup> According to Peter von Becker in *Der Tagesspiegel*, it shows the ‘Arroganz des intelligent verblendeten Starautors und Luxusstalinisten Peter Hacks’,<sup>691</sup> while Jens Bisky in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* praises it as an example of Hacks’s underestimated aesthetic intellect.<sup>692</sup> These two views of Hacks from the press reflect two directions that have crystallised in recent reception. The first direction, which Steglich dismisses as a ‘bürgerliche Position’,<sup>693</sup> seeks to distinguish, like Frank Schirrmacher did in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, between Hacks’s artistic greatness and his political ‘Gemeinheiten’.<sup>694</sup> This view is problematic because Hacks’s art was always already political. Moreover, such a dismissal of his political stances neutralises much of the critical potential of his work, and does not help to understand Hacks as a public intellectual, nor the peculiar situation of intellectuals in the GDR.

The second direction in the reception of Hacks seeks to re-establish him as a great socialist artist. Much of the recent rise in research on Hacks can be viewed in this way, and at times lacks critical distance. Heidi Urbahn de Jauregui is an especially productive admirer. In an essay from 1993, she defends Hacks’s stance in the Biermann affair, as an act of braveness, ‘gegen

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<sup>690</sup> *Berlinische Dramaturgie: Gesprächsprotokolle der von Peter Hacks geleiteten Akademiearbeitsgruppen*, 5 vols, ed. by Thomas Keck & Jens Merle (Berlin: Eulenspiegel, 2010).

<sup>691</sup> Peter von Becker, ‘Rübenrauschen und Flaschengeister: Bühne im Blick: Theaterbücher von und mit Gerhard Stadelmaier, Peter Iden und Peter Hacks’, *Der Tagesspiegel*, 21 December 2010, p. 22.

<sup>692</sup> Jens Bisky, ‘Der Weltgeist liebt die harten Stühle: Abendgespräche an der Ost-Berliner Akademie: Endlich ist die Berlinische Dramaturgie von Peter Hacks erschienen’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 3 July 2010, p. 15.

<sup>693</sup> Steglich, ‘Die Hacks-Rezeption’, p. 139.

<sup>694</sup> Frank Schirrmacher, ‘Er denkt also, wie er will’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, 9 March 2008, p. 25.

den Strom zu schwimmen, der eindeutig nach rechts und gen Westen trieb'.<sup>695</sup>

In 2009 she repeats Hacks's narrative of Western cultural decline with her uncritical use of phrases like 'am Westen orientierte Niedergangskunst'.<sup>696</sup> She claims: 'Hacks war, was leider viele Verantwortliche in der DDR aufgehört hatten zu sein, ein dialektischer Denker.'<sup>697</sup> Seeking to justify Hacks as a genuine socialist, as opposed to those in power, Urbahn de Jauregui constructs a dichotomy of a 'good' Hacks and 'bad' 'Verantwortliche'.

Volker Riedel is more nuanced, but still tries to establish an image of an extraordinarily critical author by stating that Hacks abstained from using 'Formulierungen wie "Arbeiter-und-Bauern-Staat" oder "machtausübende Arbeiterklasse"',<sup>698</sup> which is, as we will see, not true for the 1950s. Hacks's ambivalence, which Riedel claims to be unusual,<sup>699</sup> is actually typical of many intellectuals throughout the GDR's existence.

Much research on Hacks pays insufficient attention to the ever-changing historical contexts. In sketching Hacks's aesthetics, Wolf Gerhard Schmidt quotes statements from various essays written in very different historical and political contexts.<sup>700</sup> Ursula Heukenkamp projects Hacks's post-1960 differences to Brecht back to the 1950s, when Hacks still drew heavily on Brechtian methods: she states that Hacks wanted to create an alternative to

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<sup>695</sup> Heidi Urbahn de Jauregui, 'Der verbotene Dichter', in *Zwischen den Stühlen*, pp. 181-196 (p. 185).

<sup>696</sup> Heidi Urbahn de Jauregui, 'Hacks oder die Mitte: Zum Staatsdenken von Peter Hacks', in *Staats-Kunst: Der Dramatiker Peter Hacks: Erste wissenschaftliche Tagung der Peter-Hacks-Gesellschaft*, ed. by Kai Köhler (Berlin: Aurora, 2009), pp. 62-72 (p. 70).

<sup>697</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>698</sup> Volker Riedel, "'Prexaspes" oder Hacks' heterodoxes Bekenntnis zum Sozialismus', in *Staats-Kunst: Der Dramatiker Peter Hacks*, pp. 40-61 (p. 54).

<sup>699</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>700</sup> Wolf Gerhard Schmidt, "'Alle Kunstwerke sind Golems": Organisation und Hyperthrophie der "totalen Dialektik" bei Peter Hacks', *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur*, 34 (2009), 162-183.

‘Brecht-Theater’ and to move away from ‘Brechts “Didaktismus”’.<sup>701</sup> Such misunderstandings result from the fact that research focuses primarily on Hacks’s work after 1960,<sup>702</sup> when he wrote ‘Versuch über das Theaterstück von morgen’, which marked the starting point of his development of a theory of socialist classicism.<sup>703</sup> The positions he took previous to this turn, which often diverged from official aesthetics, are not part of established images of Hacks.<sup>704</sup>

An exception is Christian Krause, who accurately analyses the relationship between SED cultural policies and Hacks’s aesthetics when writing ‘Die Sorgen und die Macht’ in 1958-1959, although his reading of Hacks’s aesthetics is slightly flawed, as I will demonstrate in section 3 of this chapter.<sup>705</sup> It is important to analyse Hacks’s positions of the 1950s because, as an intellectual who came to the GDR to contribute with his art to socialism, he had a critical aesthetic programme which was also problematic in a political way, and which collided with his affirmation of GDR socialism and official policies.

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<sup>701</sup> Ursula Heukenkamp, “‘Eine Sache, die der Weltgeist vorgesehen hat, auf die kann man sich dann auch verlassen’”: Peter Hacks und die große Fehde in der DDR-Literatur: Zum 80. Geburtstag’, *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, 18 (2008), 625-633 (p. 630).

<sup>702</sup> See also Dieter Kraft, ‘Der entkettete Knecht: Philosophische Perspektiven auf Brecht und Hacks und Hegel’, in *Vorsicht, Hacks! Der Dichter in der ‘jungen Welt’, 1999-2009*, ed. by Stephan Huth (Berlin: Aurora, 2010), pp. 193-207.

<sup>703</sup> Rüdiger Bernhardt, ‘Peter Hacks und der Weltgeist: Literarisches Thema und autobiographischer Anspruch’, in *Staats-Kunst: Der Dramatiker Peter Hacks*, pp. 105-130 (p. 109).

<sup>704</sup> One of the most prolific researchers on Hacks is Felix Bartels. Whereas his monography on Hacks’ treatment of the relationship between genius and society does differentiate between different stages in Hacks’ work as an author, it does not treat his pre-1960 work in detail, except for the play *Eröffnung des Indischen Zeitalters* – which was written in Munich. Felix Bartels, *Leistung und Demokratie: Genie und Gesellschaft im Werk von Peter Hacks* (Mainz: André Thiele, 2010).

<sup>705</sup> Christian Krause, “‘Wir brauchen unsere 11. Sinfonie’”: Kongruenzen und Widersprüche zwischen Peter Hacks und der SED-Kulturpolitik in der Entstehung des Dramas *Die Sorgen und die Macht*’, *Treibhaus: Jahrbuch für die Literatur der fünfziger Jahre*, 4 (2009), 177-192.

## 2. Political affirmation

How closely Hacks's aesthetics and politics are connected can be seen in his early writings, for instance his 1951 doctoral thesis 'Das Theaterstück des Biedermeier (1815-1840)'. Hacks claimed that art was in a desperate state, from which it could only be freed by a new society in which all classes were equal and contributed equally to cultural production.<sup>706</sup> As I will argue below, his writings from the years before 1955 indicate a growing orientation towards the East German political and literary public spheres, which resulted from his vision of a new, egalitarian society.

### 2.1 Crossing the East-West divide

Hacks's 1954 article 'Wider den ästhetischen Ennui: Oder Beweis, daß ein Kunstwerk einen Inhalt haben müsse', published in *Frankfurter Hefte*, gives insight into his early criticism of West German society and culture on the one hand, and engagement with discourses related to the East German public spheres on the other. The essay is conceived as a contribution to the debate on formalism, as a letter to Walter Maria Guggenheimer, an associate of the *Frankfurter Hefte* shows.<sup>707</sup> Hence, it must be seen within the East as well as the West German contexts. Hacks argues that the Western 'spätbürgerliche Gesellschaft' strengthened the 'verhängnisvolle Neigung des Künstlers zur Überschätzung des bloß Formalen'. He claims that this tendency destroys the relationship of artists to the contents of their works, leading to 'die

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<sup>706</sup> Schütze, *Peter Hacks*, p. 21.

<sup>707</sup> In November 1953 he wrote that he conceived a 'Grundsatz-Plauderei über Formalismus-Fragen (vom ästhetischen und soziologischen Standpunkt)'. Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach (DLA), Nachlass Peter Hacks (A: Hacks), Korrespondenz, 'Peter Hacks an Frankfurter Hefte, 1953-1960', 'Peter Hacks an Dr. Walter M. Guggenheimer', 21 November 1953.

unkünstlerische, billige Harmonie’ of ‘sterile Antikendramen oder sonst etwas Inhumanes’.<sup>708</sup> The emphasis on new forms, his criticism of what he regards as traditional theatre’s contentless and unrealistic harmony, his insistence on the dialectic of form and content, and his criticism of a purely formal approach to art and literature, point forward to his aesthetics in the second half of the 1950s.

Before 1955, Hacks crossed the East-West divide intellectually and was already working with an East German audience in mind, as can be seen in his letters. In 1952, he corresponded with Brecht, expressing his admiration and asking him for advice on whether to move East.<sup>709</sup> Three years later, Brecht would invite Hacks to East Berlin, but at this point he was reluctant to do so, and advised him to stay: ‘Gute Leute sind überall gut’. He also discouraged Hacks from publishing in East German journals.<sup>710</sup> Hacks did not follow this advice, as he considered his plays inappropriate for capitalist societies. In a 1954 letter to the Aufbau-Verlag, he offered his first play ‘Das Volksbuch vom Herzog Ernst’ for publication in the GDR, irrespective of offers from West German publishers: ‘Es ist kein Stück für den Westen.’<sup>711</sup> Hence, it is not surprising that in a 1958 interview about Brecht, Hacks relates that, when Brecht invited him to work with him at the Berliner Ensemble in 1955, he and his wife, the playwright Anna Elisabeth Wiede, accepted because ‘wir also ohnehin schon die ganze Zeit schwanger gegangen waren mit Umzugsideen

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<sup>708</sup> Peter Hacks, ‘Wider den ästhetischen Ennui: Oder: Beweis, daß ein Kunstwerk einen Inhalt haben müsse’, *Frankfurter Hefte: Zeitschrift für Kultur und Politik*, 9 (1954), 588-593 (p. 592).

<sup>709</sup> Peter Hacks, *Verehrter Kollege: Briefe an Schriftsteller*, ed. by Rainer Kirsch (Berlin: Eulenspiegel, 2006), p. 11.

<sup>710</sup> DLA, A: Hacks, Korrespondenz, ‘Briefe an ihn von Brecht, Bertolt’: ‘Bertolt Brecht an Peter Hacks’, 15 January 1952.

<sup>711</sup> DLA, A: Hacks, Korrespondenz, ‘Briefe von ihm an Aufbau-Verlag (Berlin) 1954-2003’: ‘Peter Hacks an Aufbau-Verlag Berlin’, 28 February 1954.

und eigentlich wirklich warteten auf einen Anlaß'.<sup>712</sup> His move was preceded by his decision to publish across the inner-German border and his involvement in discourses in the East German public spheres, which was a consequence of his political and aesthetic positions.

## 2.2 Political responsibilities of art

Hacks reflected on the political responsibilities of art in socialist societies in a 1957 reply to a survey about present-day theatre conducted by the Soviet journal *Teatr*, also published in *NDL*. As art allegedly regained 'ihre inhaltliche Verbindlichkeit, ihre Aussage-Funktion', it had the responsibility to transmit reliable and constructive information:

Also muß ein Theaterstück auch mit Mitteln gemessen werden, mit denen man einen Zeitungsartikel oder eine öffentliche Rede mißt. Wenn es einen Unsinn aussagt, muß man es für einen Unsinn nehmen. Wenn es etwas Schädliches aussagt, muß man es gegebenenfalls unterdrücken.<sup>713</sup>

Similar to Herzfelde in his lecture on censorship, Hacks presents censorship in socialism as a necessity – an opportunity even, as this opens up the 'außerordentliche Freiheits-Qualität' to provide 'Wahres'. He claims that theatre must take its responsibility and freedom to tell the truth, and must be 'zur Rechenschaft gezogen werden' if it provides 'Falsches'.<sup>714</sup> Whereas Hacks supports suppression of 'Schädliches', he wants theatre which spreads

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<sup>712</sup> AdK, Hans-Bunge-Archiv, 1070: 'Gespräch mit Hacks und Wiede über Brecht am 17.2.1958' (transcript).

<sup>713</sup> Hacks, 'Das Theater der Gegenwart', p. 129.

<sup>714</sup> Ibid.



wrong information ('Unsinn') to be held accountable, but does not specify by whom and how.

Hacks saw this mission of GDR theatre in the context of the Cold War, which he regarded as the contemporaneous expression of the class struggle of the proletariat. His 1957 essay in *Theater der Zeit* against liberalism in theatre places East German theatre in a political context of West German militarism, and emphasises the need for partisanship in the conflict between socialism and capitalism. He affirms that art should relate to, and take sides in, the political and social issues of the present, as he signals a lack of 'Zeitstücke' portraying the transition to socialism. He blames this deficit on failures in the programming of East German theatres:

Ich werfe einigen Theatern vor, dass sie, als Theater eines Arbeiter- und Bauernstaates, kein Interesse für die Probleme der Gegenwart, also des Sozialismus, zeigen. [...] Man kann kein privates Theater machen, während das imperialistische Finanzkapital sich anschickt, seine weissdeutschen Endlösungs-Spezialisten nach Osten auszusenden. Hat man denn nicht begriffen, dass da ein Zusammenhang besteht zwischen Privatleben und Kollektivtod?<sup>715</sup>

Hacks presents genuine artistic freedom as an imperative to tell the truth, as opposed to a bourgeois 'liberal' or 'private' sense of freedom, which would benefit imperialism and lead to a repetition of the Holocaust. Therefore, he argues, GDR theatres have to display their political responsibility to show the reality of socialism and of the threat posed to it by the fascist West. This

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<sup>715</sup> DLA, A: Hacks, Prosa: Aufsätze: 'Liberalismus auf dem Theater'.

argument shows how antifascism worked as a coercive argument; Hacks calls for art to become political in a very specific way and thematise the present and the Nazi past from a socialist perspective.

### 2.3 German division and the Cold War

In the quotation above, Hacks connects the perceived threat of Western imperialist capitalism towards the socialist East with the Nazi invasion of Eastern Europe and the Holocaust, as well as with the counterrevolutionary Whites of the Russian Civil War. He integrates the Cold War, and in consequence German division, into a class struggle narrative. By using terminology from the narrative of the Russian Revolution, he moreover asserts that the Soviet Union is a model for the German development of socialism.

Hacks employed such class struggle narratives of the Cold War (locating the ‘fascist’ class enemy in the West) in his writings on political events in West Germany. In two satirical poems, published in *ND* in April and September 1957, he mocked the FRG in a discursive pattern which pictures it as the continuation of Nazism.<sup>716</sup> These poems connect to the principle of *Volkstümlichkeit*, because Hacks chose a comical genre from Bavarian folk culture, the ‘Gstanzl’. The use of this genre in the official SED newspaper indicates an inclusionist claim of validity for West Germany. The first of the two poems, ‘Die alten Mörder’ from April 1957, attacks West German rearmament. Lamenting the prominence of former Wehrmacht generals in the

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<sup>716</sup> Peter Hacks, ‘Die alten Mörder’, *Neues Deutschland: Beilage Kunst und Literatur*, 4/5 May 1957, p. 1; ‘Und wählt Ihr wieder die Weißen’, in *Neues Deutschland*, 15 September 1957, p. 4. Weber’s *Peter-Hacks-Bibliographie* does not list either of these poems.

Bundeswehr and NATO,<sup>717</sup> it emphasises the continuity between fascism and the Western camp:

Diese Generäle und Blitzkrieg-Asse

Diese schon mal abgedankten Weltherrn

Sind die alten Mörder unsrer Klasse.

Stärkt die Volksmacht.

Schlagt die Hitlerfeldherren.<sup>718</sup>

The poem responds to the appointment of former Wehrmacht general Hans Speidel as commander-in-chief of NATO in Central Europe in April 1957.<sup>719</sup> Hence it ties in with a campaign launched by the SED around January 1957 against Wehrmacht leaders in the Bundeswehr command, and against West German rearmament in general, in which especially Speidel and Adolf Heusinger were targeted.<sup>720</sup> Juxtaposing ‘Volksmacht’ and ‘unsre Klasse’ with ‘Hitlerfeldherren’ and ‘Blitzkrieg-Asse’, Hacks connects the Cold War with the Second World War. Both are presented in a class struggle narrative, which conflates fascism with capitalism and legitimises the GDR as ‘people’s power’.

Hacks published his second satirical ‘Gstanzl’ on 15 September 1957, the day on which the CDU would gain an absolute majority in the Bundestag

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<sup>717</sup> All 44 West German generals and admirals appointed up to 1957 had been officers in the Wehrmacht. The GDR, by contrast, had appointed merely 6 former Wehrmacht officers. Jens Scholten, ‘Offiziere: Im Geiste unbesiegt’, in *Karrieren im Zwielficht: Hitlers Eliten nach 1945*, ed. by Norbert Frei (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2001), pp. 131-177 (p. 159).

<sup>718</sup> Hacks, ‘Die alten Mörder’.

<sup>719</sup> DLA, A: Hacks, Korrespondenz, ‘Hacks, Peter an Neues Deutschland <Zeitung, Berlin-Ost>, 1957-1993’: ‘Peter Hacks an Kulturredaktion Neues Deutschland’, 14 April 1957.

<sup>720</sup> Cf. Alaric Searle, *Wehrmacht Generals, West German Society, and the Debate on Rearmament, 1949-1959* (Westport: Praeger, 2003), pp. 216-218.

elections.<sup>721</sup> The SED supported the SPD in its election campaign which was hailed as a 'Klassenbewegung gegen die Atomkriegspolitiker' of the Adenauer government.<sup>722</sup> Hacks's poem was intended to be a part of this campaign.<sup>723</sup> The poem again invokes narrative patterns of the Russian Civil War, presenting German division as the national variety of this stage in the Revolution:

Und wählt Ihr wieder die Weißen,  
Und wählt Ihr nicht endlich rot,  
Kommen die Gewählten und schmeißen  
All ihre Wähler tot.<sup>724</sup>

In a didactic appeal to the reader, the poem highlights what it sees as the dilemma of a majority of the West German people expected to continue to support a government of its alleged enemies who, as the use of 'schmeißen' establishes, are preparing a fatal nuclear war. By drawing a historical analogy with the counterrevolutionary Russian 'Weißen', Hacks again presents the Russian Revolution as a model for Germany. The poem asserts that the socialist revolution is taking place in East Germany, whereas the FRG appears as the stronghold of the counter-revolution, in its new guise as aggressive militarism and imperialism. Hacks's poem affirms dominant images of West

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<sup>721</sup> 'Bundestagswahl 15.09.1957',  
<[http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/de/bundestagswahlen/fruehere\\_bundestagswahlen/btw1957.html](http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/de/bundestagswahlen/fruehere_bundestagswahlen/btw1957.html)> [accessed: 30 June 2011].

<sup>722</sup> Quoted in Carsten Penzlin, *Wahlkampf und Außenpolitik: Eine vergleichende Studie zu den Bundestagswahlen von 1957 und 1972* (Rostock: Baltic Sea Press, 2009), p. 206.

<sup>723</sup> Hacks stated this intent in the letter in which he offered the poem to the editorship. DLA, A: Hacks, Korrespondenz, 'Hacks, Peter an Neues Deutschland <Zeitung, Berlin-Ost>, 1957-1993': 'Peter Hacks an Kulturredaktion Neues Deutschland', 27 July 1957.

<sup>724</sup> Hacks, 'Und wählt Ihr wieder die Weißen'.

Germany, but also the politics of the day by presenting the West Germans with a choice: red (SPD) or the certain death of nuclear warfare.

Another example of the connection Hacks made between Adenauer's FRG and Nazi Germany is the preamble to an unpublished draft of 'Der Müller von Sanssouci' (1957). The draft prelude of this play about Prussian militarism, Frederick the Great, despotism and the consolidation of the rule of law, which ultimately favours the despot,<sup>725</sup> is set in a West German school:

LEHRER: Haltung. Zum – Gebet. Ich bete für unseren verehrten Herrn Bundeskanzler und sein christliches Kabinett, insonderheit die Minister Schröder, Brentano und Strauss, sowie für unsere demokratische Bundeswehr, insonderheit die Generale Speidel, Kammlhuber und Heusinger. Der Herr unterstütze ihre Pläne, befördere ihr Tun. Amen.

DIE SCHÜLER: Amen.

LEHRER: Und nun Ruhe. Hausaufgabe?

VORZUGSSCHÜLER: Ein Müller lebte sorgenfrei, Herr Lehrer Huber.

LEHRER: Gut. Die historische Begebenheit vom Müller von Sanssouci.

Kerls. Unser grosser Friedrich gehört, neben Bismarck und Konrad Adenauer, zu den Recken der deutschen Geschichte, deren Vorbild das Herz jedes deutschen Jungen begeistert, sich vorzubereiten auf die weltumfassenden Aufgaben, die die Vorsehung unserem demokratischen deutschen Reich gestellt hat.<sup>726</sup>

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<sup>725</sup> Peter Hacks, 'Der Müller von Sanssouci: Ein bürgerliches Lustspiel', in *Stücke*, 2. Auflage (Leipzig: Reclam, 1974), pp. 195-249.

<sup>726</sup> DLA, A: Hacks, Dramatisches, 'Der Müller von Sanssouci: Ein bürgerliches Lustspiel'.

The preamble contains references to Nazi propaganda, which Hacks uses to establish a connection between West Germany, where it is set, and Nazism: addressing his students in a militaristic and masculine way as ‘Kerls’ (a nickname for Frederick the Great’s regiment of tall soldiers), this West German teacher makes a claim of continuity from Frederick and Bismarck to Adenauer reminiscent of Nazi propaganda which linked Hitler to the same former rulers.<sup>727</sup> Moreover, the teacher refers to the FRG with the term ‘deutsches demokratisches Reich’, with which Hacks places it in the imperial German tradition. The idea that providence has set Germany ‘weltumfassenden Aufgaben’ also corresponds to Nazi discourses. The allusion to three former Wehrmacht generals now serving the Bundeswehr fits in with the SED campaign against West German rearmament, which he also supported in the poem ‘Die alten Mörder’, linking Nazi Germany to the FRG. The honouring of Bismarck and Frederick (with the latter appearing in the play as a war-hungry autocrat) enhances the image of a militaristic FRG.

In these examples, Hacks used his writing as a weapon in the Cold War, which he argued was his task as an artist. Apart from such directly political comments, he also saw his plays as assets in the cultural competition between East and West.<sup>728</sup> In this context, it is notable that he attached high importance to his plays being performed in West Germany. In 1959 he attended the rehearsals of his adaptation of Heinrich Leopold Wagner’s play ‘Die Kindermörderin’ at the Wuppertaler Bühnen and the Münchener

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<sup>727</sup> For instance, the Nazis produced a number of feature films on both Bismarck and Frederick the Great, linking them to Hitler. See Sabine Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden: Nationalsozialistische Mythen, Riten und Symbole 1923 bis 1945* (Vierow: SH-Verlag, 1996), pp. 238-239.

<sup>728</sup> As Caute argues, the Cold War was as much a cultural as a military and economic competition. Caute, *The Dancer Defects*, pp. 4-5.

Kammerspiele. Asking the Culture Ministry for permission to exchange currency, he stressed the importance of the production of ‘ein Stück von uns’ in West Germany.<sup>729</sup> Even if it could be argued that the purpose of the letter prompted him to put it this way, Hacks regarded his plays as contributions to the GDR’s socialist political project.

Hacks also published occasionally in West German newspapers. An article on Friedrich Schiller published in *Stuttgarter Nachrichten* (7 November 1959), illustrates his criticism of bourgeois Western culture, and how this criticism grounded in an understanding of the cultural heritage which did not comply with the Party’s *Erbepolitik*.<sup>730</sup> As we will see in section 3 of this chapter, Hacks was highly critical of the esteem for the German *Klassik* in SED cultural discourses. In the context of the celebration of the ‘Schillerjahr’ in 1959, Hacks critiques Schiller as an early example of decline in bourgeois drama. He presents contemporaneous Western drama as the end point of this decline, employing a narrative pattern of growing bourgeois ‘decadence’:

Und es darf keinesfalls vergessen werden, daß in dem langen und unaufhaltsamen Abstieg der Bourgeoisie und des bürgerlichen Dramas Schiller immerhin noch vor der Mitte rangiert. Im Vergleich zu Shakespeare ist er ein Zwerg. Im Vergleich zu den spießbürgerlichen Naturalisten von Heute, zu Osborne oder Ionesco, ist er ein Goliath.<sup>731</sup>

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<sup>729</sup> DLA, A: Hacks, Korrespondenz, ‘Briefe von ihm an Deutschland <DDR>, Ministerium f. Kultur 1958-1989’: ‘Peter Hacks an Ministerium für Kultur, Abteilung: Haushalt-Valuta’, 24 April 1959.

<sup>730</sup> DLA A: Hacks, Prosa: Aufsätze, ‘Über Schiller, 15.9.59’. Published as: ‘Redst du von einem, der da lebet?’, *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, 7 November 1959, Supplement, p. 34.

<sup>731</sup> Ibid.

Hacks comes close to condemning these two modernist Western playwrights as ‘decadent’, which can be related to his view that in Western late-bourgeois societies true literature was unable to develop.

His pessimistic view on literature in the capitalist West emerges from his criticism of Uwe Johnson in his 1959 speech for the East German PEN. He alleged that Johnson’s talent was ruined by the society he published in.<sup>732</sup> Only months earlier, Johnson had left the GDR and published his novel *Mutmaßungen über Jakob* in the West, as he had been unable to publish it in East Germany.<sup>733</sup> In the context of Hacks’s 1955 move to the GDR, Johnson’s move in the opposite direction provoked him to write a furious dismissal. Faced with this problem of a writer moving West to find freedom of expression, Hacks slates Johnson’s novel as an example of Western society’s animosity to true art, as it encouraged Johnson to write in a subjective way. Carefully avoiding mentioning the circumstance that *Mutmaßungen über Jakob* was written in the GDR, Hacks asserts that this novel is exemplary of the ‘Unwissenheit’ which allegedly dominates the present ‘Landschaft des bürgerlichen Geistes’. He sketches a sinister image of ‘Westdeutschland, wo ganze Galgen voll talentierter Leute, die [...] Schriftsteller sein könnten, aus Unkenntniss zu Stümpfern werden’.<sup>734</sup> Due to this ignorance, Hacks maintains, Johnson regards the world as ‘nicht erkennbar’. In this view ‘bestens unterstützt von allen reaktionären Ideologen’, he allegedly becomes a ‘radikaler Subjektivist’:

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<sup>732</sup> Peter Hacks, ‘Literatur im Zeitalter der Wissenschaften’, in *Die Maßgaben der Kunst: Gesammelte Aufsätze, 1959-1994* (Berlin: Claassen, 1996), pp. 50-57 (p. 56).

<sup>733</sup> Gary Lee Barker, *Understanding Uwe Johnson* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), p. 3.

<sup>734</sup> Hacks, ‘Literatur im Zeitalter der Wissenschaften’, p. 56.



Statt der Prozesse der Außenwelt notiert er irgendwelche Reflexe dieser Außenwelt in den Gehirnen irgendwelcher Leute. [...] Kann dabei Kunst herauskommen? Zur Kunst gehört [...] die Fähigkeit, eine Sache zu bewältigen, inhaltlich und formal. Ein schlechthin unlesbares Buch, das ist es, was herauskommt. Und die Meute der Kunstaufpasser macht einen großen Jubel um dieses Buch und lobt Herrn Johnson und bestärkt ihn in seiner Dummheit. In diesem Land werden [...] die Talente geknackt wie die Flöhe.<sup>735</sup>

In Hacks's view, Johnson's subjectivism, very much conditioned by late-bourgeois society, disqualifies him as a writer. By emphasising that Johnson's talent is ruined by Western literary criticism, Hacks's criticism again asserts that late-bourgeois societies like West Germany have a destructive effect on culture, which relates to official uses of the term 'decadence'. Hacks defines art very much in terms which are congruent with dominant cultural discourses, in this case realism as the norm and subjectivism as its counterpart. Moreover, the image of the West German literary commentators as a mob of 'Kunstaufpasser' is a reference to Nazi cultural policies, asserting a continuity between Nazi Germany and the FRG.

Another intellectual who left the GDR in 1959 was Heinar Kipphardt.<sup>736</sup> Since he was a close friend of Hacks and, as we will see, an ally of his in the debates of the late 1950s, in which they held similar critical positions, his move was less unproblematic for Hacks to condemn than Johnson's. Indeed, Hacks did not dismiss Kipphardt publicly, but criticised and

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<sup>735</sup> Ibid., pp. 56-57.

<sup>736</sup> Kipphardt left following his denunciation by representatives of the 'Kulturkommission beim Politbüro des ZK', at a meeting with 'Intendanten' of all Berlin theatres in March 1959. Sven Hanuschek, 'Natürlich gibt es kein Reich der Pferde: Heinar Kipphardt und die Schwierigkeiten der Satire in der DDR der späten 50er Jahre: Ein Kommentar zur Stenografischen Niederschrift der Beratung der Kulturkommission', in *Szenen Berliner Literatur 1955-1965*, ed. by Andreas Degen (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2011), pp. 52-74 (p. 53).

regretted his move in private correspondence. In a letter of 3 September 1959, he asked: ‘was machst Du bei den Schneemenschen?’, employing the metaphor of the cold and icy capitalist West. He suggests that the only good reason to move to West Germany would be adultery: ‘Ich vermute, du hast einen guten Grund, dort zu sein, wo Deine liebe Frau nicht ist; wenn das der Fall ist, erwarten wir einen Bericht über das Liebesleben der Schneemenschen’.<sup>737</sup> As Kipphardt responded to this mockery by emphasising that his move was for cultural-political reasons, Hacks wrote on 22 December: ‘Nun befindest Du Dich in einem Land, wo kulturpolitische Differenzen gesundheitsschädlicher sind als in unserem.’ In his correspondence, Hacks thus admitted to cultural conflicts in the East German public spheres, and even calls them harmful, but maintained his more fundamental criticism of the West. His criticism of Western intellectuals in these private letters is parallel to his dismissal of Johnson in his speech at the PEN club, as becomes apparent from his speculation on Kipphardt’s professional future. He expresses his doubts that Kipphardt would be able to remain an independent artist in West Germany:

Vielleicht wirst Du Dummendoktor in Mexiko. Vielleicht wirst Du Schnulzenschreiber in München. Vielleicht wirst Du Vortragsreisender und informierst nicht überraschte Rundfunzhörer darüber, dass der Sozialismus in der DDR der Wahre Sozialismus doch eben nicht sei. Ich setze da diese dritte Möglichkeit ganz real; es gibt da Mechaniken, die bedeutendere Defraudanten wie Dich so weit gebracht haben. Glücklicherweise hilft man Dir hier, das zu vermeiden. Ich wünsche Dir sehr, dass es Dir gelingt. Ich wünsche Dir, dass

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<sup>737</sup> Peter Hacks & Heinar Kipphardt, *Du tust mir wirklich fehlen: Der Briefwechsel*, ed. by Uwe Naumann (Berlin: Eulenspiegel, 2004), pp. 16-17.

Du die Möglichkeiten hast, ohne grössere Gangstereien am Leben zu bleiben und was Erträgliches zu produzieren. Ich bin nicht so optimistisch.<sup>738</sup>

On the one hand Hacks calls intellectuals who left the GDR frauds, on the other he blames their criticism of GDR socialism on anonymous forces in West Germany – a similarity to his criticism of Johnson's alleged subjectivism. His private disappointment with Kipphardt's leaving East Germany and his public denunciation in the case of Johnson were thus based on the same images of and narratives on the West German cultural public spheres.

#### 2.4 Polemic against Enzensberger

A closely related problem to the one posed by intellectuals leaving East Germany is that of left-wing intellectuals in the West who did not move East, like Hacks did in 1955. The Cold War imaging of the FRG and the West German cultural public spheres that informed his criticism of Johnson, rendered the existence of progressive intellectuals there impossible in his eyes. In an open letter of August 1958 to Hans Magnus Enzensberger, the prominent young progressive West German poet, Hacks took issue with this problem.<sup>739</sup> Published in *Junge Kunst*, an official journal of the FDJ, this is the first of several polemical open letters to Enzensberger, in which he intended to demonstrate to an audience of young GDR artists what a criticism of progressive West German intellectuals could look like, as Alexander Karasek

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<sup>738</sup> Hacks & Kipphardt, *Du tust mir wirklich fehlen*, pp. 17-19.

<sup>739</sup> Jens Mehrle rightly interprets Hacks' invitation, at the end of the open letter, to visit him in East Berlin as a call on Enzensberger to follow his move east from 1955 and to end his political 'Unbehaustheit'. Jens Mehrle, 'Die Enzensbergeriade: Der folgenreiche Briefwechsel von Peter Hacks mit einem Schriftstellerkollegen aus der alten Bundesrepublik', in *Vorsicht, Hacks! Der Dichter in der 'jungen Welt'*, 1999-2009, ed. by Stephan Huth (Berlin: Aurora, 2010), pp. 186-193 (p. 187).

and Roland Berbig argue.<sup>740</sup> In the context of the example he intended to set of how to treat West German intellectuals, and how to respond to their criticism of East Germany and the Eastern bloc in general, these open letters reveal a defensive stance on some of the political issues arising in the year 1956: the official recognition of Stalin's terror by the Soviet Union, the repression of critical voices in the GDR and the suppression of the Hungarian Uprising.

The open letter of August 1958 contains a critique of Enzensberger's debut volume of poetry: *verteidigung der wölfe* (1957). The quality of Enzensberger's poetry is for Hacks a product of its progressive purpose.<sup>741</sup> The open letter intends to explain why it must nevertheless be dismissed. He argues that the quality and 'menschenfreundliche Absicht' of the poems do not excuse the 'Unkenntnis' of which they testify:

Es ist aber leider, was Sie schreiben, dummes Zeug (ich werfe Ihnen Unkenntnis vor). [...] Was nutzt poetisches Vermögen, ohne Kenntnis, im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert, wo, und Sie werden mir da beipflichten, Poesie ohne Kenntnis nicht mehr gedacht werden kann?<sup>742</sup>

Hacks's criticism of Enzensberger resembles his allegations against Johnson in its emphasis on literature's duty to convey insights into political reality. In the argument, official criticisms of naturalism resonate, which claimed that naturalism's strict mimesis did not allow for such insights into the reality

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<sup>740</sup> Hans Magnus Enzensberger & Peter Hacks, 'Ein Briefwechsel 1957 bis 1962', ed. by Alexander Karasek & Roland Berbig, *Berliner Hefte zur Geschichte des literarischen Lebens*, 8 (2008), 34-64 (p. 34).

<sup>741</sup> As Hacks wrote to Henryk Keisch of NDL, who wanted to print the open letter as well, he found Enzensberger the 'beste Lyriker Westdeutschlands, (wozu natürlich gehört, dass er, von den ernsthaften, der progressivste ist; ich habe ja Westdeutschland nicht erfunden)'. DLA, A: Hacks, Korrespondenz, 'Briefe von Peter Hacks an Neue Deutsche Literatur <Zeitschrift, Berlin, Weimar>': 'Peter Hacks an Henryk Keisch, Redaktion NDL', 22 October 1958.

<sup>742</sup> Enzensberger & Hacks, 'Ein Briefwechsel', p. 35.

beneath the surface.<sup>743</sup> Effectively, Hacks alleges that Enzensberger fails in his artistic duty to convey ‘Kenntnisse’ of what is happening beneath the surface, as he maintains that Enzensberger does not name the perpetrators of the ‘Mißstände’ his poems address: ‘Sie nennen ihre Urheber, nicht besonders genau, Wölfe, oder auch Angler oder Henker.’ Moreover, his failure is compounded by a denunciation of the GDR which, according to Hacks, amounts to a vile Nazi discourse: ‘Wer sind die Wölfe? “belsen und hilde benjamin”? Das ist einfach eine Nazisauerei.’<sup>744</sup> Enzensberger’s mentioning of GDR justice minister Hilde Benjamin in combination with the infamous concentration camp is indeed questionable, as she lost many family members at the hands of the Nazis, including her husband. But her name is also connected to repression and executions of opponents of the regime (including many Nazis) during her years as vice-president of the Oberste Gericht der DDR (1949-1953).<sup>745</sup> As Minister of Justice since 1953, she was responsible for the persecution of critical intellectuals in 1957.<sup>746</sup> Hacks resists Enzensberger’s suggestion of continuity between Nazi and GDR repression – calling this denunciation a fascist act. He even justifies violent acts done in the name of socialism, when he argues that these are necessary for the revolution which will end the oppression of capitalism: ‘um diese besondere Gewalt abzuschaffen, [muß] Gewalt angewendet werden, Revolution gemacht werden’. Hacks justifies GDR repression as revolutionary violence. He moreover stresses that such repression carries on the struggle of the working

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<sup>743</sup> Cf. Manuela Bonnke, *Kunst in Produktion: Bildende Kunst und volkseigene Wirtschaft in der SBZ/DDR* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007), p. 55.

<sup>744</sup> Enzensberger & Hacks, ‘Ein Briefwechsel’, pp. 35-36.

<sup>745</sup> Falco Wertenkin, *Politische Strafjustiz in der Ära Ulbricht: Vom bekennenden Terror zur verdeckten Repression*, second edition (Berlin: Links, 1997), p. 26.

<sup>746</sup> Cf. Marianne Brentzel, *Die Machtfrau: Hilde Benjamin, 1902-1989* (Berlin: Links, 1997), p. 202 & passim.

class and forms a barrier against Nazism, enabling the GDR to be a peaceful and anti-fascist state:

Revolutionär ist die demokratische Justiz, die Justiz der Arbeiterklasse, die Justiz, an der Hilde Benjamin maßgeblich mitgearbeitet hat und mitarbeitet. Ist es schwer zu begreifen, daß die DDR ohne diese revolutionäre Justiz jetzt nicht wäre, was sie ist: ein friedfertiger Staat, ein Staat ohne Nazis [...]?<sup>747</sup>

Hacks situates Benjamin's work as Minister, and the GDR judiciary over which she presides, in the tradition of her work as a lawyer defending communist activists before 1933. Hacks furthermore asserts that Enzensberger has a petty bourgeois way of thinking when he opposes state authorities in general:<sup>748</sup> 'Aber was haben Sie gegen meine? [...] Was Sie da abdrehen, ist die alte spießbürgerliche Macht-verdirbt-den-Charakter-Leier [...].'<sup>749</sup> Even the most progressive West German intellectual in Hacks's view, was thus accused by him of ignorance, confusion and a lack of political insight. Such is the frontal attack Hacks proposes as the appropriate approach to leftist West German intellectuals, making them accomplices (by spreading ignorance) of the allegedly fascist FRG. This attack also serves to defend GDR leaders against their being held accountable for political persecutions.

In his reply, which was not published at the time, Enzensberger acknowledges his ignorance, but questions Hacks's self-assurance and denial of repression committed in the name of socialism.<sup>750</sup> Hacks responds in a

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<sup>747</sup> Enzensberger & Hacks, 'Ein Briefwechsel', p. 37.

<sup>748</sup> For instance in the poem 'konjunktur': Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *verteidigung der wölfe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1962), pp. 86-87.

<sup>749</sup> Enzensberger & Hacks, 'Ein Briefwechsel', p. 38.

<sup>750</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 40-44.

second open letter in *Junge Kunst* (3 February 1959) with a firm rejection of Enzensberger's allegations of crimes committed in the name of socialism, producing a simplistic image of the Hungarian Uprising as a counterrevolutionary act which was rightly beaten down. Similarly, he describes the East German uprising of 1953 as a 'Putsch' against the revolution which was implemented in the GDR by the workers and farmers through collectivisation, 'Bodenreform' and nationalisation – an uncritical adoption of the official narrative. Returning to Enzensberger's repeated criticism of Benjamin, Hacks constructs a narrative in which she figures as the heroine of the class struggle of which the GDR is the continuation:

Diese Frau, welche schön und klug war und für die berliner Arbeiter mehr getan hat, als Sie und ich in unserem Leben für sie tun werden, die dann die Nazizeit im KZ verbracht hat (wo sie ihren Mann vor ihren Augen kaputtgemacht haben), die danach selbst in der Periode des strengsten revolutionären Terrors nicht auf die Idee kam, Vernichtungs- oder Folterstätten für ihre Feinde und die der Menschheit zu errichten, diese Frau hat es nicht nötig, sich von irgendeinem indirekten Himmlerapologeten anblödeln zu lassen.<sup>751</sup>

Hacks emphasises Benjamin's contribution to the communist struggle and antifascist resistance, and her suffering in the concentration camp as a result of this, legitimising the state which gave this heroic victim of fascism ministerial power. Finally, he calls Enzensberger an apologist of Himmler, because he did not support the right, Eastern side in the Cold War. As this disqualification of

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<sup>751</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

Enzensberger once more shows, Hacks regarded the Cold War as the continuation of the struggle against fascism.

Hacks took an apologetic stance towards Stalinism in the next letter (26 February 1959), in reply to Enzensberger's accusation that Hacks's dismissal of the Hungarian Uprising was out of touch with reality, as it would be informed by Party directives instead of the actual situation on the ground in Hungary. Enzensberger proposed instead to agree that Stalin committed crimes against humanity as they were revealed by the new Soviet leader Khrushchev in 1956. In his response, Hacks constructs a class struggle schema of the conflict between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, which justifies Stalinist atrocities:

Ist das so schwer zu verstehen, daß Staatspolizei die Folge von (ökonomischen) Sorgen ist? Und daß diese Sorgen nicht notwendig aus dem Sozialismus [*sic*] resultieren, im Gegensatz zu den greuelerzeugenden Sorgen des Imperialismus [*sic*], die eben unvermeidlich sind? Woraus resultieren sie: fast ausschließlich aus Rüstungsanstrengungen, Disproportionen im Reproduktionsprozeß, welche wieder fast ausschließlich auf die, ja immerhin gelegentlich wahrgemachte, Kriegsdrohung des Imperialismus [*sic*] zurückzuführen sind. [...] Stalins Sozialismus [*sic*] war ein deformierter Sozialismus [*sic*], aber ein wesentlich durch äußere Umstände deformierter. Stalins Greuel sind in Wahrheit Hitlers Greuel (sie beginnen mit Hitler).<sup>752</sup>

Hacks argues from a theoretical supposition – namely that ‘Staatspolizei’, by which he means state terror, is inevitable in imperialism given its permanent

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<sup>752</sup> Enzensberger & Hacks, ‘Briefwechsel’, p. 55.



economic troubles, but in socialism it only takes place as a result of, ultimately, the imperialist war threat – that allows him to blame Stalin’s ‘deformed socialism’ on circumstances beyond the dictator’s control. Why did Hacks not recognise Stalin’s atrocities like other East German intellectuals did before, in the wake of Khrushchev’s Secret Speech?<sup>753</sup> The first thing to consider is the very specific context in which Hacks wrote this apology: an open letter intended to demonstrate the ‘correct’, antagonistic way to respond to West German left-wing intellectuals. Moreover, he wrote it well after the debates among GDR intellectuals about Stalinism and reforms had ended in the trials of 1957. But, as Krause notes, Hacks had largely abstained from these debates at the time.<sup>754</sup> He did not share their criticism of Stalin and the GDR leadership – even if, in the heat of the debate, he referred to Stalin in a very ironic and by-the-way manner, in a letter to Peter Huchel, the editor of *Sinn und Form* who was under continuous pressure from the authorities.<sup>755</sup> Declining to write an obituary for Brecht because he was too devastated by his death, Hacks notes: ‘Ich [...] schreibe Ihnen gerne mal was über Gott, Stalin, die Relativitätstheorie oder andere unwichtige Dinge.’<sup>756</sup> By using irony, Hacks does away with the revelations about Stalin, instead of engaging with them.

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<sup>753</sup> e.g. Gustav Just, *Zeuge in eigener Sache* (Frankfurt am Main: Luchterhand, 1990), pp. 137-138; see also Alfred Kantorowicz, ‘Gewissen und Mahner des Volkes’, *Im 2. Drittel unseres Jahrhunderts: Illusionen, Irrtümer, Widersprüche, Einsichten, Voraussichten* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1967), pp. 148-153.

<sup>754</sup> Krause, ‘Wir brauchen unsere 11. Sinfonie’, p. 184.

<sup>755</sup> See Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, p. 164.

<sup>756</sup> DLA, A: Huchel, 06.9: ‘Peter Hacks an Peter Huchel, 1.9.1956’.

### 3. Aesthetics: A programme for a socialist theatre

Shortly after his move to the GDR, Hacks published two essays in which he laid down his programme for a socialist theatre: 'Einige Gemeinplätze über das Stückeschreiben' (September 1956) and 'Das realistische Theaterstück' (October 1957), both in *NDL*.<sup>757</sup> Based on the definition of realism as the portrayal of conflicts, Hacks devised his programme to challenge dominant theatrical methods. Schütze identifies a starting point for Hacks's programme in the dialectical unity of form and content, as pronounced in his 1954 article 'Wider den ästhetischen Ennui'.<sup>758</sup> Apart from indicating a continuity in Hacks's stances before and after his move to the GDR, this assumption informed his opposition to what he regarded as the harmonising theatre of the classical heritage as preferred by official discourses.

The two programmatic essays have to be read as a pair:<sup>759</sup> the first tries to establish common aesthetic ground for the debate on realist theatre, the second discusses problems that are still to be solved in Hacks's attempt '*zu den weltweiten wissenschaftlichen Bemühungen um den Stil des sozialistischen Realismus beizutragen*'.<sup>760</sup> As this sentence suggests, and his correspondence confirms, he thought his contribution was important to this debate.<sup>761</sup> His eagerness to contribute shows that GDR notions of socialist realism were not

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<sup>757</sup> Peter Hacks, 'Einige Gemeinplätze über das Stückeschreiben', *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 4.9 (1956), 119-126; 'Das realistische Theaterstück', *Neue deutsche Literatur*, 5.10 (1957), 90-104

<sup>758</sup> Schütze, *Peter Hacks*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>759</sup> Hacks indeed regarded them as such. In a letter to the editorship of *Theater der Zeit* he even called the second essay 'die fortgesetzten Gemeinplätze'. See DLA, A: Hacks, Korrespondenz, 'Briefe von Hacks, Peter an Theater der Zeit 1955-1980', 'Peter Hacks an Theater der Zeit, Redaktion', 21 July 1957.

<sup>760</sup> Hacks, 'Das realistische Theaterstück', p. 90. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>761</sup> In August 1957, he wrote to the editors of the journal *Aufbau*: 'Die Realism-Diskussion interessiert mich sehr, das ist ein Hobby von mir. Aber ich habe eben erst einen ziemlich langen Aufsatz über diesen Gegenstand gemacht [...] und den hat seit zwei Monaten die NDL.' DLA, A: Hacks, Korrespondenz, Briefe von Peter Hacks an Aufbau: 'Peter Hacks an Redaktion Aufbau', 20 August 1957.

closed or fixed, but open for discussion – indeed many of his considerations in these essays conflict with notions prevalent in official aesthetic discourses.

The two essays are separated by a year: the first appearing in early 1956, in the wake of tensions between critical intellectuals and SED officials, the second well after the trials against reformist intellectuals in 1957. The different circumstances of publication invoke interesting parallels and discontinuities within his arguments in these essays.

### 3.1 Criticism at the Fourth Writers' Congress

Hacks initially conceived the two programmatic essays 'Einige Gemeinplätze über das Stückeschreiben' and 'Das realistische Theaterstück' in the context of tensions between Party representatives and writers which came to a climax during the Writers' Congress of January 1956. In this context, Hacks sought to sketch out a normative aesthetic framework in 'Einige Gemeinplätze über das Stückeschreiben'. He states in the preamble: *'die Muse ist keine eiserne Jungfrau. Indessen ist sie auch kein Flittchen von der Maxime "Mache alles"'*.

In this sexualised metaphor of the process of artistic creation, asserting the masculinity of the artist, Hacks claims some stylistic leeway for writers and artists, but also clearly sets limits to it. To elaborate this point, he goes on to argue that an artistic style consists of objective and subjective elements.

Whereas the latter are *'der persönlichen Neigung überlassen'* and could be severely damaged by setting strict norms, normative criteria are necessary for the former. These *'eher ausschließenden als fordernden Behauptungen'* aim to develop such stylistic norms for the theatre *'von heute'*.<sup>762</sup>

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<sup>762</sup> Hacks, 'Einige Gemeinplätze über das Stückeschreiben', p. 119. Emphasis in the original.

The essay 'Einige Gemeinplätze' is therefore to be understood as an attempt to shape the consensus over what a socialist play should entail.

Whereas he proposed a normative aesthetic, he remains vague about what aspects of writing are to be understood as 'subjective' elements and therefore to be left untouched by such norms. Moreover, it becomes clear in the following essay that the norms he proposes differ from those proposed by official Party discourses on crucial points.

Hacks engaged with a key issue in the tensions between writers and Party dogmatism, i.e. the opposition of conflicts and harmony. At a meeting with Deputy Minister for Culture Alexander Abusch in September 1955, Brecht argued against an 'idealistic' tendency among writers to work with ideals and 'Formeln', instead of portraying reality: many writers allegedly portrayed the world as they wished it to be instead of how it actually was.<sup>763</sup> At the Fourth Writers' Congress in January 1956, Brecht once more opposed a supposedly prevailing tendency to give idealised accounts of reality, which lack true conflicts. He pleads for new theatrical methods to make the audience engage in the conflict between the old and the new order. To bring about this change, he concludes, theatre needs 'Kenntnis der Dialektik'.<sup>764</sup> Brecht's criticism on these occasions informed much of Hacks's self-positioning.

At the congress, both Seghers and Lukács intervened on this issue.<sup>765</sup> In her keynote lecture, Seghers criticises contemporaneous GDR literature: out of fear of being too negative, many writers allegedly avoided depicting conflicts,

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<sup>763</sup> Schiller, *Hoffnung auf Tauwetter*, p. 26.

<sup>764</sup> Bertolt Brecht, 'Ausführungen vor der Sektion Dramatik: 12. Januar 1956', in IV. *Deutscher Schriftstellerkongreß, Januar 1956: Protokoll Band 1* (Berlin: DSV, 1956), pp. 153-162 (p. 162).

<sup>765</sup> Lukács opposed 'Schematismus' in East German literature and called it a result of too mechanical ways of 'Gestaltung'. Georg Lukács, 'Das Problem der Perspektive: 11. Januar 1956', in IV. *Deutscher Schriftstellerkongreß: Protokoll Band 1*, pp. 75-82 (p. 76).

but followed ‘Schablonen’, resulting in ‘Schematismus’. She rails against writers relying on dogmas, as this meant avoiding the truth – with the effect that they wrote unrealistically and formalism re-entered literature. She calls on her colleagues to be more courageous and to show the development towards a new way of life through the depiction of genuine conflicts.<sup>766</sup> In this intervention Seghers uses a similar strategy as Herzfelde in his critical essays from the early 1950s: by turning the formalism verdict against its proponents, both Seghers and Herzfelde use terms from dominant aesthetic discourses in their criticism of these discourses. Both Brecht and Seghers speak of a general situation or of ‘some writers’ who supposedly use the disputed aesthetic categories, with Seghers also giving some examples, but they do not oppose the Party line directly.<sup>767</sup> This political tactic makes their argument ambiguous. Hacks agreed with their opposition to harmony and their argument that realist literature should show conflicts.

### 3.2 *Widersprüche* and cultural heritage

The programme Hacks proposes in the two essays insists on the portrayal of contradictions and rejects the official endorsement of the *Weimar Klassik* and bourgeois realism as constituents of the heritage of GDR culture. Apart from the controversy at the Fourth Writers’ Congress, Hacks’s criticism also links to a debate in Soviet theatre from the early 1950s. In 1952, the *Pravda* denounced the harmonising theatre of what it called ‘conflictlessness’

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<sup>766</sup> Seghers, ‘Der Anteil der Literatur an der Bewußtseinsbildung des Volkes’, pp. 51-57.

<sup>767</sup> Dieter Schiller argues this strategy weakened Brecht’s argument. Schiller, *Hoffnung auf Tauwetter*, p. 26.

(‘Beskonfliktnost’), that it accused certain Party ideologues and the playwright Nikolai Virla of adhering to.<sup>768</sup>

Hacks’s opposition to harmonious theatre is thus consistent with official Soviet stances, but as we will see, he goes beyond official Soviet and GDR notions of socialist realism as he makes the conflict central rather than the revolutionary development. In the East German context, his plea conflicts with the Party’s denial of similar arguments at the Fourth Writers’ Congress. Moreover, it involved a harsh criticism of SED concepts of the cultural heritage, and, with the connection made between form and societal structure, implied an acknowledgement that East German society, even though it was the better Germany, had its failures as well.

In ‘Einige Gemeinplätze’, Hacks criticises the allegedly widespread ‘Irrtum’ of assuming that socialism was already established in the GDR. Instead, he argues that East Germany was in a phase of transition, which would take ‘noch eine bemerkliche Weile’, and which had specific aesthetic implications, because reality was ‘in der Hauptsache widersprüchlich’.<sup>769</sup> The insistence on a transition marked by contradiction collides with orthodox notions of socialist realism which, following Zhdanov, place the revolutionary development at the heart of socialist realism (a harmonising tendency, at least in the long run). As Hacks argues instead that ‘Widersprüche’ should be central in art, he touches on the question of heritage:

Form ist eine Chiffre für gesellschaftliche Struktur. Die Widersprüche sind nicht überwunden, folglich gibt es keine Form, die die Widersprüche als

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<sup>768</sup> Nicholas Rzhevsky, *The Modern Russian Theatre: A Literary and Cultural History* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), p. 114.

<sup>769</sup> Hacks, ‘Einige Gemeinplätze’, p. 120.

überwunden zeigt. Es besteht [...] bei einigen Stückeschreibern noch die Tendenz zur verführten Harmonie, die sich in Klassizismen aller Art äußert. Sie orientieren sich an der deutschen Klassik, welche doch gleicherweise ein Fall von verführter Harmonie, von Ausweichen vor den Widersprüchen, [...]. Eine solche Art von harmonischer Form kann nur zweierlei bedeuten: Irrtum oder Irreführung.<sup>770</sup>

The criticism of a supposed absence of contradictions in classical theatre touches on one of the central elements of the *Erbe* conception of official SED cultural discourses.<sup>771</sup> Hacks, who would develop his own ‘sozialistische Klassik’ in the 1960s,<sup>772</sup> opposes the canonisation of the *Klassik* in the previous decade. Utilising a core aspect of aesthetic norms to criticise classicism, he describes it as a move away from reality. He employs a similar strategy to the one used by Seghers and Brecht: Hacks did not explicitly attack cultural policy, but an allegedly general trend among authors, describing their writing in such a way that they resemble the directives he opposes. His critical attitude towards the *Klassik* can be traced back to critical adaptations of *Faust* in Brecht’s 1952 production *Urfaust*<sup>773</sup> and Hanns Eisler’s libretto *Johann Faustus*,<sup>774</sup> and to Brecht’s speech at the Fourth Writers’ Congress.<sup>775</sup> As

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<sup>770</sup> Ibid.

<sup>771</sup> Angela Borgwardt, *Im Umgang mit der Macht: Herrschaft und Selbstbehauptung in einem autoritären politischen System* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2002), p. 97.

<sup>772</sup> Andrea Jäger, ‘Hacks, Peter’, in *Metzler Lexikon DDR-Literatur: Autoren – Institutionen – Debatten*, ed. by Michael Opitz & Michael Hoffmann (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2009), pp. 116-118 (p. 117).

<sup>773</sup> See Schlenker, *Das ‘kulturelle Erbe’ in der DDR*, p. 133.

<sup>774</sup> Grit Dommies, ‘Klassik-Rezeption’, in *Metzler Lexikon DDR-Literatur: Autoren – Institutionen – Debatten*, ed. by Michael Opitz & Michael Hoffmann (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2009), pp. 166-168.

<sup>775</sup> Brecht, ‘Ausführungen vor der Sektion Dramatik’, pp. 160-161. ‘Die Kunstmittel Kleists, Goethes, Schillers müssen heute studiert werden; sie reichen aber nicht mehr aus, wenn wir das Neue darstellen wollen.’

emerged from chapter 2, Herzfelde brought forward similar criticisms in the early 1950s.

Like Brecht's, Hacks's disapproval of an uncritical adoption of the classical heritage comes down to proposing new forms that go beyond the classical ones, as Hacks's discussion of two allegedly widespread 'Argumente zugunsten des sozialistischen Klassizismus' shows.<sup>776</sup> Using the realism principle against his opponents, his paraphrase of the first argument he opposes links a fundamental idea of SED cultural policies with a vulgarised version of German idealism's conception of the purpose of art:<sup>777</sup> 'Die Kunst überflüge das gemeine Leben, hierdurch gebe sie Kraft und Schwung zur realen Überwindung der Mißstände.'<sup>778</sup> Hacks objects on the grounds that the audience must be able to recognise their own times in a work of art. As the current transitional phase was supposedly marked by conflicts, only an anticipation of future harmony would be possible. What would hence be required was a new aesthetic more apt to both the contradictory present and the needs of the working class.<sup>779</sup>

As the parallels to Brecht and Herzfelde suggest, Hacks's argument against an uncritical adoption of classical forms goes back to debates in Marxist aesthetics during the first half of the twentieth century, carried on in the GDR of the 1950s. A central issue in these debates was the question whether the proletariat should conquer existing high culture and take hold of

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<sup>776</sup> Hacks, 'Einige Gemeinplätze', p. 120.

<sup>777</sup> Andrew Bowie describes idealism's conception of art as follows: 'Instead of being conceived of principally in terms of mimesis, representation, or entertainment, art begins to be conceived of in terms of its ability to reveal the world in ways that may not be possible without art.' See: Andrew Bowie, 'German Idealism and the Arts', in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. by Karl Ameriks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 239-311 (p. 241).

<sup>778</sup> Hacks, 'Einige Gemeinplätze', p. 120.

<sup>779</sup> Ibid.



this heritage, or if a radically new society would need radically new cultural forms as well. Hacks positions himself on the modernist side of this debate. He disputes a second argument for socialist classicism: ‘Die Arbeiterklasse habe ein Recht auf hohe Form.’ He calls this notion metaphysical, and claims that the ‘Herrschaft der Arbeiter’ should not result in taking over ‘die Formen der Bürger oder der Feudalen’, i.e. the respective ruling classes of the two preceding historical eras.<sup>780</sup> His criticism of the artistic forms of the bourgeoisie as belonging to a bygone ruling class, extends Hacks’s disapproval to another part of the officially canonised *Erbe*, namely bourgeois realism. Instead of taking over bourgeois art forms, the workers should find their own, ‘unter Verwendung von Formergebnissen früherer Nicht-Herrschender’. He claims: ‘Wie die Gedanken sind auch die Formen von Nicht-Herrschenden besser als die von Herrschenden. Man soll mit dem Kult nicht den Proleten hinausschmeißen.’<sup>781</sup> Hacks is critical of the denunciation of ‘Proletkult’, the Soviet movement from the immediate postrevolutionary years that ‘completely rejected bourgeois culture’,<sup>782</sup> and sought ‘uniquely proletarian artistic forms’ instead.<sup>783</sup> After methods associated with Proletkult were attacked during the Stalinist regime in the 1930s,<sup>784</sup> SED discourses of the 1950s accused the movement of neglecting form by focusing on content.<sup>785</sup> Hacks, while insisting on a unity of form and content, is critical of this wholesale denunciation. His ironic line indicates that his disapproval of the adoption of bourgeois realism by SED discourses, and by Lukács in particular, is accompanied by a re-

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<sup>780</sup> Ibid.

<sup>781</sup> Ibid. In the second essay, abandoning the plebeian, Hacks would alter this argument considering that the proletariat was supposedly the ruling class in socialism.

<sup>782</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1976), p. 39.

<sup>783</sup> Lynn Mally, *Culture of the Future: The Proletkult Movement in Revolutionary Russia* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1990), p. 231.

<sup>784</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>785</sup> Bonnke, *Kunst in Produktion*, p. 58.

valuation of proletarian-revolutionary alternatives to prevalent realism discourses, as part of the heritage of socialist culture.

Hacks returns to the issue of *Erbe* to the end of 'Einige Gemeinplätze'. His reliance on radical proletarian aesthetics becomes clear as he calls it problematic to learn from past 'Vorbilder': 'Da die Form aus dem Inhalt kommt, und da der Inhalt jedesmal und insbesondere heute neu ist, ist die Form jedesmal und insbesondere heute neu.'<sup>786</sup>

Hacks sought new forms specific to the proletariat and equipped to illustrate the dialectic of present conflict and anticipated future harmony. He maintains in 'Einige Gemeinplätze' that 'das Prinzip der Harmonie in die widersprüchlichen Formen in dem Maße hereinzuragen hat wie die harmonische Zukunft in unsere widersprüchliche Gegenwart'. Instead of the criticized 'Abwesenheit von Widersprüchen', form should reflect the 'Sinn in den Widersprüchen':

Die künstlerische Widerspiegelung der weltanschaulichen Grundentscheidung für oder gegen den Menschen, für oder gegen die Zukunft, ist die Grundentscheidung für oder gegen die Form als solche. Mithin, es gibt Form. Eine Vernachlässigung der Form, eine Formlosigkeit oder Formfeindschaft entsprechen nicht dem Stand unserer gesellschaftlichen Erkenntnis. Sondern vonnöten ist gestaltete Widersprüchlichkeit. Der sozialistische Realismus ist ein poetischer Realismus.<sup>787</sup>

Five years after the formalism campaign, he claims a place for form in the discourse on socialist realism. His line of argument, implicitly critical of the

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<sup>786</sup> Hacks, 'Einige Gemeinplätze', pp. 125-126.

<sup>787</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

formalism condemnations of the early 1950s, accords with the disapproval of scholastic or schematic literature at the Writers' Congress earlier that year. His argument for the poetic expression of conflicts, by means of a plurality of styles, as genuine socialist realism is clearly aimed at a perceived tendency in East German socialist realism to neglect formal issues.<sup>788</sup> The final sentence of the quotation is remarkable, though, as it echoes the very bourgeois realism he rejected earlier on. The 'poetischer Realismus' of the second half of the nineteenth century was an outspokenly non-political literary movement, which does not match with Hacks's aims; instead he lays a claim to the term 'poetischer Realismus' in order to present his version of realism, with a multiplicity of styles reflecting societal conflict, as the truly poetic one.

In the second essay, 'Das realistische Theaterstück', Hacks expands his criticism of harmonising depictions of GDR reality. As in the earlier essay, he presents his methods as a more appropriate means to achieve the objective he shares with official discourses: a realist and socialist theatre. His argument is hardly compatible with official notions of socialist realism, though, as can be illustrated by the following statement: 'Man kann im Besonderen kein Allgemeines zeigen, das nicht in ihm ist. [...] Manche Leute haben das Bedürfnis, Allgemeines von morgen künstlerisch zu gestalten.' He condemns this tendency as 'keine dialektische [...] Anstrengung'.<sup>789</sup> Hacks's statement conflicts with the definition of socialist realism as the depiction of reality in its revolutionary development, but also with Lukács's notion of totality as 'eine die Gegensätze übergreifende intelligible Gemeinsamkeit, die sich als

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<sup>788</sup> See for instance Loest's remarks in his 1981 autobiography, reporting that he tended to focus on constructing narratives which benefited socialism, rather than developing an appropriate writing style, in Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, p. 154.

<sup>789</sup> Hacks, 'Das realistische Theaterstück', pp. 90-91.

“dialektische” Tendenz [...] zur Aufhebung aller Gegensätze geltend mache’.<sup>790</sup> Hacks claims instead that his ‘Arrangement der Widersprüche’ reflects the essence of present society, and is a true realist and dialectic one. He puts this criticism in terms affirmative of dominant cultural discourses. Moreover, he connects the literature he opposes with condemned notions such as naturalism, idealism, abstraction and ‘Nichtrealismus’.<sup>791</sup> This is similar to Herzfelde’s use of officially sanctioned language, but whereas the latter clearly used this as a strategy to make his argument acceptable, which eventually restricted his critical thrust, Hacks affirmed these goals and maxims from the onset, but still proposed an alternative method to reach them.

The continuity between the two essays in their criticism of contemporaneous GDR literature is striking because of the radically changed circumstances of publication: published in October 1957, ‘Das realistische Theaterstück’ came after what is often assumed to be the closure of a space for reform-minded intellectuals by the regime by late 1956 or early 1957.<sup>792</sup> It indicates that opposition to orthodox SED cultural policies, along the lines of the criticism at the 1956 Writers’ Congress, remained possible after the political opposition had been broken, even if Hacks had to take some of his points back as the following pages will show.

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<sup>790</sup> Spies, ‘Georg Lukács und der Sozialistische Realismus in der DDR’ p. 37.

<sup>791</sup> Hacks, ‘Das realistische Theaterstück’, p. 91.

<sup>792</sup> Siegfried Prokop identifies the military actions in Hungary and Egypt in late autumn as the end of the ‘Tauwetter’ in the GDR. Prokop, 1956, p. 94. See also Dietrich Staritz, *Geschichte der DDR 1949-1990: Moderne deutsche Geschichte Band 11* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), p. 163.

### 3.3 Plebeian language

An area of conflict between Hacks's essay 'Einige Gemeinplätze über das Stückschreiben' and official discourses is his use of the term 'plebeian', which related to his criticism of heritage policies, specifically to his presumption that the philosophy and styles of past non-rulers were better than the dominant classical and bourgeois-realist ones. But in this area, he did alter his stance in the later essay, 'Das realistische Theaterstück', a move which significantly altered the impact of his criticism of official *Erbepolitik*.

As Schütze notes, Hacks derived this term from a 1949 essay by Hans Mayer, an increasingly controversial figure in the mid-1950s.<sup>793</sup> Mayer had argued in 1949 that the 'plebejische Tradition' was a central element of Brecht's plays. He celebrated the language of Brecht's *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* as an anti-naturalistic 'Ethos von Unten',<sup>794</sup> which unveils the true social interests behind events.<sup>795</sup> The circumstance that the term derived from Mayer, who used it to praise a play which had been contested since the formalism campaign,<sup>796</sup> could have played a role in Hacks's move away from the term, which was already problematic considering heritage policies which adopt bourgeois values.

In 'Einige Gemeinplätze', Hacks uses the term plebeian to support his argument for new forms which derive from the lower classes. He insists that instead of the language of the higher classes, playwrights should use a 'plebeian' language: 'jedermann weiß, daß [...] eine plebejische Sprache

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<sup>793</sup> Cf. Lehmstedt (ed.), *Der Fall Hans Mayer*; Bernd Leistner, 'Hans Mayer als Literaturprofessor in Leipzig'.

<sup>794</sup> Schütze, *Peter Hacks*, p. 28.

<sup>795</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-29.

<sup>796</sup> Jäger, *Kultur und Politik in der DDR*, p. 52.

marxistische Gedanken sehr wohl auszudrücken fähig [ist]'.<sup>797</sup> He claims the plebeian, which he describes as the 'Geisteshaltung von konsequent ihrer gesellschaftlichen Lage gemäß handelnden Unteren',<sup>798</sup> and the rational to be two indispensable features of progressive aesthetic thinking:

Es kann einmal das rationalistische Attribut stärker betont sein, einmal das plebejische: das Fehlen eines von ihnen disqualifiziert das Stück als fortschrittliches. [...] Es gab Zeiten, wo diese Attribute einander ausschlossen, im Marxismus bedingen sie einander. [...] Wir sind ohne Verständnis für den Widerspruch zwischen dem Gebildeten und dem Volkstümlichen, wir wollen durchaus Gottsched *und* den Hanswurst.<sup>799</sup>

Notwithstanding the differences between the two, Hacks associates the problematic plebeian category with the established notion of *Volkstümlichkeit*. This is an example of his strategy to make the term acceptable, which also had the effect of affirming the established term. The final subclause must be seen in the light of his championing of alternative, non-Aristotelian theatrical methods. It refers to the eighteenth-century author Johann Christoph Gottsched's campaign against the common people's enjoyment of the 'foolery and foul abuse' of so-called 'Hanswursttheater', which he perceived as a breaching of Aristotelian rules.<sup>800</sup> Hacks thus used the plebeian category to put forward alternatives to official heritage concepts.

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<sup>797</sup> Hacks, 'Einige Gemeinplätze', p. 121.

<sup>798</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>799</sup> Ibid., pp. 119-120.

<sup>800</sup> Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Third Edition (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 330.

As his following argument shows, he regarded epic theatre as the most appropriate theatrical form of such a simultaneously plebeian and rational aesthetic. He claims that this combination of the plebeian and the rational – specified for the ‘Jetztzeit’ as ‘proletarisch und dialektisch’ – is the main prerequisite of all progressive art. He goes on to argue that epic theatre has its roots in the ‘Volksstück’, the theatrical form of a proletarian culture marked by ‘Wirklichkeitsbewußtsein’ and ‘Materialismus’: ‘Das Volksstück ist episch seit je; es hat ein ungebrochenes Streben nach Totalität [...]. Die Grundfesten des epischen Theaters liegen im Volksstück und nicht im intellektuellen, romantischen Un-Theater.’<sup>801</sup> In the continuous debate on what socialist drama should entail, Hacks favours epic theatre and connects it with the concepts totality and *Volkstümlichkeit* and a dismissal of romanticism.

His use of the term plebeian supports his argument for non-Aristotelian theatre. But in ‘Das realistische Theaterstück’, Hacks distances himself from the term plebeian.<sup>802</sup> This alteration has two reasons, the first of which indicates a discursive shift: it shows that the category, which was already problematic, became impossible to use with its instigator Mayer being under attack. The year between the publication of the two programmatic essays saw an extensive debate about Mayer’s essay ‘Zur Gegenwartslage unserer Literatur’ of November 1956, which with the phrase ‘rotangestrichene Gartenlaube’ develops a critique of the adoption of (petty) bourgeois culture.<sup>803</sup> Mayer’s plea was rejected in a series of articles in *ND* and by Deputy Minister of Culture Abusch.<sup>804</sup> It is striking that Hacks does not mention Mayer in the

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<sup>801</sup> Hacks, ‘Einige Gemeinplätze’, pp. 122-123.

<sup>802</sup> Hacks, ‘Das realistische Theaterstück’, p. 99.

<sup>803</sup> Mayer, ‘Zur Gegenwartslage unserer Literatur’, pp. 449-450.

<sup>804</sup> Meyer, ‘The literary critic Hans Mayer’, pp. 191-192.

latter essay – whereas he did refer to him in the former. This indicates that Hacks wanted to avoid being associated with him.

Hacks's alteration can also be traced back to a suggestion from Brecht during their discussion of 'Einige Gemeinplätze'. Brecht urged him to be prudent, 'damit wir also wenigstens nicht von vornherein Sachen schreiben, wo man also gleich Ärger kriegen wird', as Hacks relates in a 1958 interview with Hans Bunge. Brecht apparently wanted to advise Hacks on how to negotiate views which diverted from official discourses. Brecht considered that the term plebeian was problematic because it did not derive from Marxist terminology. In the interview, Hacks calls Brecht's doubts regarding the term 'wunderbar' and 'wichtig'.<sup>805</sup> It is feasible that, with his retreat, Hacks wanted to avoid the sort of 'Ärger' Brecht hinted at. While he now avoided the use of the category for the present, Hacks still tried to save parts of it – for instance calling the 'plebejische Position [...], als Gegenwind gegen idealistische Abweichungen, eine eminente sozialistische Tugend'.<sup>806</sup>

For Hacks's treatment of language, abandoning the term 'plebeian' means a u-turn, restoring the importance of past higher culture in his conception of what East German socialist theatre should entail. His opposition to taking over the language of the *Klassik* and bourgeois realism vanishes. He argues that, whereas the 'plebejische Sprache' was the only realist language available hitherto (he thus still dismisses bourgeois realism in its time), it has lost its validity now that the working class is in power: 'Sie [die Arbeiterklasse] spricht, bereits herrschend, die alte Sprache der Herrschenden; sie spricht sie nur besser.' While expressing remorse for losing the plebeian

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<sup>805</sup> AdK, Hans-Bunge-Archiv, 1070: 'Gespräch mit Hacks und Wiede über Brecht am 17.2.1958' (transcript).

<sup>806</sup> Hacks, 'Das realistische Theaterstück', p. 100.



language, he claims that ‘Hochdeutsch’ has now become ‘die proletarische Volkssprache’.<sup>807</sup> The turn away from the plebeian category therefore puts into question his previous rejection of the dominant concept of the cultural heritage and opens up the possibility for the reorientation in favour of the *Klassik* which Hacks would carry out in the 1960s with the development of his socialist classicism. Moreover, the concession he makes has consequences for his former argument in favour of epic theatre. It means that he alters his previously positive treatment of the ‘Volksstück’, which he now regards as ‘jene schönen, einfältigen, derben und naiven Gesamtkunstwerke mit ihrer epischen Montagetechnik’. In contrast to his previous argument, Hacks uses the term epic to disqualify a theatrical tradition. Still, his argument preserves the essence of his earlier plea for a synthesis between ‘Gottsched’ and ‘Hanswurst’: the proletarian play, he goes on to argue, should be a synthesis of ‘Volksstil’ and ‘hohem Stil’, since the proletariat is ‘zugleich unterste Klasse und herrschende Klasse’.<sup>808</sup> This synthesis, he concludes, can be found in the ‘realistische Theaterstück’.<sup>809</sup> In the latter of the two programmatic essays, Hacks thus reconciles his ‘dialectical theatre’ with official concepts of the cultural heritage.

### 3.4 Tragedy and Comedy

An issue in Hacks’s rejection of bourgeois traditions that sparked much debate in the late 1950s, as we will see in the next section, is his rejection of tragedy. In ‘Einige Gemeinplätze’ he criticises the idea that tragedy was to be adapted to socialism in such a way that ‘die Katastrophe die Lösung enthülle’. He goes

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<sup>807</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>808</sup> Ibid., pp. 101-102.

<sup>809</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

on to argue that, as there are still conflicts, there are also still ‘tragische Gegenstände’, but tragedy as a method is to be abolished in socialism. Instead, tragic subjects had to be treated in ‘völlig neuartiger Weise’.<sup>810</sup>

His rejection of tragedy does not result in a turn towards comedy, even though Hacks claims the latter to be – unlike the former – capable of connecting with the ‘Kunst einer Klasse, welche damit beschäftigt ist, die Mißstände der Welt [...] objektiv zu überwinden’.<sup>811</sup> Instead, Hacks favours the ‘ernste Witz’ and the ‘didaktische Pointe’.<sup>812</sup> Krause misunderstands this point when he states that Hacks expected theatre to develop from tragedy to comedy, and adds: ‘Die Tragödie steht für das Modell der Klassengesellschaft, die Komödie für die Gesellschaft von Morgen.’<sup>813</sup> Such an interpretation ignores the dialectical basis of Hacks’s aesthetics, which means he sought to attain a synthesis between both opposites.<sup>814</sup> More specifically, Krause’s claim is contradicted by a point Hacks makes in ‘Das realistische Theaterstück’: the true realist play would overcome the antithesis between tragedy and comedy. Hacks declares both concepts to be dispensable since the former treats ‘unüberwindbare, da ernste Widersprüche’ and the latter ‘überwindbare, da unernste Widersprüche’:

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<sup>810</sup> Hacks, ‘Einige Gemeinplätze’, p. 123.

<sup>811</sup> Ibid., pp. 123-124.

<sup>812</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>813</sup> Krause, ‘Wir brauchen unsere 11. Sinfonie’, p. 185.

<sup>814</sup> Bernhard Spies also mistakenly projects Hacks’ turn towards the comedy genre in his theory of socialist classicism back to when Hacks conceived *Die Sorgen und die Macht*, establishing a false contradiction between Hacks’ presumed ‘Programm der sozialistischen Komödie’ and this play. Bernhard Spies, ‘Komisches Welttheater von der Vorstellbarkeit einer guten Macht’, in *Heitere Spiele über den Ausgang der Geschichte: Peter Hacks und die Komödie im Kalten Krieg: Vierte wissenschaftliche Tagung der Peter-Hacks-Gesellschaft*, ed. by Andrea Jäger (Berlin: Aurora, 2012), pp. 13-27 (p. 16).

Die historische Dialektik aber lehrt, daß alle Widersprüche berechtigt sind und alle Widersprüche aufhebbar. [...] Welches Genre handelt über überwindbare ernste Widersprüche? Das realistische Theaterstück. [...] Im realistischen Theaterstück liegt eine Identität von Komik und Tragik vor.<sup>815</sup>

In Hacks's dialectic, reality does not allow for a separation of comical and tragical elements. Moreover, he argues that both genres do not attain the objective of realist theatre:

[...] weder Lachen noch Weinen ist die beabsichtigte Hauptwirkung des realistischen Theaters, sondern die mit Einsicht gepaarte Erregung über das Leben; das Vergnügen an der Einsicht und die aus der Erregung folgende Aktivität.<sup>816</sup>

Hacks's assertion that 'Erregung' and 'Vergnügen' advance 'Einsicht', relates to Brecht's argument that epic theatre aims to convey 'Erkenntnisse', for which the audience's emotions have to be made use of.<sup>817</sup> Hacks's argument for a new aesthetic develops from his criticism of tragedy in 'Einige Gemeinplätze', virtually untouched by the different cultural-political contexts in which the two essays were published.

### 3.4 Contradictory heroes

At the centre of Hacks's programme is his proposal to bring contradictory characters onto the stage, a re-conceptualisation of dramatic characters, which

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<sup>815</sup> Hacks, 'Das realistische Theaterstück', p. 95.

<sup>816</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>817</sup> Jörg-Wilhelm Joost, 'Schriften 1933-1941 zum Theater', in *Brecht Handbuch, 4: Schriften, Journale, Briefe*, ed. by Jan Knopf (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003), pp. 172-188 (p. 180).

is critical of the one-dimensional positive heroes common in socialist realism. Without mentioning him, Hacks builds on Lukács's conception of the 'mittlere Held', average characters typical of their time and embodying the conflicts of their society.<sup>818</sup> Like Loest with his developing heroes, Hacks adapted Lukács's notion to fit in with his supposition that reality in the transitional phase was essentially contradictory.

His criticism of the ways in which many heroes in GDR theatre are pictured relates to the debates about *Schematismus*, a criticism raised by, amongst others, Seghers, against works of literature which relied overtly on dogmatic schemes, instead of a more adequate depiction of more differentiated realities.<sup>819</sup> Hacks alleges in 'Einige Gemeinplätze' that many authors suppose 'angeborene, fixe Unterschiede zwischen Menschen', regardless of all 'soziale Hin und Wider'. He calls this a non-Marxist practice: 'Durch bestimmte Albernheiten des sozialistischen Idealismus oder Schematismus ermuntert, fordern sie Vernachlässigung der Soziologie statt besserer Soziologie, Metaphysik statt vollständiger Dialektik.'<sup>820</sup> Hacks claims the authority of three core terms from Marxist-Leninist discourses (materialism, sociology, and dialectics) and uses their opposites (idealism, neglect of social dimensions, metaphysics) to reject the use of characters he regarded as dominant in East German literature.

Hacks proposed a different, 'dialectical' type of hero which, as he claims in 'Das realistische Theaterstück', reflects the contradictions which make up a personality more realistically: 'der durchschnittliche Mensch hat

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<sup>818</sup> See Lukács, *Der historische Roman*, p. 131 and passim.

<sup>819</sup> See for instance Seghers' comments at the Fourth Writers' Congress. Seghers, 'Der Anteil der Literatur an der Bewußtseinsbildung des Volkes', pp. 51-57.

<sup>820</sup> Hacks, 'Einige Gemeinplätze', pp. 124, 125.

nicht einen Habitus, sondern gegensätzliche Verhaltensweisen, welche mehr oder weniger unkoordiniert nebeneinander herlaufen'.<sup>821</sup> Moreover, he argues that this hero demonstrates that, as all things and people are related in 'widersprüchlichen Zusammenhängen', the same behaviour can have several, conflicting positive and negative functions which form a dialectical unity. Hence, the hero, embodying 'die typischen Widersprüche seiner Gesellschaft' and positioned 'in den typischen widersprüchlichen Situationen seiner Zeit', must be 'zugleich Held und Nicht-Held'.<sup>822</sup> By emphasising that these contradictions are typical, Hacks turns the canonical principle of 'das Typische' against one-dimensional heroes he regarded as symptomatic of East German literature, affirming one aspect of dominant discourses in order to reject another.

The essay concludes with a significant concession to official discourses, though, undercutting his argument for contradictory heroes, perhaps even his entire programme. He notes that 'Helden ohne Widersprüche' are possible in a situation when 'ein ungeheurer Hauptwiderspruch alle anderen Widersprüche verschlingt'.<sup>823</sup> This exception leaves open the possibility of one-dimensional heroes for contemporary East German drama and literature, because the period of socialist construction in the GDR or indeed German division with its alleged Western threat could be interpreted as such a situation. He makes his argument more compliant with official discourses by the example he gives of such an extraordinary situation: the Russian Revolution, its heroes being those of Nikolai Pogodin.<sup>824</sup> Even though

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<sup>821</sup> Hacks, 'Das realistische Theaterstück', p. 102.

<sup>822</sup> Ibid., pp. 103-104.

<sup>823</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>824</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

his latest works could be interpreted as more critical,<sup>825</sup> this Soviet dramatist was best known for his plays portraying socialist construction, such as *Tempo* (1929), about the building of a factory in Stalingrad, and *The Aristocrats* (1934) which, as Cynthia Ann Ruder puts it, ‘supports the programs of socialist construction and social reforging’<sup>826</sup> in portraying forced labour in the construction of the Belomor Canal.<sup>827</sup> Hacks thus left open the possibility of more Soviet-style conceptions of socialist-realist theatre, probably in an endeavour to bring his plea for ‘dialectical theatre’ into compliance with canonical notions of socialist realism. This strategy reduces the subversive effect of his programme.

#### 4. Intervening in the debate on didactic theatre

As the continuity between the two programmatic essays illustrates, critical engagement with official discourses remained possible in the East German literary spheres after the Party leadership cracked down on oppositional intellectuals in late 1956, even if Hacks withdrew from some of his bolder points in the second essay. Indeed, as Petra Stuber argues, that year marks the beginning of a debate in East German theatre on how socialist realist theatre had to be conceived.<sup>828</sup> She calls it the debate on ‘didaktisches Theater’, and claims that it followed the basic patterns of the debates on formalism, since the Party again employed the terms ‘modernism’, ‘decadence’, ‘formalism’, ‘Kleinbürgerlichkeit’ and ‘Revisionismus’ as a means of condemning its

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<sup>825</sup> Caute, *The Dancer Defects*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>826</sup> Cynthia Ann Ruder, *Making History for Stalin: The Story of the Belomor Canal* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), p. 156

<sup>827</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 155-157.

<sup>828</sup> Stuber, *Spielräume und Grenzen*, p. 173.

opponents.<sup>829</sup> As the following sections will show, such accusations were also directed against Hacks.

In March 1959, the ‘Kulturkommission’ of the Politburo, led by Kurella, intervened in this debate: it called a meeting with the ‘Intendanten’ of all Berlin theatres, to denounce Kipphardt, the dramaturgist at the Deutsche Theater (DT). The meeting was also an attack against the ‘Richtung des “dialektischen Theaters”’, the methodological direction both Kipphardt and Hacks represented.<sup>830</sup> As *ND* reported, Kipphardt was accused of subjectivism, not accepting the leading role of the Party, and rejecting socialist realism.<sup>831</sup> Kurella’s ‘Schlusswort’ was clear: ‘Als Staatsfunktionär und als Theaterfunktionär ist Kipphardt durch [...] seine Praxis und durch seine ganze Einstellung, die er gezeigt hat, nämlich erledigt.’<sup>832</sup> A few months later, Kipphardt left the GDR, whereas his friend and main ally in the debate Hacks – who was not attacked in person – abandoned the disputed method and started to develop his theory of ‘sozialistische Klassik’ in the following year.<sup>833</sup> In the preceding debate, both Hacks and Kipphardt proposed engagement with the contradictions that characterised East German reality.

Fritz Erpenbeck, editor of *TdZ*, made the counter-argument in the debate, envisaging a more traditional harmonising model. The latter line of

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<sup>829</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>830</sup> Hanuschek, ‘Natürlich gibt es kein Reich der Pferde’, p. 60.

<sup>831</sup> ‘Kulturkommission beriet mit Berliner Theater-Intendanten: Bericht des “Neuen Deutschland”’, 16. März 1959’, in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED*, pp. 548-549.

<sup>832</sup> Quoted in Hanuschek, ‘Natürlich gibt es kein Reich der Pferde’, p. 63.

<sup>833</sup> His criticism of Brecht’s *Das Leben des Galilei* in his 1959 speech ‘Literatur im Zeitalter der Wissenschaften’ marks his departure from methods associated with Brecht, such as ‘dialectical theatre’. In declaring that Brecht’s positions were right in the past, but redundant in the present, Hacks adopts official SED positions against Brecht. Hacks, ‘Literatur im Zeitalter der Wissenschaften’, pp. 53-55. Cf. Bernd Leistner, ‘Zum Schiller-Bezug bei Peter Hacks’, in *In Sachen Peter Hacks: Studien und Kritiken aus zwei Jahrzehnten* (Mainz: André Thiele, 2011), pp. 19-48 (p. 20).

argument can be illustrated by Erpenbeck's criticism in *ND* on 31 May 1957 of the 'Modernitätsaposteln' (particularly Kipphardt and Langhoff) at the DT. He condemned its recent production of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, arguing that director Langhoff was influenced by wrong modernist views. Erpenbeck insisted that theatre should be 'groß', 'blutvoll' and 'leidenschaftlich', spellbinding the audience.<sup>834</sup> In his response, Kipphardt set out to defend 'heutiges' theatre, and rejected Erpenbeck's stance as a traditionalist one.<sup>835</sup> Kipphardt's response was published in *ND* as well, which means that the Party still allowed for discussion of its theatre policies in its central newspaper. Even so, the official Party line favoured the model Erpenbeck adhered to, as a negative assessment of Brecht by the Kulturabteilung of the Central Committee in October 1957 indicates: Brecht's theatre had critically exposed the 'Widersprüche' of bourgeois society, it argued, but as socialism had solved these contradictions, his methods had become obsolete and had to be replaced by socialist realism.<sup>836</sup>

Hacks's position in this controversy was precarious: he was associated with Erpenbeck's journal as member of its editorial board, whereas his 1955 play 'Die Schlacht bei Lobositz' was to be performed at the disputed DT.<sup>837</sup> Moreover, this play received criticism from the SED, which indicates how much his methods were contested.<sup>838</sup> With 'Die Schlacht bei Lobositz' – which was published that same year by Aufbau-Verlag in a volume of Hacks's early plays – Hacks wanted to contribute to the peace movement by exposing the social structure of armies as a 'Verschwörung der Offiziere gegen die

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<sup>834</sup> Quoted in Stuber, *Spielräume und Grenzen*, p. 175

<sup>835</sup> Ibid., pp. 175-176.

<sup>836</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>837</sup> Hacks & Kipphardt, *Du tust mir wirklich fehlen*, p. 9.

<sup>838</sup> Stuber, *Spielräume und Grenzen*, p. 182.



Menschen'.<sup>839</sup> Completed before his 1955 move to the East, this play did not comply with the political priorities of the SED when the GDR was in the process of establishing its own army, as the criticism of the production by the Kulturabteilung in 1957 shows. The Party did not blame Hacks for the conflict between the play and topical GDR policies, since the play was written while he was still in the West. But its criticism of the decision to call 'Die Schlacht bei Lobositz' a 'sozialistisches Stück', makes clear the disparity between Hacks's methods and those preferred in official discourses.<sup>840</sup> From a close reading of the play it may be concluded that its modernist structure and style were further reasons for the negative official response to it, for instance its lack of a hero with whom the audience could identify and its use of speech which exposes the characters. In the play this technique is used to unmask officers who treat their soldiers well: their friendliness is only a more subtle way of preparing soldiers for battle.<sup>841</sup>

As his self-positioning in the programmatic essays suggests, Hacks sympathised with Kipphardt's stance. In his 1957 article 'Das Theater der Gegenwart', he repeats his plea for 'dialectical theatre', as well as his criticism of contemporaneous GDR theatre and the cultural heritage. He criticises the general state of GDR theatrical practice while affirming socialist realism: 'Ich bin der Meinung, daß die Theorie des sozialistischen Realismus besser ist als die Anwendung, die das zeitgenössische Drama gelegentlich von ihr gemacht hat.' He affirms the canonical principles of 'Verständlichkeit', 'Perspektive',

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<sup>839</sup> Peter Hacks, 'Die Schlacht bei Lobositz: Anmerkungen', in *Theaterstücke* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1957), pp. 301-305 (p. 303).

<sup>840</sup> Stuber, *Spielräume und Grenzen*, p. 182. At the 1959 meeting of the Politburo's 'Kulturkommission', held to condemn Kipphardt, Hans Grümmer criticised the play once more as 'pazifistisch'. See Hanuschek, 'Natürlich gibt es kein Reich der Pferde', p. 55.

<sup>841</sup> Peter Hacks, 'Die Schlacht bei Lobositz', in *Theaterstücke* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1957), pp. 209-300.

‘des Typischen (was ich nicht mit dem Schematischen verwechsle)’, the positive hero (possible only if ‘die Fabel und die historischen Umstände ihn mir ermöglichen’), but calls them secondary to his ‘dialectical’ principles. He finally claims that socialist realism has to be ‘dialektischer Realismus’.<sup>842</sup> As in the essays discussed above, his challenge to dominant discourses interplays with an affirmation of elements from these discourses, contributing to and simultaneously determined by the canonical status of the terms.

His criticism of contemporaneous theatre again links in with a critique of the dominant concepts of cultural heritage, which he challenges by using terms derived from official discourses. He highlights the alleged hegemony in East German theatre of an idealist tradition ‘des deutschen Klassizismus und seiner Epigonen’, and – surprisingly – ‘die mechanische Tradition des Naturalismus’. Whereas the former was part of the officially endorsed heritage for socialist culture, the latter was frowned upon in official SED aesthetic policies.<sup>843</sup> By linking existing forms of socialist realism to naturalism, and by calling the *deutsche Klassik* idealistic, Hacks gives differing, alternative interpretations of patterns from official discourse. As he goes on to claim a place for the allegedly neglected ‘große realistische Tradition des deutschen Theaterstücks, die [...] von J.M.R. Lenz über Georg Büchner zu Bertolt Brecht führt’, he turns the principle of realism – a canonical principle he adhered to – against the theatrical traditions preferred in official heritage concepts.<sup>844</sup> By presenting writers who were outside the official canon of classical theatre as the quintessential tradition of realist drama, Hacks seeks to alter the meaning of socialist realism, and simultaneously affirms it as a principle. This double

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<sup>842</sup> Hacks, ‘Das Theater der Gegenwart’, p. 127.

<sup>843</sup> See Bonnke, *Kunst in Produktion*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>844</sup> Hacks, ‘Das Theater der Gegenwart’, p. 128.

effect – affirmation through discussion – is similar to Wieland Herzfelde's essays from the early 1950s.

Although writing in the past tense throughout this critical line of argument, Hacks concludes by pointing to the persisting relevance of his argument: 'Ich beschreibe diese Zustände, weil sie noch nicht überwunden sind.'<sup>845</sup> This final sentence indicates that, although originally written for a Soviet journal, this criticism of East German theatre must be seen in the context of the debate on didactic theatre.

#### 4.1 'Politdramaturgie'

From the onset, Hacks was involved in the debate on didactic theatre, as his plea for more politicised forms of dramaturgy in *Theater der Zeit* (November 1956) shows: 'Bitte nicht erschrecken: Polit-Dramaturgie!'.<sup>846</sup> Hacks criticises a lack of political theatre in East Germany in order to bring forward his theatrical principles: what he calls dialectical theatre and a Brechtian notion of the audience's involvement. He identifies the early 1950s as a period 'des "politischen" Theaters [...], die artistisch und politisch wenig getaugt hat', and claims that this period was followed by the current lack of political theatre.<sup>847</sup> He signals a deficiency in East German theatre of 'dialectics' and of theatrical means to stimulate an audience 'zur kritischen Stellungnahme gegen Personen eines Stücks': 'Man hat solche Mittel nicht angewendet. Man spielt reaktionäres Unterhaltungstheater.'<sup>848</sup> In the essays against Aristotelian theatre

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<sup>845</sup> Ibid.

<sup>846</sup> Peter Hacks, 'Bitte nicht erschrecken: Polit-Dramaturgie!', *Theater der Zeit: Zeitschrift für Politik und Theater*, 11.11 (1956), 5-6.

<sup>847</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>848</sup> Ibid., pp. 5-6.

he published over the next years, Hacks defends his claim that traditional theatre, as advocated by official cultural policies, was reactionary.

To overcome the dominance of methods which aim at identification with the characters on stage, and to stimulate modernist methods which seek to stimulate critical reflection, Hacks pleads for 'Politdramaturgie'. Such a political dramaturgy should make sure that a play 'einen modernen Arbeiter etwas angeh[t]'. As he laments the fact that theatre conceptions have not changed with the changing of the audience, Hacks opposes the adoption of traditional theatrical methods. To adapt a play to the needs of the working class audience, 'Politdramaturgie' should go beyond the text, and show failures of the author if necessary: 'Es genügt nicht, daß es [das Stück] bloß gut ist oder woanders ein Erfolg oder von Goethe.'<sup>849</sup> After this ironic comment on the iconic figure of the *Klassik*, he finally refers to past debates on this issue, in which Brecht had showed the solution:

Und das traurigste ist, die Dinge, die hier gesagt werden, sind der Welt seit langem bekannt. Sie sind aufgeschrieben, und sie werden jedermann öffentlich vorgeführt, und fast ohne Nutzen. ('Gut, das ist das Berliner Ensemble. Aber wo ist das sozialistische Theater?') Das sozialistische Theater existiert nicht. Und Brecht ist jetzt schon wieder tot.<sup>850</sup>

Hacks's expression of grief over the death of Brecht links in with his reliance on him in aesthetic matters. Asserting the non-existence of socialist theatre while referring to Brechtian methods as the means of overcoming this deficit, was bound to anger Party officials. Hans Grümmer of the SED Kulturabteilung

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<sup>849</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>850</sup> Ibid.

responded with an article in *ND* accusing Hacks of promoting ‘liberalistische und bürgerliche Tendenzen’.<sup>851</sup> Grümmer’s criticism was directed at Hacks’s claim that Marxism-Leninism attained a synthesis of ‘äusserster Liberalität’ and ‘äusserster Radikalität’.<sup>852</sup> The fact that this attack was published in *ND* is an indication of the prominent position Hacks had in this debate, and of the importance given to it in SED discourses.

Hacks replied on 12 September 1957 with partial self-criticism, admitting to unclear phrasing, while keeping his argument intact.<sup>853</sup> This reply is notable for its critical evaluation of the formalism campaign, affirming its objectives, but slating the dogmatism he saw as its effect. Hacks makes it clear that, when dismissing the dogmatism of the ‘political’ theatre of the early 1950s, he did not refer to Party policies. He ascribes the formalism resolution of 1951 an ‘unentbehrliche Funktion’ as it enforced ‘die Durchsetzung der führenden Rolle der Partei der Arbeiterklasse auch auf dem Gebiet der Kunst’ and made clear that ‘Kunstfragen Ideologiefragen sind und ideologischer Beurteilung unterliegen’. The formalism debate made artists conscious of ‘bestimmte Prinzipien sozialistischer Kunst’ such as ‘Verständlichkeit oder das des Zeigens der revolutionären Entwicklung’. This support of the formalism campaign and of two principal elements of official socialist realist discourses – one of which was hardly compatible with Hacks’s repeated claim that realist art had to focus on the conflicts of the present rather than the positive future – creates room for his critical evaluation of an ‘Atmosphäre des Dogmatismus’, caused by wrong ‘Anwendung’ of this campaign throughout East Germany

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<sup>851</sup> Hans Grümmer, ‘Legendenbildung und Parteibeschlüsse: Zur Diskussion um das sozialistische Theater’, *Neues Deutschland*, 27 August 1957, p. 4.

<sup>852</sup> Hacks, ‘Bitte nicht erschrecken: Polit-Dramaturgie!’, p. 5.

<sup>853</sup> Peter Hacks, ‘Politischer Spielplan’, *Neues Deutschland*, 12 September 1957, p. 5.

‘infolge des unentwickelten Bewusstseins’. Even though he laments an atmosphere of dogmatism, official policy is spared criticism and even affirmed; nameless others are blamed for dogmatism, which is dismissed as the result of underdeveloped socialist consciousness.<sup>854</sup>

Hacks’s negative assessment of early 1950s East German theatre complies with the allegations of *Schematismus* raised by critics at the Writers’ Congress of 1956, but also by SED officials during the 1956 crisis, for instance Abusch’s claim in *ND* of 27 July 1956 that this period had not produced enough works of ‘bleibender Bedeutung’, due to ‘schematisierenden Einflüsse’.<sup>855</sup> Hacks puts forward his proposal of dialectical theatre and ‘Politdramaturgie’ as the solution in theatre to the problem of *Schematismus* in socialist realism. He strengthens his proposal with the authoritative adjectives ‘proletarisch’, ‘kämpferisch’, ‘volksnah’.<sup>856</sup> His line of argument serves to make his concepts compatible with the directives of the formalism resolution, while dismissing the actual campaign.

An example of how Hacks envisaged ‘Politdramaturgie’ would work in practice, and how he sought to influence an actual theatre production, is his critique of a performance of Gerhart Hauptmann’s play ‘Die Weber’ at the Berliner Volksbühne, published in *TdZ* in December 1957.<sup>857</sup> The notion that dramaturgists should alter texts to point out contradictions forcing the audience to critically engage with the subject matter is central to his critique of the production. He points out that the play contains two excellent contradictions

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<sup>854</sup> Ibid.; for the manuscript, see DLA, A: Hacks, Prosa: Aufsätze, ‘o.T. (“Hans Grümmer hat mich leider...”), 06.09.1957’.

<sup>855</sup> Alexander Abusch, ‘Zu einigen Fragen der Literatur und Kunst: Aufsatz von Alexander Abusch, 27. Juli 1956’, in *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED*, p. 443.

<sup>856</sup> DLA, A: Hacks, Prosa: Aufsätze, ‘o.T. (“Hans Grümmer hat mich leider...”), 06.09.1957’.

<sup>857</sup> Peter Hacks, ‘Behandlung zweier Widersprüche in Hauptmanns “Die Weber”’, *Theater der Zeit: Zeitschrift für Politik und Theater*, 12.12 (1957), 7-8.

containing ‘soziale Beweiskraft’, but which are insufficiently worked out: ‘Hauptmann hat da etwas hervorragend gemacht, aber er hat es anders gemacht, als man es heute machen würde.’<sup>858</sup> Hacks’s emphasis on the topicality of his proposal fits in with Kipphardt’s insistence that the Brechtian methods he proposed were ‘heutig’ – both Hacks and Kipphardt contradict the Party’s claim that Brecht’s approach belonged to the past.<sup>859</sup> The first contradiction in ‘Die Weber’ entails a poor family complaining about their landlord: ‘Er ist geizig. [...] Sie reden von ihm als von einem ihrer Ausbeuter.’ As it turns out, the landlord is neither evil nor stingy, but just as poor as the deprived family. But as this ‘wichtiger und ernster Widerspruch: der Ausgebeutete als Ausbeuter’ is announced prior to the landlord’s appearance, the audience is prevented from discovering the contradiction themselves and does not experience ‘Verwunderung’. It would have been better, Hacks argues, if the landlord’s appearance on stage alone could compel the audience to see, to its astonishment, ‘daß er nicht Henker ist, sondern selbst Opfer’. Hacks detects a similar shortcoming regarding the second contradiction. Hilse, one of the weavers, ‘gelähmt durch das Opium der Religion’, refuses to join the uprising but is hit by a stray bullet: ‘gerade den Drückeberger erwischt der Feind. Welch eine Moral. Auch der sich von seiner Klasse trennt, lernen wir, hat ihre Niederlagen zu tragen [...]’.<sup>860</sup> This political message, Hacks maintains, is weakened because Hauptmann covers up the contradiction by foreshadowing Hilse’s death. Hacks again proposes an approach that actively involves the audience and seeks to arouse conflict within it:

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<sup>858</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>859</sup> Stuber, *Spielräume und Grenzen*, p. 177.

<sup>860</sup> Hacks, ‘Behandlung zweier Widersprüche in Hauptmanns “Die Weber”’, p. 7.

Wäre es nicht wiederum wirksamer, wenn das Publikum vom Autor zu der Meinung verleitet würde, Hilses Weg wäre ein Ausweg? Wenn er diesen gangbar scheinenden Weg vielleicht sogar in einer Hälfte des Herzens mit dem Hilse ginge und erst durch seinen erstaunlichen Tod gezwungen würde, die gehabte Meinung zu revidieren? Müßte es da nicht gründlicher nachdenken, und richtiger? Was es doch soll.<sup>861</sup>

The presented argument testifies how much Hacks's position was influenced by Brecht's call at the 1956 Writers' Congress for theatrical methods which provoke a struggle between the new and the old societal order within the audience, even if Hacks's proposal would require the audience to identify to a certain extent with the character. Hacks shows awareness of challenging dominant concepts as he states that 'ich beim Darstellen von Widersprüchen das (unschickliche) Verfahren der Überraschung für wertvoller halte als das (schickliche) der Vorbereitung'.<sup>862</sup> In line with his plea for a 'Politdramaturgie' which adapts theatrical texts to the needs of the present-day audience of workers, Hacks proposes to change the cited passages, a move away from Hauptmann's text.

#### 4.2 An SED offer of dialogue

The issue of faithfulness to the original text, which Hacks challenged in his concept of 'Politdramaturgie', was central to the discussion at a meeting organised by the Culture Ministry in October 1957. As Stuber notes, two concepts of theatre collided: 'für oder gegen die Eigenständigkeit des Theaters

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<sup>861</sup> Ibid., pp. 7-8.

<sup>862</sup> Ibid., p. 8.



gegenüber dem Stück und für oder wider ein nicht-illusionistisches Theatermodell im Sinne Brechts’.<sup>863</sup>

At the meeting, Kipphardt argued against ‘Werktreue’ and defended Brechtian methods by describing them as ‘sozialistisches Theater’. Kipphardt argued that Brecht’s methods were useful for socialism, because they bring the audience ‘auf kritische Positionen’ and show contradictions in a dialectical way.<sup>864</sup> He thus applied a similar strategy as Hacks in the programmatic essays cited above (the latter of which was published that same month, but written during the summer). As Stuber notes, Hacks supported Kipphardt, whereas Erpenbeck and the director of the Volkstheater Rostock, Hanns-Anselm Perten, opposed his plea for Brecht, claiming that only Stanislavsky’s method was progressive. Perten accused Hacks and Kipphardt of a Western ‘Hang zur Modernität’.<sup>865</sup> Afterwards, the Kulturabteilung assessed Kipphardt’s and Hacks’s position as incorrect.<sup>866</sup>

The meeting of October 1957 was held in preparation for the public SED ‘Kulturkonferenz’ held that same month, at which, as Michael David Richardson notes, ‘Western “decadent” cultural influences were again vilified’, but ‘the proletarian-revolutionary literature of the Weimar period that was often derided for its modernist tendencies, was not rejected out of hand as it had previously been’. Hacks was among those who subsequently adopted these proletarian-revolutionary techniques, Richardson adds.<sup>867</sup> As we have seen

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<sup>863</sup> Stuber, *Spielräume und Grenzen*, p. 176.

<sup>864</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>865</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>866</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>867</sup> Michael David Richardson, *Revolutionary Theatre and the Classical Heritage: Inheritance and Appropriation from Weimar to the GDR* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 184.

though, Hacks had already proposed such methods and did not wait for permission to pursue his aesthetic programme.

The Party's main cultural political institution opposed Hacks's stance, who did not get to speak at the conference, for which Kurella, secretary of the Kulturabteilung, apologised in a letter of 28 October. Kurella asked him to 'mir in irgendeiner Form mitzuteilen, was Sie zur Sache sagen wollten', as the Kulturabteilung was 'für die weitere Arbeit sehr daran interessiert, Ihre Gedanken und gegebenenfalls Vorschläge zu erfahren'.<sup>868</sup> Outside the context of the conference, Kurella thus stimulated the discussion with and among theatre makers, and his letter is an offer to form a coalition.

In a letter of 4 November, Hacks accepted Kurella's offer of dialogue. He emphasises that as there was 'eine Reihe von Gegenständen [...] über die sich zu verständigen nett und nützlich wäre', there was agreement on the main point: 'dass der Ausschließlichkeitsanspruch der marxistisch-leninistischen Theorie in der Kunst endlich und gründlich durchgesetzt werden muss', and 'dass die Unterstützung der Politik der SED' was among art's 'vornehmsten Aufgaben'. The discussion was about the 'Modalitäten, wie das zu machen sei'. He poses some open questions, the first of which indicates his opposition in theatrical aesthetics: 'Inhalt und Form der Theaterdiskussion'.<sup>869</sup> He regards the questions he discussed in his essays as genuinely open for discussion, with agreement on the main point: art should support SED policy and could only be based on Marxist-Leninist theory.

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<sup>868</sup> DLA, A: Hacks, Korrespondenz, 'Kurella, Alfred an Hacks, Peter, 1957-1962': 'Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, Zentralkomitee, Abteilung Kultur (Kurella) an Hacks, 28.10.1957'.

<sup>869</sup> DLA, A: Hacks, Korrespondenz, 'Hacks, Peter an Kurella, Alfred, 1957-1972': 'Hacks an Alfred Kurella, Zentralkomitee der SED, Abteilung Kultur, 4.11.1957'.

In his reply of December 1957, Kurella commented on ‘Das realistische Theaterstück’. Without expressing any agreement, he reports to have read it ‘mit grossem Vergnügen’ and likens Hacks to the young Brecht:

Ich glaube, Ihre Denksituation – Ihr Vergnügen an der immer neuen Aufdeckung der Dialektik – zu verstehen. Ich habe etwas ganz ähnliches vor einem Vierteljahrhundert an Brecht erlebt, mit dem ich in der Zeit, als er diese Entdeckung für sich machte, ziemlich eng verbunden war. Sie haben das Glück, dass Ihnen diese Erlebnisse in einer historisch späteren Etappe zuteil werden, und das ist, glaube ich, eine Chance: Sie können dabei weiter kommen als es Brecht vergönnt war. Aber da sind wir schon bei einem der Themen, auf die wir sicher kommen, wenn wir, wo auch immer, mit dem Gespräch beginnen.<sup>870</sup>

At first sight this is a strikingly positive approach from this high functionary, especially considering the negative assessment of Hacks’s stance in the debate in East German theatre; it indicates that there was no singular official discourse which put a taboo on Brechtian approaches to theatre, but rather a debate taking place among playwrights, directors and Party functionaries. Kurella’s line of argument implies that Brecht belonged to a past historical phase, and as he claims that Hacks can reach more in the present phase, this means that he could come closer to the Party’s principles. Was the planned start of a dialogue intended to commit Hacks more to the Party line?

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<sup>870</sup> DLA, A: Hacks, Korrespondenz, ‘Kurella, Alfred an Hacks, Peter, 1957-1962’: ‘Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, Zentralkomitee, Kommission für Fragen der Kultur beim Politbüro (Kurella) an Peter Hacks’, 17 December 1957.

### 4.3 Challenging Aristotelian theatre

In the papers from Hacks's estate I found no reference to their conversation.

As his polemical 'Warnung' against Aristotelian theatre concepts, published in *TdZ* in February 1958, shows, Hacks certainly did not adjust his stance, but continued to challenge dominant theatrical concepts. The article denounces Aristotelian drama by presenting its founder as a political reactionary whose theatre consolidates class relationships.<sup>871</sup>

Aristotle's contribution to drama, Hacks argues, was its 'Unschädlichmachung [...] für Ausbeutergesellschaften'. This 'Volksfeind' had allegedly founded a theory of tragedy that, in order to attain a 'klassenstaaterhaltenden Effekt', sought to attain 'Beruhigung' (Hacks's interpretation of Aristotelian catharsis) and upheld 'Unwissenheit'. Moreover, Aristotelian tragedy was intent on stimulating the 'Passivität des Zuschauers' and restricting their 'Urteil'.<sup>872</sup> As Hacks calls dialectical theatre and the 'plebejische Position' the enemies of tragedy, he contrasts his interpretation of Aristotle to his own programme. This becomes most clear as he points out that the language of tragedy is 'die der Gebildeten' instead of 'der Niedrigen'.<sup>873</sup> Interestingly, Hacks now returns to the plebeian tradition after his dismissal of it in 1957.

In the second part of the essay, Hacks presents Aristotle's political ideas as reactionary, in order to disqualify his poetics. He points at Aristotle's approval of class and gender relations as naturally given and unchangeable, and calls Aristotle 'keinen guten Lehrmeister'. He concludes: 'Ich [...] fürchte,

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<sup>871</sup> Peter Hacks, 'Warnung', *Theater der Zeit: Zeitschrift für Politik und Theater*, 13.2 (1958), 33-34.

<sup>872</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>873</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

es ist nicht überflüssig, vor diesem Apologeten zu warnen.’<sup>874</sup> Hacks counters aesthetic discourses he found dominant in East German theatre, and actively supported by SED cultural policies, by pointing at their flawed origins, in order to claim a place for an alternative, modern concept.

Hacks’s assertion that the theatrical methods favoured by official *Erbepolitik* were reactionary, prompted hostile reactions, to which he responds in May 1958 with an article in *TdZ*, maintaining his criticism. Defying Erpenbeck’s view that Aristotelian theatre is realist theatre, Hacks repeats his central point, calling Aristotle ‘volksfeindlich und antidialektisch’.<sup>875</sup> His denunciation of Aristotelian theatre was thus based on his particular interpretation of realism as dialectics, as expressing society’s conflicts, and of *Volkstümlichkeit* as a break with the cultural heritage of the upper classes.

Hacks’s anti-Aristotelian aesthetics, his insistence on contradictions, as well as his attitudes towards the cultural heritage, were heavily criticised in a number of contributions to *TdZ*, the main objections being that his criticism damaged the positive relationship to the humanist cultural heritage.<sup>876</sup> The most extensive article was published in December 1958 by three final-year Philosophy students of the Humboldt Universität – the future dissident Rudolf Bahro, Ulrich Döring, and Heidi Mühlberg. The three authors focus on ‘Das realistische Theaterstück’, claiming that this essay explained the background to Hacks’s unacceptable interpretation of Aristotle.<sup>877</sup> Their attack once more

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<sup>874</sup> Ibid.

<sup>875</sup> Peter Hacks, ‘An einige Aristoteliker’, *Theater der Zeit: Zeitschrift für Politik und Theater*, 13.5 (1958), 23-28 (p. 23).

<sup>876</sup> Schlenker, *Das ‘kulturelle Erbe’ in der DDR*, pp. 174-175.

<sup>877</sup> Rudolf Bahro, Ulrich Döring & Heidi Mühlberg, ‘Kritische Bemerkungen zu einigen Kunsttheorien von Peter Hacks’, *Theater der Zeit: Zeitschrift für Politik und Theater*, 13.12 (1958), Supplement, 19-32 (p. 19).

indicates that much of Hacks's programme as laid down in 'Das realistische Theaterstück' collided with dominant aesthetics.

Whereas Hacks had attempted to engage with official discourse and alter official conceptions of socialist realism, Bahro, Döring and Mühlberg reject his engagement and dismiss him as a revisionist renegade. The authors attack him at the heart of his theoretical framework, asserting a difference between his and Marxist dialectics. They criticise his notion of dialectical characters and of realism as an '*Arrangement der Widersprüche*'.<sup>878</sup> As they claim that the latter notion would not allow differentiation between the opposing forces in society, they accuse Hacks of neglecting the principle of partisanship, 'das wichtigste Kriterium zur Unterscheidung und Abgrenzung der sozialistischen Kunst'.<sup>879</sup> Hacks purportedly failed to fulfil another principle of socialist realism, because his claim that realist art cannot depict future harmony would mean that he did not allow for a 'Begreifen der Wirklichkeit in ihrer Entwicklung'.<sup>880</sup> As they declare Hacks's concepts to be incompatible with the principles of partisanship and the representation of revolutionary development, Bahro, Döring and Mühlberg exclude him from the socialist realist consensus.

The authors furthermore criticise Hacks's critical engagement with official *Erbepolitik*, as they note that he demands a revision 'eines der wichtigsten Prinzipien unserer Kulturpolitik', namely 'unsere positive Einstellung zum humanistischen Erbe', and object to his criticism of the traditions 'des klassischen Realismus'.<sup>881</sup> Hacks's essay, they conclude,

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<sup>878</sup> Ibid., 20. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>879</sup> Ibid., pp. 20-21.

<sup>880</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>881</sup> Ibid., 22.

contains a ‘falsche Richtung’ which results from his ‘unrichtigen Herangehen an die Wirklichkeit’ (not based on realist traditions) and ‘idealistischen Denkmethode’.<sup>882</sup> These are precisely the points that Hacks raised against the dominant positions that Bahro, Döring and Mühlberg continue to defend.

Moreover, the authors contend that Hacks makes ‘einige Ausfälle’ against SED cultural policies. They claim that his opposition to ‘Schematismus’ targets artists who ‘im Arbeiter von heute schon den Menschen der klassenlosen Gesellschaft erkennen’, and is hence opposed to the Party ‘die täglich bemüht ist, den Künstlern dieses gestaltungsfrohe Vertrauen auf den Menschen von morgen im Menschen von heute zu vermitteln’. They finally disqualify his use of terms like “*soziologisches Schema*” und “*sozialistischer Idealismus*” as an ‘Angriff auf die Grundlagen des sozialistischen Realismus’.<sup>883</sup> Their denunciation of Hacks’s attempt to contribute to the theory of socialist realism, presenting him instead as an enemy of Party cultural politics, was published in the key East German journal on theatre. The editor Erpenbeck, a supporter of the official *Erbepolitik* with its emphasis on traditional Aristotelian theatre, pushed for its publication.<sup>884</sup> The attack heralds a stricter line in this debate, which culminated in the denunciation of Kipphardt at the dramaturgists’ meeting three months after the publication of the essay by Bahro, Döring and Mühlberg.<sup>885</sup>

Hacks found the article ‘böswillig und unredlich’ and resigned from the ‘Redaktionskollegium’ of the journal in the same month of its publication. As

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<sup>882</sup> Ibid., pp. 22-23.

<sup>883</sup> Ibid., p. 25. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>884</sup> DLA, A: Hacks, Korrespondenz, ‘Hacks, Peter an Theater der Zeit 1955-1980’, ‘Hacks an Fritz Erpenbeck, Redaktion Theater der Zeit’, 19 December 1958.

<sup>885</sup> As Kipphardt wrote to Hacks, the ‘großen kulturpolitischen Differenzen’ disrupted his ‘Arbeitsmöglichkeiten’. Hacks & Kipphardt, *Du tust mir wirklich fehlen*, p. 18.

he wrote to Erpenbeck, this attack was the direct, but not his only reason for leaving the journal: ‘Natürlich hängt dieser Entschluss auch damit zusammen, dass es dem Redaktionskollegium ohnehin nie gelungen ist, irgendeinen Einfluss auf den kulturpolitischen Stil der Zeitschrift zu nehmen.’<sup>886</sup> Hacks was dissatisfied with the aesthetic direction Erpenbeck, the champion of the anti-Brechtian, traditional line in the debate on GDR theatre, gave to the journal.

#### 4.4 The polemic against Zwerenz

Hacks’s harsh criticism of the Aristotelian aesthetics of Gerhard Zwerenz, published in *TdZ*, March 1957, occurred in the context of this same debate.<sup>887</sup> This polemic demonstrates the complex ways in which political and aesthetic issues were often intertwined. The article must be seen as a critical contribution to the debate on didactic theatre, in which Zwerenz took the dominant line, as well as in the light of the fact that Zwerenz was attacked at a Leipzig Party meeting in January 1957, because of his critical political stances.<sup>888</sup> Archival evidence confirms Hacks’s claim that he conceived the article before the showdown against Zwerenz.<sup>889</sup> But it remains questionable whether Hacks could have been unaware of Zwerenz’s precarious position, as his critical writings were well-known and like-minded intellectuals had already

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<sup>886</sup> DLA, A: Hacks, Korrespondenz, ‘Hacks, Peter an Theater der Zeit 1955-1980’, ‘Hacks an Fritz Erpenbeck, Redaktion Theater der Zeit’, 19 December 1958.

<sup>887</sup> Peter Hacks, ‘Aristoteles, Brecht oder Zwerenz?’, *Theater der Zeit: Zeitschrift für Politik und Theater*, 12.3 (1957), Supplement, 2-7.

<sup>888</sup> Loest, *Durch die Erde ein Riß*, p. 285.

<sup>889</sup> On 23 March, Hacks wrote to Zwerenz: ‘Ich weiss nicht, wann die von Ihnen angedeuteten Schwierigkeiten vorfielen; vielleicht rechtfertigt es mich in dieser Sache, wenn ich Ihnen sage, dass mein Artikel am 2.1. (nachweislich) fertig vorlag.’ DLA, A: Hacks, Korrespondenz, ‘Hacks, Peter Briefe von ihm an Zwerenz, Gerhard, 1957’: ‘Hacks an Zwerenz’, 23 March 1957. The final manuscript is dated 22 January 1957, the same month that Zwerenz fell from grace: DLA, A: Hacks, Prosa: Aufsätze, ‘Aristoteles, Brecht oder Zwerenz?’.



been arrested.<sup>890</sup> Werner Mittenzwei claims that Hacks's dismissal had nothing to do with Zwerenz's political troubles; such a view is supported by the content of Hacks's essay, but not by the circumstances of its publication.<sup>891</sup>

In his dismissive article, Hacks slates Zwerenz's 1956 book *Aristotelische und Brechtsche Dramatik*, which argues that not Brechtian, but Aristotelian drama, as performed by the majority of GDR theatres, leads the way to the future.<sup>892</sup> Hacks defends the former, and repeats the criticisms he had made in the essays quoted above, claiming that Aristotelian tragedy cannot transmit social and political 'Zusammenhänge'. He calls Zwerenz's book 'unerquicklich [...], weil es ein äußerst schlechtes Buch gegen Brecht ist', and claims that Zwerenz's critique shows a lack of understanding: 'Er kennt gar nicht Brechts Dramaturgie, die fast nichts als die in Dramaturgie umgesetzte Dialektik ist'.<sup>893</sup> With his defence of the 'Verfremdungs-Effekt', this qualification of Brechtian dramaturgy indicates how much Hacks's 'dialectical theatre' built upon his reading of Brecht.<sup>894</sup> His response to Zwerenz's statement that Brecht 'verhindert große Gefühle', claiming that only controlled emotions are part of Brechtian theatre,<sup>895</sup> in turn relates to Brecht's statement at the 1956 congress: 'Wir müssen nicht unbedingt von der Bourgeoisie auch das übernehmen, daß man konstant die hohen Gefühle und die niedrigen gefühle [*sic*] hat, was immer nur die Gefühle der Hohen und die gefühle [*sic*]

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<sup>890</sup> Zwerenz believed Hacks' explanation and dropped the accusation. DLA, A: Hacks, Korrespondenz, 'Hacks, Peter Briefe von ihm an Zwerenz, Gerhard, 1957': 'Zwerenz an Hacks', 28 March 1957.

<sup>891</sup> Werner Mittenzwei, *Zwielicht: Auf der Suche nach dem Sinn einer vergangenen Zeit* (Leipzig: Faber & Faber, 2004), pp. 147-148.

<sup>892</sup> Gerhard Zwerenz, 'Aristotelische und Brechtsche Dramatik', in *Politische Schriften*, ed. by Fritz Zschech (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1975), pp. 10-87 (pp. 75-82). Originally published as Gerhard Zwerenz, *Aristotelische und Brechtsche Dramatik* (Rudolstadt: Greifenverlag, 1956).

<sup>893</sup> Hacks, 'Aristoteles, Brecht oder Zwerenz?', p. 2

<sup>894</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-3.

<sup>895</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

der Niedrigen waren.<sup>896</sup> Brecht's statement is taken up in Hacks's criticism of official *Erbepolitik*, which forms the background to his dismissal of Zwerenz's plea for Aristotelian tragedy.

Hacks claims that Zwerenz's central argument derives from a 'klassenbedingt starres Schema von feudal-idealistischer Tragödie und plebejisch-naturalistischer Komödie'. Realist theatre, he goes on to argue, does not fit into this out-dated scheme; Zwerenz turns a blind eye to forms beyond his 'abgenutzten, leeren Monster-Begriffen', which means he does not understand 'das Neue'.<sup>897</sup> Following this attack on Zwerenz's critique of Brecht, Hacks dismisses his plea for Aristotelian tragedy: the subjectivity of tragedy, with its individual heroes, does not suffice 'um Menschen des wissenschaftlichen Zeitalters Zuversicht zu verleihen'. Instead, 'Erkenntnis gesellschaftlicher und ökonomischer Zusammenhänge' is required: 'Weniger X's Mut als die Durchführbarkeit von X's Sache.' Theatre plays should aim to go 'auf Verallgemeinerungen hinaus' and provoke 'Denkakte'. This in turn could only be achieved according to Brecht's 'neuartige' methods instead of 'das Fühlen ohne Analyse' proposed by Zwerenz, Hacks concludes.<sup>898</sup>

Hacks's argument suggests that his polemic is indeed intended as a contribution to the debate going on in East German theatre. It relates to positions Hacks also adopted elsewhere: his criticism of the canonisation of Aristotle and his championing of Brechtian theatre. It contains no reference to the attacks Zwerenz was confronted with at the time of publication. Yet, Hacks's criticism of him and his sarcastic tone also contributed to the wider context of personal attacks against Zwerenz.

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<sup>896</sup> Brecht, 'Ausführungen vor der Sektion Dramatik', p. 158.

<sup>897</sup> Hacks, 'Aristoteles, Brecht oder Zwerenz?', p. 4.

<sup>898</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

Even more problematic is his sneer at Zwerenz in the opening lines of ‘Das realistische Theaterstück’, as it was finalised months later, when Hacks must have been aware of Zwerenz’s precarious position. Hacks scorns Zwerenz by referring critically to his argument for Aristotelian tragedy and adding: ‘*ich sage besser nicht wer*’ – thus drawing extra attention to the name he avoids mentioning, but names in subtext.<sup>899</sup> On the other hand this example taken from one of his key programmatic essays, indicates that his criticism of Zwerenz was part of his wider argument for alternative theatrical methods.

## 5. Two ‘dialectical’ plays

During the second half of the 1950s, Hacks wrote two theatre plays, in which he put his aesthetic programme into practice: ‘Der Müller von Sanssouci’ in 1957 and ‘Die Sorgen und die Macht’, the first version of which was completed in 1959. As the following section shows, the aesthetics of ‘dialectical realism’ resulted in both plays conveying political messages which undermined their intention to legitimise the SED regime and affirm its policies.

### 5.1 ‘Der Müller von Sanssouci’

In the light of Hacks’s aesthetic programme, Heukenkamp’s reading of ‘Der Müller von Sanssouci’ becomes problematic.<sup>900</sup> She asserts that this play shows to what effect he separated didactics and art:

Die Überlieferung hätte eine Wendung ins Lehrhafte nahegelegt. Aber die Fabel demonstriert das Gegenteil. Das Spiel dreht sich [...] um die

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<sup>899</sup> Hacks, ‘Das realistische Theaterstück’, p. 90. Emphasis in original text.

<sup>900</sup> Heukenkamp, ‘Eine Sache, die der Weltgeist vorgesehen hat’, p. 630.

Durchsetzung des Rechts, das einer vernünftigen Staatsführung bedarf. Dafür findet der König jedoch keinen Partner in seinem bürgerlichen Untertanen, dem Müller, der [...] das aufstrebende Bürgertum hätte verkörpern müssen. Der Witz besteht gerade darin, das der König das geschichtlich Nötige *selbst* tun muss.<sup>901</sup>

Contrary to the audience's expectations, the miller gets his rights through the intervention of the king, a 'Königslob' that contradicted the GDR discourse about Prussia in the 1950s, Heukenkamp claims.<sup>902</sup> An interpretation of the play as praise for Frederick the Great is supported neither by Hacks's aesthetic programme, nor by his statements on the play, nor by the text itself. It would be more appropriate to interpret the play in the light of Hacks's programme of dialectical theatre.

In contrast to Heukenkamp, Bernd Leistner does recognise the negative way in which Hacks presents Prussia and its king. Leistner calls 'Der Müller von Sanssouci' a 'Musterbeispiel' of Hacks's early Brechtian plays, in which the audience is provoked to form its own verdict.<sup>903</sup> Indeed, none of the characters can be regarded as a positive hero with whom the audience can identify. Friedrich appears as a war-hungry despot, who believes and wants to prove that he is not despotic.<sup>904</sup> In this sense, he is clearly a contradictory character, in the way Hacks conceived in his programmatic essays. Friedrich's antagonist the miller, embodying the emergent bourgeoisie, is also conceived in a 'dialectical' way, consistent with Hacks' aesthetic programme. Contrary to

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<sup>901</sup> Ibid., p. 630. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>902</sup> Ibid., p. 630.

<sup>903</sup> Bernd Leistner, 'Nachwort zu den Ausgewählten Dramen 3: "Der Müller von Sanssouci", "Adam und Eva", "Die Fische", "Senecas Tod" und "Musen", in *In Sachen Peter Hacks*, pp. 49-70 (p. 51).

<sup>904</sup> Hacks, 'Der Müller von Sanssouci', pp. 199-201.

his economic interest, the miller insists on Christian values and ideals: he struggles to return to his customers the flour lost when his mill burnt down, even though they do not insist on this. Moreover, his awe for the king prevents him from pursuing his rights. For the ancient mill, in which he takes up work after the fire, stands within hearing distance of the newly-built palace Sanssouci – its rattling noise drives the irritable despot mad, to the extent that he forbids the miller to grind.

Heukenkamp's observation that Friedrich himself, instead of the miller, has to attain the enforcement of the rule of law is correct: he encourages the miller to go to court to defend his legal rights to use the mill. But this cannot be interpreted as a 'Königslob': Friedrich does so to prove that he is not a despot, and yet the same rule of law means that the miller's servant is conscripted to the king's army. Friedrich, who designed the law himself, benefits from it in three ways: he demonstrates he is an enlightened sovereign who obeys the law, he gains a soldier for his belligerent army, and he restores peace and quiet in his palace, as the old miller is unable to make his mill do its noisy work without the assistance of his servant.<sup>905</sup> The miller wins the court case, but actually loses the undesired conflict with his king. The moral of the story according to Hacks in 1957: 'Wenns euer Recht nicht ist, seid ihr mit Recht beschissen.'<sup>906</sup> With the arrival of a new era, the new dominant class has to take hold of judiciary power against the old order, but even more so struggle against old patterns of behaviour within themselves.

The result of the contradictions which make up the plot and characters of the play is that neither Friedrich nor the miller can be regarded as

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<sup>905</sup> Ibid., pp. 240-249.

<sup>906</sup> Peter Hacks, "'Der Müller von Sanssouci': Anmerkungen", in *Die Maßgaben der Kunst: Gesammelte Aufsätze, 1959-1994* (Berlin: Claassen, 1996), pp. 324-325 (p. 324).

embodying a progressive historical force. Hinting at the ambiguity of his characters, Hacks writes in his ‘Anmerkungen’: ‘Friedrich ist ein preußischer Aufklärer, der Müller ein preußischer Aufrührer.’<sup>907</sup> Such an absence of clear progressive historical forces is problematic for legitimacy views of the past, which seek to integrate the GDR into a continuity of progressive forces as a means of legitimising it.<sup>908</sup>

## 5.2 ‘Die Sorgen und die Macht’

Hacks’s first play about socialist production ‘Die Sorgen und die Macht’ deals with the dilemma, taken from a reportage in *ND* from September 1957, whether to prioritise quality or quantity in the production of coal briquettes.<sup>909</sup> He uses this dilemma to work out the contradictions that he found typical of the transitional phase, such as contradictory interests of different cooperative factories, contradictory political ideas and interests of the workers, and the contradiction that the Party is stronger than its representatives, who fail to come up with a solution to the dilemma around which the play revolves.<sup>910</sup> The hero of the play, the labourer Fidorra, fits in with Hacks’s concept of contradictory heroes. As Hacks’s drafts show, Fidorra is designated to bring about the changes needed, but is also conceived as a jealous lover, with

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<sup>907</sup> Hacks, “‘Der Müller von Sanssouci’: Anmerkungen”, p. 325.

<sup>908</sup> See Peter Davies & Stephen Parker, ‘Brecht, SED Cultural Policy and the Issue of Authority in the Arts: The Struggle for Control of the German Academy of Arts’, in *Bertolt Brecht: Centenary Essays*, ed. by Steve Giles & Rodney Livingstone (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), pp. 181-195 (p. 183-184). See also the 1952 debate on Eisler’s *Johann Faustus*, in which Wilhelm Girnus criticised the author’s portrayal of German history as a ‘Misere’. Werner Mittenzwei, ‘On the *Faustus* debate’, in *Hanns Eisler: A Miscellany*, ed. by David Blake (Luxembourg: Harwood, 1995), pp. 363-392 (p. 381).

<sup>909</sup> ‘Nicht im Schwung nachlassen!’, *Neues Deutschland*, September 1957. Hacks retained the article in his files with source materials for *Die Sorgen und die Macht*. DLA, A: Hacks, Dramatisches, ‘Die Sorgen und die Macht’, folder 1.

<sup>910</sup> Peter Hacks, ‘Die Sorgen und die Macht: Stück in fünf Aufzügen’, in *Ausgewählte Dramen* (Berlin & Weimar: Aufbau, 1976), pp. 85-185.

outdated ideas about love and masculinity.<sup>911</sup> The other characters are also designed according to this model of contradictory characters, as an early synopsis of the play indicates:

Das Stück zeigt, lustig und realistisch, Menschen, wie wir alle sie kennen.  
[...] Die meisten von ihnen sind nicht gut und nicht schlecht. Sie haben ihre Schwächen und ihre Vorzüge. Sie alle zusammen sind die Helden des Aufbaus.<sup>912</sup>

The notion of contradictory characters also applies to the Party representatives in the play. Different from the heroes of Loest's novels and stories, Fidorra is not guided by impeccable, paternalistic older comrades, and does not develop a consciousness of being part of the working class movement. His motivation to plea for fewer and better quality products is inspired by his love for Hede Stoll, a woman who works in the nearby glass factory which cannot fulfill its production norms because it has to work with briquettes of inferior quality, supplied by Fidorra's factory. In pursuit of his personal interests, of gaining Stoll's love, Fidorra comes to persuade his colleagues to work in the general interest (i.e. to choose quality over quantity), which is illustrative of the contradictions Hacks wanted theatre to convey.<sup>913</sup>

The play must be regarded as Hacks's attempt to work out his controversial programme for realist theatre and simultaneously meet the Party's demand for literature about the present. The fact that Hacks spent months observing working-class life in the Industriekombinat Bitterfeld in

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<sup>911</sup> DLA, A: Hacks, Dramatisches, 'Die Sorgen und die Macht', folder 1.

<sup>912</sup> DLA, A: Hacks, Dramatisches, 'Die Sorgen und die Macht', folder 7.

<sup>913</sup> Hacks, 'Die Sorgen und die Macht', pp. 174-177.

1958, testifies to his eagerness to contribute to socialist realist theatre with *Gegenwartsbezug*, and meet the demand that writers should learn from factory workers. The same can be said of the public readings of the play, in the same factory and one in Senftenberg, followed by discussion with the workers, the protocols of which Hacks kept in the portfolio with material for the play.<sup>914</sup> Held in April 1959, these discussions coincide with the Bitterfelder Konferenz at which the working class was urged to contribute to a socialist national culture.<sup>915</sup> But Hacks's play did not meet with official approval. When it was being rehearsed at the DT in the spring and summer of 1959, the Culture Ministry suspended the production and put pressure on Hacks to amend his text, as a letter from Hacks to Walter Kohls of the DT from 16 June 1959 shows.<sup>916</sup>

There are two specific political difficulties with the play. Firstly, as Krause points out, Hacks's insistence on contradictions as constitutive of the transitional phase leads him to present the persistence in the GDR of some negative aspects of capitalism, such as workers' exploitation.<sup>917</sup> Contrary to Heukenkamp in her remarks on 'Der Müller von Sanssouci', Krause does consider Hacks's theories in his analysis of 'Die Sorgen und die Macht'. The second political problem of the play is that, as a spontaneous initiative from the workers leads to a solution of the problems in the play, the Party has only a limited, passive role, which undermines its claim to lead the transition to

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<sup>914</sup> DLA, A: Hacks, Dramatisches, 'Die Sorgen und die Macht', folder 7.

<sup>915</sup> Mittenzwei, *Die Intellektuellen*, pp. 177-178.

<sup>916</sup> In the letter, Hacks refuses to sign a contract for an 'Änderungs-Honorar' with the culture ministry: 'Das ist natürlich völlig unmöglich. Hätte ich mit dem Ministerium Vertrag machen wollen, hätte ich ihn über das Stück gemacht, nicht über Änderungen [...]. Aber ich wollte keine machen und will es jetzt erst recht nicht. Man kann mir ja wohl schwerlich zumuten, Geld für ein Stück von denselben Leuten zu nehmen, die es immerfort absetzen.' DLA, A: Hacks, Korrespondenz, 'Briefe von ihm an Deutsches Theater <Berlin> 1955-1969': 'Hacks an Walter Kohls', 16 June 1959.

<sup>917</sup> Krause, 'Wir brauchen unsere 11. Sinfonie', p. 186.



socialism. Moreover, the irrational factor of love eventually contributes to the solution. As Krause concludes, the plot revives the ‘Urkonflikt’ of the socialist movement between a Leninist concept of an avant-garde Party and Rosa Luxemburg’s ‘Spontaneitätstheorie’.<sup>918</sup> The conflict around the play thus arises out of the theoretical, aesthetic concepts with which Hacks worked.

It remains unclear if Hacks did alter the play according to the Ministry’s suggestions.<sup>919</sup> His claim in a letter to Kipphardt in September 1959 that he did not make changes out of obedience, must be seen in the light of Kipphardt’s leaving the GDR: Hacks had to maintain that he did not submit to Party demands.<sup>920</sup> It is certain, though, that the revision of the play did not fulfil these demands, for it was discontinued after one try-out. The official reason given was that the workers of the Bitterfeld factory in which Hacks had observed working-class life, opposed the play because they found themselves ‘verzerrt dargestellt’.<sup>921</sup> It is plausible that the Party used the workers’ authority as a pretext to suppress a play which did not comply with certain of its political and aesthetic policies.

Emmerich calls the difficulties Hacks had with this play ‘verwunderlich’. He admits that the play contained ‘realistische Beobachtungen, die das legitimatorische Gesellschaftsbild der SED aus seinem empfindlichen Gleichgewicht brachten’, but argues that all contradictions the play builds up are resolved in a harmonising happy end, at which Fidorra ‘im

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<sup>918</sup> Ibid., pp. 188-189.

<sup>919</sup> This can only be established through a systematic analysis of his early drafts, which would go beyond the framework of this thesis.

<sup>920</sup> Hacks wrote: ‘Mein Stück, welches bekanntlich sehr gut [...] ist, wird zur Zeit ganz flott geprobt. [...] ich habe auch noch das und dies geändert, aber nur für Kunst, nicht Bravheit.’ Hacks & Kipphardt, *Du tust mir wirklich fehlen*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>921</sup> Quoted in Krause, ‘Wir brauchen unsere 11. Sinfonie’, p. 182.

Sozialismus an[kommt]’.<sup>922</sup> This interpretation ignores the fact that the contradictory role of the Party is not resolved in the play. Fidorra does the ‘right’ thing by pleading against his own interest for quality briquettes, but he does not seem conscious of his transformation, and hence it cannot be said that he has fully ‘arrived’ in socialism: ‘der Blitz soll mich zersägen, wenn ich begreife, wie das alles so schnell mit mir bis hierhin gekommen ist.’<sup>923</sup> The main character’s lack of insight is typical for his ‘dialectical’ heroes, but Fidorra’s final words are also an appeal to the audience whose understanding is supposed to go beyond the character’s.

The conflict about ‘Die Sorgen und die Macht’ would last until 1962, when the DT production of the third and final version of the play was cancelled after Party criticism.<sup>924</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

The case of ‘Die Sorgen und die Macht’ illustrates the great extent to which aesthetics and politics were intertwined. Hacks sought to contribute to the construction of political narratives of how the working class overcomes the problems it faces on its way to socialism. The play also put his aesthetic programme into practice. His ‘dialectical realism’, emphasising the contradictions Hacks regarded as central to reality during the transition to socialism, led to political messages which did not comply with official narratives, and hence undercut his political affirmation in other areas. The conflict around the play coincides with Hacks’s abandoning of his attempt to

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<sup>922</sup> Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR*, p. 160.

<sup>923</sup> Hacks, ‘Die Sorgen und die Macht’, p. 183.

<sup>924</sup> Mittenzwei, *Die Intellektuellen*, pp. 187-188.

give socialist theatre a more modernist direction, after the official reproach his ally Kipphardt had received.

Hacks's notion of what socialist theatre should entail shared the aims of official realism discourses, but he proposed alternative methods with which to achieve these aims. He regarded socialist realism as open for discussion, but the proposals he made contradicted fundamental aspects of official interpretations, such as the imperative that socialist realism depict reality in its revolutionary development. Moreover, Hacks called into question official *Erbepolitik* as he contested key components of the canon. His proposal to find new forms based on the art of the lower classes in earlier eras continues the modernist argument in the debates begun in the 1920s, and complies with his attempt to bring forward new concepts of realist theatre in a Brechtian tradition.

Hacks continued to bring forward his alternative programme for socialist realist theatre after 1957. Indeed, the ferocity and high degree of politicisation of the debate in which he participated, is striking considering the crackdown on political opposition from reformist intellectuals. However, Hacks abandoned his divergent and politically problematic aesthetic positions after the 1959 denunciation of Kipphardt, who had proposed and deployed similar methods.

Similar to Herzfelde's earlier aesthetic writings, affirmative and divergent elements interplayed in Hacks's programme. Defying dichotomies of conformity and dissidence, the case of Hacks shows that intellectuals, or even single texts, do not necessarily fit one of these categories. For instance, his 1959 critique of Schiller criticised the canonisation of this playwright in East

Germany, but also alleged that Western late-bourgeois theatre was in a state of decline. His polemic against Zwerenz in 1957 is particularly striking, as Hacks, who avoided direct political opposition to Ulbricht's regime, attacks dominant aesthetic positions which were held by an author who did demand political reforms and was prosecuted for this.

Hacks's position in cultural-political discourses in the East German public spheres of the 1950s was more complex than either the image of the mean agitator or the attempts to present him as a critic suggest. While he constructed political narratives which legitimised GDR socialism and the SED regime, his divergent aesthetic programme had far reaching political repercussions. The criticism of official concepts of the cultural heritage for the new socialist nation, for instance, touched on questions of the renegotiation of national identity. More problematic for his political affirmation was his insistence on the primacy of contradictions for contemporary East German society, which did not allow for straightforward praise of the Party. As the aesthetic was political, Hacks's seemingly straightforward political position became ambiguous in the light of his alternative aesthetics.

## 5. Conclusion

The case studies of Erich Loest, Peter Hacks and Wieland Herzfelde challenge dichotomous and top-down models of intellectual conduct in East Germany.

As each of the three case studies shows, the correlation between dissident, divergent or oppositional positions on the one hand, and dominant, partisan or affirmative positions on the other is too complex to support such schematic representations.

The ambiguity of Herzfelde's positioning becomes apparent in his stances on aesthetic issues. His modernist convictions collided with official conceptions of socialist realism, and there was no place for his artistic past, as well as the legacy of his artistic companions George Grosz and his brother John Heartfield in the propagated canon of the GDR's cultural heritage. To defend the modernist and avant-garde legacy, he resorted to a negotiating strategy, mainly in the context of his essays and speeches addressed at other intellectuals. The simultaneity of this defence of the legacy of modernism, and his championing the official line in the academic context of his teaching role at Leipzig University, attests to the dependency of his self-positioning on its contexts and addressees. His negotiating strategy in the essays and speeches entailed referring to authority figures and quoting core aspects of official discourses in order to justify his modernist positions. His endeavour to influence public cultural discourses through participation in them required an affirmation of the ever-changing consensus on aesthetic matters, which was largely defined by official policies. Hence his strategy contributed to the dominance of the official line in the public spheres. As the limits of the

consensus narrowed in the wake of the formalism campaign, the tactic of alteration through affirmation was increasingly restricting him to an ever smaller consensus. As the formalism campaign persisted and the construction of socialism since mid-1952 favoured a narrow understanding of socialist realism, the historical context enabling his negotiating tactics diminished. Yet Herzfelde's involvement in debates on socialist realism and his affirmation of official realism discourses did not mean a submission to the authoritarian regime, but something more ambiguous: his involvement must be understood as an ongoing attempt to shape public discourses, rather than being governed by them. His ambiguous participation in the East German cultural public spheres can be explained by the narratives he constructed on his return in 1949, which he conceived of as a homecoming to an antifascist Germany, and an obligation to engage in its rebuilding. Although he returned relatively late, his participation in the project to build an antifascist, socialist Germany was a positive choice. But shortly after his arrival in East Germany, his article in defence of Grosz made clear his problematic position, both as a returnee from Western exile and as an intellectual with a distinctly modernist profile.

Dichotomous schemes dominant in the reception of East German intellectuals, as outlined in my first chapter, are also unable to explain the synchronism of consensus and conflict in Loest's predominantly critical, as well as his more conformist texts; both aspects are intertwined to a large extent in most of his essays, reportages, novels, and stories from the 1950s. Moreover, some of the very narratives and images through which he supported official discourses in his texts from before the uprising of 17 June 1953, constitute the basis of his criticism afterwards. Even the critical essay he wrote

in reaction to the uprising and which brought him into conflict with Party officials, 'Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne', is generally in support of SED rule and affirmative of the official view of the uprising as a failed fascist coup. Moreover, also after the conflict over the essay, Loest's writing supports official policies without simply adhering to the Party line. Similar to 'Elfenbeinturm und rote Fahne', the 1954 novel *Das Jahr der Prüfung* contains both affirmative and critical positions. The novel supported SED educational politics and pursued official cultural policy recommendations that writers should observe the transition to socialism at grass roots level, but it also contained problematic plot-elements to which officials of the Amt für Literatur und Verlagswesen objected. The war stories from 1956 and 1957, likewise, are a move away from the officially promoted subject area of the contemporary transition to socialism, but they simultaneously support official policies towards the FRG, particularly campaigns against West German rearmament. Thematic continuities indicate that one cannot make a clear-cut separation between Loest's critical and conformist positions. Both positions are to be found in a set of narratives that Loest employed in many of his texts, and which also inform his oppositional stance during the 1956-1957 crisis. His support of a less dogmatic form of socialism which gave the working class superior authority, effectively a challenge to the SED's self-understanding as a Leninist avant-garde Party, is consistent with his exaltation of the proletariat in his novels and stories. He accordingly remained a supporter of SED rule, even if he challenged Party leaders like Siegfried Wagner at Party meetings and in his article 'Junge Künstler und der Weg zur Atmosphäre' of December 1956, published in *Sonntag*. His disparagement of Wagner must also be seen in

connection with the criticism of careermakers and phrasemongers expressed in the narrative of *Das Jahr der Prüfung*.

Loest's as well as Herzfelde's political criticism in 1953 and 1956-1957 stem from the reformist direction which, as Rainer Land and Ralf Possekel argue, is inherent to discourses in the SED. In 1956-1957, Loest and Herzfelde had connections to dissidents such as Gerhard Zwerenz and Wolfgang Harich, and supported democratic reforms to improve GDR socialism. These efforts were unsuccessful as the reform movement was forcefully suppressed in late 1956 and in 1957, when critical intellectuals were imprisoned. Herzfelde's stances during the crisis of 1956-1957 once more indicate the ambiguity of his position and how much his positioning depended on the different contexts and addressees of his speech. He defied Party directives over the contents of *NDL*, intervened at Party meetings to defend Zwerenz and Hans Mayer, and to criticise the severity of cultural policies. But he refrained from taking his criticism to the wider public spheres. In his conflict with the authorities over the publication in *NDL* of a critical discussion of SED cultural policies, he crossed the limits of acceptability and was removed from the editorial board of this journal. It is striking though, that he felt able to return to his 1950 positions on expressionism quite soon after this reprimand, in his 1959 article in *Sinn und Form* on Johannes R. Becher. Loest was less prudent than Herzfelde, taking his criticism to the wider public sphere and attacking Ulbricht and Wagner head-on, resulting in his arrest and sentence to seven years' imprisonment.

Hacks is not known to have been involved in the circles of critical, reformist socialist intellectuals, even during their heyday in the summer and



fall of 1956. The ambiguity of his self-positioning lies mainly in his aesthetic writings. His notion of what socialist realist theatre should entail shared the objectives of SED cultural policies, but he proposed alternative methods with which to achieve these aims. As he participated in the discussions over the interpretation of socialist realism for East German theatre over the second half of the 1950s, the proposals he made contradicted fundamental aspects of official aesthetics: his programme of 'dialectical realism' drew heavily on avant-garde theatre methods such as those of Bertolt Brecht, and was subjected to controversy and official disparagement until he abandoned it in 1959-1960. Politically, Hacks seems an unambiguous and vehement supporter of the SED at first glance. But as my discussion of the controversy over his only play from the 1950s which deals directly with the present construction of socialism, 'Die Sorgen und die Macht', shows, Hacks's aesthetic differences to the Party line led to ambiguities in a more strictly political sense. As a result of the central position accorded to contradictions in Hacks's aesthetics, also in theatre about the transitional phase to socialism, the play conveys a number of problematic political messages. It is implied that contradictions continued into contemporaneous East Germany, with the play showing persisting injustices, as well as the prevalence of negative attitudes amongst the working class. Moreover, the central position of contradictions meant that the play presented the construction of socialism and the Party's role in it as contradictory, instead of presenting both in a purely positive light. Hacks's seemingly straightforward political affirmation was thus undercut by his aesthetic positioning in two ways: the programme itself brought him into conflict with SED cultural functionaries, and it led to the problematic plot of 'Die Sorgen

und die Macht'. The controversy around the play coincides with Hacks's abandonment of his aesthetics of dialectical realism, following the official reprimand given to and subsequent flight of his ally and friend Heinar Kipphardt. The Party rejected Hacks's aesthetic programme in two ways through the move against Kipphardt and the cancellation of the production of 'Die Sorgen und die Macht' at the Deutsche Theater, both in 1959.

The narratives Loest constructed in his novels and stories about the present make an interesting connection between German division and the socialist development in East Germany. They juxtapose images of the successful (socialist) construction in the East with negative images of West Germany as the stronghold of predatory capitalism or imperialism, whose leaders cynically collaborate with the American occupiers in preparing to unleash the next world war, thus undermining the national consciousness. In this way, Loest's fiction appeals to a sense of patriotism, in order to legitimise the GDR as the sole heir of the German nation, and as the guarantee for a safe and prosperous future.

In different genres of writing, Hacks and Herzfelde similarly put forward narratives which supported GDR claims to legitimacy, while denouncing the FRG. Herzfelde did so for instance during his speech at and articles about the 1954 'Dichtertreffen' at the Wartburg in Eisenach, which also supported topical policies of the Ministry of Culture of the GDR to reach out to West German intellectuals. In a context in which this coalition-building politics did not play a role, Hacks's disparagement of the FRG in his satirical poems and of West German intellectuals in his polemics against Hans Magnus Enzensberger and Uwe Johnson sought to legitimise the Eastern socialist

alternative he opted to join in 1955. But for both Hacks and Herzfelde, their opposition to the canonised ways of adopting the *Deutsche Klassik* as heritage for East German socialist culture undermined an important element of GDR claims to legitimacy.

In their disparagement of the FRG as a puppet of Western imperialism, all three authors discussed here constructed cultural images of Western decline. They denounced the culture of the capitalist West as decadent, superficial, indecent and tightly controlled by the ruling classes. From narratives like Loest's *Die Westmark fällt weiter*, or his description of the mobs at the uprising of 1953, the claim emerges that imperialist agents employ such Western cultural influences to undermine national consciousness and prepare the youth for a forthcoming strike against communism.

As my discussion of the case of Herzfelde shows, this writer returning from Western exile introduced aesthetic positions from the debates during the Weimar republic and the years of exile into the GDR cultural spheres. But a younger writer like Hacks also drew heavily on avant-garde aesthetic traditions instead of taking official concepts for granted. His proposal of finding new forms based on the art of the lower classes in past eras, must be seen as a continuation of the modernist argument from the 1920s. Hacks's opposition to a portrayal of future harmony, i.e. of a premature presentation of a socialist utopia, as the GDR was still supposed to be in transition, relates to Herzfelde's problems with Lukács's principle of totality, and is also incompatible with the Stalinist conception of socialist realism as a portrayal of reality in its revolutionary development, as adopted by official SED policies during the 1950s.

The close relationship between the aesthetic arguments of Herzfelde and Hacks is an important aspect of their self-positioning in relation to official policies, which may be easily overlooked when applying generational models. A term like 'Exilgeneration' supposes a unity, or at least a commonality among returning exiles, which not only overlooks their fierce aesthetic differences, but also the very diverse experiences possible in exile, as well as other factors such as gender, political affiliation or class. Generational identities do not play an important role in the publications from the 1950s of the three authors examined in this thesis. I have not found evidence that Hacks constructed particular generational narratives. Both Loest and Herzfelde did occasionally use narratives which could be interpreted in generational terms. But upon close examination, other issues appear of greater importance to these narratives, particularly identifications with socialism as a political movement or with the working class.

If Herzfelde's narrative of homecoming from the 1949 memoir *Immergrün* offers a generational perspective in proposing a redeeming community of antifascist resistance fighters and returning exiles, the national outlook of the narrative, which calls attention to the importance of coming to terms with the past on the way towards a better future, is stronger and made more explicit by the narrator. In addition, the narrative can be read as a political model of identification, regardless of age or generational belonging. Similarly, Herzfelde's poem 'Das ferne Lied' (1954) tells a story of socialist affinity, which can be read as an appeal to socialists of his own age group, but is essentially a personal account of identification with socialist ideals. Other

poems such as ‘Des Friedens Soldaten’ (1955), ‘Ballade von der Liebe’ (1959) and ‘Die Augen des Kindes’ (1950) construct images of socialism as a bond between generations, in which good care for the youth and their future is provided by the state emerging from the class struggle of former generations. Consistent with his Marxist convictions, socialism as a political movement appears as a more important concept of identification than a sense of generational belonging.

Also in Loest’s narratives, generationality is of minor importance compared to class and political affiliation, even if his narratives of the conversion of (former) young Wehrmacht soldiers may appeal to a group with a clear common experience – one shared by the author himself. Most of his other young protagonists could also be regarded as generational models, and since their development is frequently guided by older proletarian activists, his narratives of conversion could be read as demonstrations of a bond between proletarian generations. But these narratives contain a strong and much more explicit emphasis on the identification of the characters with the working class. Such an identification is also consistent with the legitimatory function of these narratives, which define the proletariat as male, decent and heroically victorious, and establish it as a source of supreme authority. Even those protagonists who do not belong to this class come to identify with the working-class cause, its goals, and its politics. One example is the figure of the detective Ewald Pennkuven in *Die Westmark fällt weiter*, who is also an older character – and would therefore not fit a generational interpretation of the narratives of conversion. The characters’ working-class identification is in some cases enhanced by the perspective of an orientation on the German

nation, resulting in an indictment of Western imperialism's alleged attack on national unity. Generational identities play only a minor role in Loest's narratives; socialism, the working class, and the German nation constitute a greater role for both him and Herzfelde.

The interactions of intellectuals in the public spheres of East Germany in the 1950s were diverse, ambiguous and often paradoxical. As public discourses were dynamic and went through continuous changes, intellectuals had to continuously renegotiate their positions, while seeking to improve them. Moreover, the dynamics and diversity of public discourses meant that utterances could have ambiguous meanings and effects: depending on their historical and institutional contexts, particular narratives or narrative patterns could have fluid meanings. Speaking in different public spheres and addressing different audiences also altered these effects. Whereas Loest ran into trouble in the aftermath of the uprising of 17 June 1953 by publishing his objections about the Party line in a major journal, the *Leipzig Börsenblatt für den deutschen Buchhandel*, Herzfelde chose to raise them within the more enclosed sphere of the Writers' Union. He adapted his positions according to the different roles and contexts in which he spoke. He brought forward his alternative aesthetic views primarily in his articles and speeches addressed to fellow intellectuals, making use of the possibilities offered by socialist realism discourses to put forward particular views. Affirming key elements of official cultural policies to make his argument acceptable eventually restricted its critical thrust, and limited his possibilities of expression as Party discourses toughened after the implementation of the formalism campaign.

Hacks made use of a similar strategy to use officially sanctioned language to express alternative aesthetic views. He supported the aims of official discourses, and his concept of ‘dialectic realism’ was an alternative means of achieving these aims. But by propagating different aesthetic solutions which collided with official aesthetic policies and, in the case of ‘Die Sorgen und die Macht’ (1959), with the Party’s claim to leadership in the transition to socialism, he undercut his principal political support of SED rule. He abandoned his aesthetic programme of ‘dialectical realism’ after it was rejected by the SED Kulturbteilung in 1959.

Whereas this thesis has highlighted various tactics, contexts and spaces enabling intellectuals to engage critically in the East German public spheres of the 1950s, the three case studies also clearly indicated that there were limits to their engagement. Such limits were usually the product of the unequal power distribution between intellectuals and Party or government officials, but at times they also resulted from the very strategies used by the intellectuals themselves: as my discussion of Herzfelde’s defence of modernism in the early 1950s shows, his tactic of alteration through affirmation increasingly tied him to official discourses as the consensus narrowed after 1951. In differing ways and with contrasting personal consequences, all three intellectuals examined in this thesis met with repressive measures when they crossed the limits of criticism: Hacks’s aesthetic programme was rejected in 1959 and the production of his play ‘Die Sorgen und die Macht’ was discontinued; Herzfelde was removed from his position at *NDL* in 1957; and Loest received a harsh prison sentence in 1957 for his criticism of the regime. The limits of critical engagement were not fixed, but differed depending on a range of

factors such as the institutional and historical contexts of criticism, the institutionalised status of the critical intellectual, or the standing of the Party officials involved. Whereas Loest had powerful support from Kuba and Anna Seghers in his 1953 conflict with the Party line, his 1957 imprisonment cannot be seen in isolation from his attack on the powerful Leipzig SED leader Siegfried Wagner.

There is no easy answer to the question how successful these intellectuals were with their critical engagement in the public spheres. Their impact on public and official discourses cannot be measured. Herzfelde may have strengthened official cultural orthodoxies as a result of his tactics of affirmation, but his work may also have contributed to a continued awareness of the modernist legacy among intellectuals. The memoirs of his student at the Literaturinstitut Leipzig Adolf Endler seem to point at such an effect. Loest was less successful as the political reforms he demanded in 1956-1957 were rejected by the GDR leadership. Hacks's engagement in the debate on East German theatre was also rejected, and the author abandoned his critical aesthetic positions which undercut his political support of the regime. Yet his and Herzfelde's propagation of alternative or unorthodox versions of socialist realism may have benefited the development of a range of less conventional literature by authors like Christa Wolf, Heiner Müller, and Stephan Hermlin in the early 1960s. To establish such a relationship would go far beyond the scope of this thesis, which has shown the variety, versatility and ambiguity in the positioning of different intellectuals in the East German public spheres during the 1950s, thus challenging black-and-white schemes which result from top-down models of the role of intellectuals in the GDR.



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