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SANTA CRUZ

**INFILTRATION AND EXCESS:
EXPERIMENTAL ART AND THE EAST GERMAN STATE, 1980 – 1989**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

VISUAL STUDIES
with an emphasis in FEMINIST STUDIES

by

Sara Blaylock

June 2017

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Abstract
Infiltration and Excess:
Experimental Art and the East German State, 1980 – 1989
Sara Blaylock

Art and cultural historians have long characterized the relationship between East Germany’s experimental artists and its state bureaucrats as at best one of division, opposition, and hostility. In this view, artists are either victims or pawns of the state. In “Infiltration and Excess: Experimental Art and the East German State, 1980 – 1989” I expand this framework to reveal how experimental culture actually engaged with the state and exposed and critiqued its core disjunctions. I focus on artists who used body-based practices, like performance, film, and photography, to create new vocabularies for representation, as well as their uses of reproducible media in the creation and circulation of their work.

By the Cold War’s final decade, the GDR government’s inability to produce a collective and coherent public significantly frayed its power. Thus, I argue that experimental practice was not only an antidote for, but also a diagnosis of a weakening state: a foil and a mirror to official culture. In fact, the East German experimental arts scene produced an alternative public—a counter-public—with commitments to culture, community, and interdisciplinarity that state socialism had sought to inspire. This irony, really an inversion of state socialist principles, lies at the heart of my dissertation.

Oversimplified narratives of the Cold War era have consistently defined the Eastern Bloc by its victimization or complicity under Communism, leaving little room for details about regional variation in culture or civic politics. My scholarship—

based on substantial archival research and numerous interviews—highlights one case among many, joining an emerging field of academics and artists whose work examines the Cold War past as a means of revitalizing and globalizing areas of the world once again at risk of cultural and political isolationism.

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Introduction.
Experimentation and the Erosion of the State

Being East German

Art and cultural historians have long characterized the relationship between East Germany's experimental artists and its state bureaucrats as at best one of division, opposition, and hostility. In this view, artists are either victims or pawns of the state. "Infiltration and Excess: Experimental Art and the East German State, 1980 – 1989" expands this framework to reveal how experimental culture actually engaged with the state and exposed and critiqued its core disjunctions. It examines a selection of artists, publishers, curators, and gallerists working across media in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the 1980s whose drive to revise or critique the artistic possibilities of their state united in a need for greater political inclusivity and individual creative license. The project of Communism had failed to emancipate its working class heroes or its artistic idols.¹ Experimental practice became a means to articulate that failure. More importantly, it became a tool to exceed the conditions of the state. From the clearly hostile performance work of a group like the Auto-Perforation Artists to the latent activism of Gundula Schulze's² photographs or Gino Hahnemann's films to the alternative form of an institutional practice established by

¹ For more on the role of "art workers" in the Eastern Bloc, see Angela Dimitrakaki, "What Is an Art Worker? Five Theses on the Complexity of a Struggle" in *Former West: Art and the Contemporary After 1989*, eds. Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh (Utrecht: BAK; Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016), 407 – 420.

² The photographer added the name "Eldowy" from the Arabic word *el dowy* (the light) in the mid-1990s. This text uses solely "Schulze," the name she used in the GDR. Nevertheless, all citations will be listed as "Schulze Eldowy."

East German samizdat,³ the principles of official culture were consistently countered by the creative practices that emerged within the GDR's experimental scene.

By the Cold War's final decade, the East German government's inability to produce a collective and coherent public significantly frayed its power. Thus, experimental practice was not only a critique of, but also drew attention to a weakening state: a foil and a mirror to official culture. In fact, the GDR's experimental arts scene produced an alternative public—a counter-public—with the very commitments to culture, community, and interdisciplinarity that state socialism had sought to inspire. This irony, really an inversion of state socialist principles, defined the corrupted core of the East German state even as it inspired a decade of creative dissent. It also illustrates the hazards of subjecting aesthetics to ideology. Examining the East German case provides insight into both this particular history, as well as the ways in which dissenting culture can help to identify the holes in the fabric of other anti-democratic systems.

Defining dissent

To date the literature on experimental practice from the GDR has characterized it as a monolithic rejection of state culture and never as representations of the fraying of the state itself.⁴ As a result, scholarship on experimental culture from

³ *Samizdat* is a neologism coined by the Russian poet Nikolai Glazkov, literally meaning “self-published” or “self-publishing.” Sergei Alex Oushakine, “The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat,” *Public Culture*, vol 13, no. 2 (2001): 191 – 214. Please see my discussion of my use of this term in footnote 430 (Chapter 4) of this dissertation.

⁴ See, for example: Ronald Galenza and Heinz Havemeister, eds., *Wir wollen immer artig sein: Punk, New Wave, HipHop, Independent-Szene in der DDR 1980-1990* (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf,

the GDR endorses a narrative that characterizes East Germany's non-conformist artists primarily as dissenters in a parallel world. The problem is that this view obscures their role as witnesses to a failing political system in one of the least understood cultural histories of the Cold War period. Without an adequate analysis of East German artists as dissenters and witnesses, we will continue to miscalculate the role culture played in the GDR's rapid decline. To that end "Infiltration and Excess" defines artistic dissent explicitly as an outcome of the East German government's weakening ideological control—specifically the decay of its cultural authority. I thus resist defining experimental practice as deliberately politically motivated, that is to say, as a form of action that targeted the government system. The history of the GDR's experimental art, as this dissertation demonstrates, was far more ambiguous. Artists infiltrated as they were themselves infiltrated; they exceeded, as the state itself made room for excess. Similarly, the cultural margin, that is to say the realm of creative experimentation, is also understood contextually and as a slippery entity—as both in between the official and unofficial realms of culture and sometimes squarely at their centers.⁵ The status of marginality is thus contingent. Less a position self-ascribed by the artists themselves, marginality was determined by the East German state when it wielded its power to determine what could and could not be defined as

1999); Paul Kaiser and Claudia Petzold, *Boheme und Diktatur in der DDR: Gruppen, Konflikte, Quartiere 1970-1989* (Berlin: Fannei & Walz, 1997), Exhibition catalog; Claus Löser, *Strategien der Verweigerung: Untersuchungen zum politisch-ästhetischen Gestus unangepasster filmischer Artikulationen in der Spätphase der DDR* (Berlin: DEFA-Stiftung, 2011).

⁵ Alexei Yurchak describes the apolitical position of the majority public in a late Soviet Russia in his book *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). He uses the term *svoi*, which translates to "us," "ours," or "those who belong to our circle" (103). Although his framework applies to a more generic public than the one I am describing here, *svoi* nevertheless demonstrates a common indifference to state politics shared across Eastern Bloc countries in a late Cold War period.

the cultural norm. In important ways the people, subject positions, and aesthetic inclinations explored by the artists of this study more accurately represent the make up of East German society. In a 1980s GDR, experimental practice thus came to represent the state better than its own official culture. Exploring that possibility is a central interest of this dissertation.

Throughout my study, I define the GDR's experimental art as a counter-discourse that responded to official state rhetoric. Understanding that state discourse took an especially visual form in the Eastern Bloc's state socialist countries, I draw from Nicholas Mirzoeff's theory of countervisuality as a means to foreground the hazards and vulnerability of oppressive systems where power is largely enacted through visual culture.⁶ In the East German context the countervisual, like counter-discourse, describes the contestation of hegemonic language through representations or forms of subjectivization that distress the normative definitions of culture, upon which the state's power depended. My attention to the visual contributes an underexplored aspect of the relationship between state power and its dissenters in the literature on the Cold War East.

In his research on a late Soviet Union, Alexei Yurchak defines the language of this government as an "authoritative discourse."⁷ The term accounts for the rigidity and orthodoxy of official language in state socialist systems, writ large. As in the Soviet cases he explores, my dissertation demonstrates how the inflexibility of the

⁶ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look. A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

⁷ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, 14.

GDR's authoritative discourse—its state culture—which manifested in an inconsistent relationship between ideology and reality, ultimately weakened the state's power. That withering, I argue, is made particularly evident in the variety and strength of East Germany's experimental culture.

This dissertation analyzes the tension between state power and citizen dissent by defining East Germany's experimental art scene as a series of countervisual enactments that contested core elements of state culture. It does so incrementally through chapters organized around the following four social formations: the body, *Kulturerbe* (cultural legacy), the collective, and the public sphere. More precisely, each chapter represents a social scale, which moves the text from private to public life. Case studies become the lens through which to understand how artists internalized state discourse, and critiqued or retooled it for their own creative purposes. I have selected these examples for a number of reasons. First, they demonstrate the fluidity between official and unofficial culture that foregrounds my definition of margin. Second, the examples offer a range of practices that comprised the experimental scene, but they are far from exhaustive. Finally, my choice to focus on individuals is intentional. They offer a particularly compelling lens on the period and reveal the variety of ways people came to define themselves through creative practice.

At the same time that "Infiltration and Excess" offers a gloss of East German culture and society, it attempts to relieve the history of experimental practice in a late

GDR from its own “system of representation”⁸—that is to say, its identification with a specific political and geographic formation. Here, I tacitly invoke the work of Stuart Hall and Kobena Mercer to suggest that, just as the ascription of race or gender confines cultural producers to a specific identification, those working in Eastern Bloc contexts continue to face the burden to represent⁹ their specific historical moment—a liability, which has until quite recently denied the influence of state socialist practices on global art histories.¹⁰ To that end, “Infiltration and Excess” introduces ways that experimental practice in a late GDR also referred back to modernist histories and questions of subject formation in culture that are meaningful beyond the East German context. The history of the GDR’s experimental art—from photography to performance, film to collectives, publications to galleries—complicates, even as it renews, the definitions of art practice in the post-WWII era. This dissertation introduces how a culture born of modernism, but raised in state socialism pursues on its own terms many of the same issues central to what has come to define artistic practice in the West.

⁸ Stuart Hall, “The Work of Representation” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 1997), 17.

⁹ Kobena Mercer, “Black Art and the Burden of Representation,” *Third Text*, no. 10 (1990): 61 – 78.

¹⁰ See, for example, the “All the World’s Futures” exhibition, curated by Okwui Enwezor for the 2015 Venice Biennale, as well as the increasing profile of Eastern Bloc studies in scholarship, particularly through the efforts of people like Zdenka Badanovic, Bojana Cvejić, Eda Čufer, and Anthony Gardner. For several years the Museum of Modern Art in New York’s Contemporary and Modern Art Perspectives global research program has produced groundbreaking exhibition research on Central and Eastern Europe. In March 2017, MOMA invited me to present research on performance art from East Germany to its C-MAP group as part of its inaugural efforts to study the GDR.

An authoritative discourse in visual form

East Germany's cultural apparatus was hyper-visible throughout the country. Artists especially bore a significant task to represent and, in effect, produce the GDR's iteration of an Eastern Bloc socialist utopia.¹¹ In this environment, artists were both valorized by and alienated from the state, simultaneously supported and confined by the significance of their cultural capital. Starting as early as the 1950s,¹² those outside of the official cultural apparatus or along its margins reacted against this instrumentalization through experimental works that rejected the goal-oriented culture advanced by the state. In so doing, they ultimately claimed more creative license. In a context where culture was equated with political power, that creative license, I argue, was an enactment of citizen agency. I focus on East Germany's final decade, a culmination of a state, which had been for many years in decline. I consider how artists—primarily those born close to the Berlin Wall's 1961 erection—used state limitations, including their own marginalization by cultural authorities, to usurp or revise a strained reality.¹³ This generation, the “*Hineingeborene*,”¹⁴ so-called because

¹¹ Evgeny Dobvrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Ulrike Goeschen, *Vom sozialistischen Realismus zur Kunst im Sozialismus* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001).

¹² Paul Kaiser, "Symbolic Revolts in the 'Workers' and Peasants' State': Countercultural Art Programs in the GDR and the Return of Modern Art" in *Art of Two Germanys. Cold War Cultures*, eds. Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckmann, 170 – 185 (Abrams, New York: 2009), Exhibition catalog.

¹³ The literary scholar Wolfgang Emmerich identifies three generations of East German authors. This triad is also applicable to visual artists. The first generation adhered most faithfully to the socialist realist doctrine, including its attack on aesthetic formalism. These people were generally already middle-aged or older at the end of WWII. The second generation, born between 1915 and the late 1930s, was willing to participate in building a socialist state, but was nevertheless critical of it. The third generation had all but abandoned the political idealism of socialism, and chose instead to work independently of its credo, at a critical or an indifferent distance from it. These three categories are nevertheless fairly inorganic. Though they describe a generic ethos of the time, they are frequently contradicted by more detailed inspection. Wolfgang Emmerich, *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* (Leipzig: Kiepenheuer, 1996), especially 119 and 404.

they had been “born into” the GDR’s state socialism, experienced most profoundly a post-utopian country long mired in the unraveling of communist expectations. These artists demonstrate how a socialist aesthetic or ethic remained in spite of a shifting or hesitant attachment to East Germany’s third way potential.¹⁵

The rapid development of experimental culture in the 1980s may also be explained as the consequence of two simultaneous changes in cultural and surveillance policy that occurred in 1976. First, in November of that year the political singer-songwriter Wolfgang Biermann was expatriated from the GDR while on a legally sanctioned concert tour in West Germany. Party leader Erich Honecker defended his decision, claiming that Biermann had become “involved in a smear campaign against the Socialist Order which was organized abroad.”¹⁶ The event resulted in the first-ever public outcry against the government to be made en masse by key cultural figures. Over one hundred writers, including the world-famous Christa Wolf, Heiner Müller, and Jurek Becker, banded together in an open letter that condemned the state for exiling the beloved singer. The open dialogue they demanded never took place. Instead, these writers faced punishment—including loss of professional memberships and positions in the writer’s union. More importantly, they inspired members of a younger (and more vulnerable) generation to band together and

¹⁴ Uwe Kolbe, *Hineingeboren: Gedichte, 1975 – 1979* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982).

¹⁵ Here I refer to the attachment that some artists, especially those who elected to stay in East Germany in the 1980s, had to the country’s potential to embody a different, and still anti-capitalist, ideological and cultural paradigm than the one imposed by Eastern Bloc ideologues and bureaucrats. East Germany’s third way potential describes the hope that the country’s creative and activist public could prefigure a reformed socialist future. This attitude was also quite characteristic of the second generation of East Germans. For more on this, see footnote 13 on Wolfgang Emmerich.

¹⁶ cited in Klaus Schroeder, “Die Angst der SED vor dem bösen Wolf” in *Ende vom Lied*, ed. Christoph Tannert (Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2016), 30, Exhibition catalog.

demand a conversation about the so-called “Biermann Affair.”¹⁷ Many of these people would be thrown in jail for their actions. The impact was substantial and cannot be overstated.

Cultural historians of the GDR have long defined this as a turning point,¹⁸ and two recent exhibitions in Berlin have likewise taken the Biermann expatriation as their point of origin.¹⁹ The state’s unwillingness to discuss his expulsion made clear that East German citizens would not be heard by their government, which could make or break laws as it saw fit. It also contradicted Honecker’s own promise, made when he took power in 1971, to allow for a “tabooless” cultural order, which invited discussion and debate.²⁰ A lack of confidence in government was equaled by a lack of confidence in state culture. In the same year, the Ministry for State Security (Stasi) likewise shifted course on its surveillance of experimental culture, beginning its so-called *Zersetzung* (lit. corrosion) strategy, which targeted the private lives of individuals.²¹ The simultaneous emergence of a private-public sphere of experimental artists and the enlistment of neighbors, friends, lovers, and family members to spy on them was certainly no mere coincidence.

Both Biermann’s expatriation and the Stasi’s shift to a *Zersetzung*-strategy in 1976 likewise help to explain a turn among artists to make their experimentations

¹⁷ Ian Wallace, “The Politics of Confrontation: The Biermann Affair and its Consequences,” *German Monitor*, no. 29 (1992): 68 – 80.

¹⁸ See, for example, Kaiser and Petzold, *Boheme und Diktatur in der DDR*.

¹⁹ *Gegenstimmen / Voices of Dissent*, Martin-Gropius-Bau, 2016; *Ende vom Lied / The End of the Story*, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2016.

²⁰ Erich Honecker, Speech at the Fourth Meeting of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party, December 17, 1971, cited in Kaiser and Petzold, *Boheme und Diktatur in der DDR*, 24.

²¹ Jens Gieseke, *The History of the Stasi. East Germany’s Secret Police, 1945 – 1990* (New York & Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2014), 147.

increasingly more public. The impulse to be visible—to not hide in the confines of a private home or secretly pass artworks from friend to friend—characterized the counter-culture of a 1980s GDR. More specifically, it was the interest in initiating new points of contact—from use of space to use of media—that strengthened, even constituted, this scene into more than a frustrated underground milieu. This infrastructure became a form of “effective counterproduction” that challenged the stability of the state’s own claims to cultural hegemony.²²

In a period of marked individuation, in the 1980s artists united in a tendency to combine body-based practices—like performance, film, and photography—with reproducible media. The result is a set of dynamic practices that shared an investment in creating new vocabularies of representation that directly countered the state’s definition of culture, and which could circulate beyond a single artist, event, or even country. Whether in films, like those the Auto-Perforation Artists made of their live performances, or in the proliferation of independently-produced publications, like *Anschlag*, which served as platforms for photographers like Gundula Schulze whose series of worker photography contrasted state-made photo essays, combining critical practice with reproducible media invigorated the GDR’s experimental arts scene in the 1980s. Uniting the metaphorical surface of the body with the literal surface of print and filmic media, artists and filmmakers exceeded the otherwise insurmountable restrictions on mobility imposed on them by Cold War geopolitics. This work was most profoundly coordinated by autonomous galleries, including Judy Lybke’s

²² Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2016), 266.

EIGEN+ART, which he obsessively documented in moving images and photographs later anthologized in publications sold to the West. My research indicates that Lybke's conscious effort to prepare for a future beyond the Eastern Bloc was common and motivated many artists and filmmakers to produce tangible evidence of their own subjectivities and experience.

Historiographical context and literature review

The impact of East German art on the art of the Cold War and post-Cold War periods remains underexplored; no book-length project on the topic has been produced in English. This absence is particularly striking with regard to experimental culture. Nevertheless, although the official art of East Germany has received noticeably more attention in scholarship, including in chronological histories or biographies of its artists, it has scarcely been exhibited on its own terms, and English-language scholarship is almost non-existent. With the exception of Paul Kaiser's 2016 study *Boheme in der DDR*, no scholarly studies that offer a comprehensive account of the GDR's creative counterculture have been produced outside of the context of the edited volume or exhibition catalogue.²³ My dissertation stands in direct conversation with Kaiser, in particular with the ways in which he emphasizes the important roles that official culture and the whole sociology of the East German state's cultural

²³ In fact, until 2016 the only real example of a comprehensive multi-media accounting of the experimental scene was Kaiser and Petzold's exhibition *Boheme und Diktatur in der DDR* (1997). The *Gegenstimmen. Kunst in der DDR 1976 – 1989 / Voices of Dissent: Art in the GDR* exhibition (Martin-Gropius-Bau, 2016), co-curated by Christoph Tannert and Eugen Blume, significantly remedied this absence, and likewise made some important gestures towards the cross-over between official and unofficial practice, which I also describe in my text.

project played in the country's four-decade art history. Kaiser's work represents an evolution from earlier texts he has written on experimental culture that espouse a clear distinction between official and unofficial art, a binary which I seek to dismantle.²⁴ Importantly, most of that research by Kaiser has appeared in exhibition catalogues, including the foundational text he co-wrote with Claudia Petzold in 1997, *Boheme und Diktatur in der DDR*. In fact, with the exception of a few media-specific scholarly studies (i.e., *Strategien der Verweigerung*, Löser, 2011; *Kunst im Korridor*, Fiedler, 2013), the greatest strides in the study of East Germany's experimental culture have taken place in exhibition catalogues. 2016's *Gegenstimmen* (co-curated by Christoph Tannert and Eugen Blume) likewise represents a clear departure from the schematic vision of unofficial culture as an anti-state practice that I explore in "Infiltration and Excess." In fact, I see my research in direct conversation with the curatorial work and essays of Christoph Tannert. Because his work is so closely attached to his own biography, my contribution to, for example, analysis of the Auto-Perforation Artists or photographers like Thomas Florschuetz achieves a scholarly distance that his do not—and in my view ought not—attempt. Indeed, the majority of advocates for the study or exhibition of East Germany's experimental culture of the 1980s (including Claus Löser, Uwe Warnke, or Gabriele Muschter) were active themselves in this scene. The field has thus grown largely out of self-reflection, which has—to its credit—scarcely fallen into the trap of nostalgia. Access to a select set of primary sources is thus fairly straightforward and necessary for this kind of

²⁴ See, for example Kaiser and Petzold, *Boheme und Diktatur in der DDR*.

study. Nevertheless, a scholarly distance, which might allow for the interrogation of global art histories, feminism, and media histories remains scarcely explored in the extant literature. For example, I have worked a great deal with Gabriele Muschter's texts (*DDR Frauen fotografieren*, 1989; *Geschlossene Gesellschaft*, 2012), though my approach explores a more nuanced definition of gender and feminism than she does in her texts, especially those produced in the Cold War era. In this respect, Sarah James' 2013 text *Common Ground*, which examines East and West German photography in comparison, has been one of the most important models for my approach. Like James, I knit the history of modernism into the analysis of East German art and thereby seek to underscore its relevance to western art history.

The paucity of scholarly research on the GDR's experimental culture comes in the face of a fairly well catalogued inventory of material. For example, Löser's 2011 monograph and Fiedler's from 2013 include exhaustive lists of the micro-histories of nearly all of the GDR's most important filmmakers and galleries, respectively. Similarly, Klaus Michael and Thomas Wohlfahrt's *Vogel oder Käfig sein* (1991) and Frank Eckart's *Eigenart und Eigensinn* (1993) both provide a great deal of primary source material in the areas of non-conformist literature and self-publishing. Other key works have included the edited volumes *Kunst in der DDR* (Gillen and Haarmann, 1990), *Jenseits der Staatskultur* (Muschter and Thomas, 1992), *Gegenbilder* (Fritzsche and Löser, 1996), *Die Addition der Differenzen* (Warnke and Quass, 2009), and *Durchgangszimmer Prenzlauer Berg* (Felsmann and Gröschner, 2012). Most recently, Tannert's *Gegenstimmen* catalogue unites art criticism with

several dozen accounts by the artists themselves. These books are significant because they feature a range of observations written by primarily East Germans reflecting on the scene that they took part in. Nevertheless, they tend to be more auto-biographical than analytical. They are, as such, important primary resources. The richness of their contents likewise begs for further study.

In contrast to art history, the study of East Germany is quite advanced in German studies. Nevertheless, in the face of a wide array of studies on literature, film, state, and everyday history, the lack of research on the fine arts of the GDR is quite striking. There is also a lack of research on the GDR of the 1980s, in general. This gap has been explained to me as a symptom of the messiness of the decade. Namely, the state's cultural program, its economy, and its political system were in tatters; the rules that guide the understanding of previous decades simply do not apply to the period. Nevertheless, there are of course important exceptions. In terms of the study of literature in the 1980s, I see my dissertation as being in direct conversation with David Bathrick's *Powers of Speech* (1995)—a work that introduced to me the significance of the speech act or printed matter as forms of alternative discourse. Marc Silberman's research on the East German public sphere and its national cinema (DEFA) has likewise provided frameworks for appreciating the GDR's final decade.²⁵ Similarly, foundational research on the GDR's everyday history by Mary Fulbrook (*Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 1995; *The People's State*, 2005) and Wolfgang Engler

²⁵ See, for example: Marc Silberman, "Problematizing the 'Socialist Public Sphere': Concepts and Consequences" in *What remains? East German Culture and the Postwar Public*, ed. Marc Silberman, 1 – 23 (Washington, D.C.: American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, 1997); Marc Silberman and Henning Wrage, eds., *DEFA at the Crossroads of East German and International Film Culture: A Companion* (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2014).

(*Die Ostdeutschen*, 1999, *Die Ostdeutschen als Avantgarde*, 2002) as well as work on the everyday material or consumer culture of East Germany (*Socialist Modern*, Pence and Betts, 2008) introduces the kinds of everyday frameworks I see relevant to experimental practice in a late GDR. Indeed, work on the 1980s has been significantly advanced by research on everyday history and culture. My research thus takes off, in large part, where these scholars leave off—adding an in-depth discussion about a cultural margin, which was clearly implicated in the larger East German society.

Research on gender and feminism in East Germany coming out of German studies or History has also been particularly influential. Here, I am thinking of Josie McLellan (*Love in the Time of Communism*), Donna Harsch (*Revenge of the Domestic*, 2007) Irene Dölling,²⁶ and Myra Marx Ferree (*Varieties of Feminism*, 2012). Importantly, curators like Bettina Knaup, Angelika Richter, Beatrice Stammer (*Und Jetzt*, 2009) and Susanne Altmann (*Entdeckt!*, 2011) are turning discussions about gender and feminism in East Germany towards the arts. My research joins this conversation through rich scholarly and visual analysis, which invites comparisons across the East and West. Looking at gender, especially via performance or film, has likewise provided a pathway to the kinds of discussions taking place around this subject by scholars and curators of Eastern and Central European Art (i.e., *Gendered Artistic Positions and Social Voices*, Hock, 2013; *Gender Check*, Pejić, 2009). In fact, one of my primary goals is to merge the study of East German art with the prolific

²⁶ Irene Dölling, “Frauen- und Männerbilder. Eine Analyse von Fotos in DDR-Zeitschriften,” *Feministische Studien*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1990): 35 – 49.

work happening on other former Eastern Bloc countries today. I am particularly interested in the research of Bojana Cvejić (*Parallel Slalom*, 2013), Piotr Piotrowski (*In the Shadow of Yalta*, 2009; *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, 2012), Boris Groys (*The Total Art of Stalinism*, 1992; *Art Power*, 2008), as well as the scholarship and exhibitions produced by the Former West research platform²⁷ and the Museum of Modern Art's Contemporary and Modern Art Perspectives work on Central and Eastern Europe.²⁸ All of these examples have theorized the ways in which the art of the Eastern Bloc contributes to our understanding of the uniqueness of this context, as it well as its modernist inheritance and significance to the 21st century.

East German culture is, nevertheless, conspicuously absent from scholarship on the Eastern Bloc. Although certainly curators and art historians working in Germany are working to advance the specific character of an East German counterculture, with the exception of some discussions of East German feminist art practice,²⁹ the "Modernity, Socialism, and the Visual Arts" conference (Germany and Poland, 2013),³⁰ and Christoph Tannert's recent invective against the provincialization of East German art historiography,³¹ most scholars have not incorporated East German art into a wider Eastern European (let alone global)

²⁷ Former West recently published a volume of their findings: Hlavajova and Sheikh, *Former West*.

²⁸ Museum of Modern Art: Contemporary and Modern Art Perspectives (C-MAP) (website). Accessed March 27, 2017. <https://www.moma.org/research-and-learning/international-program/globalresearch>.

²⁹ Bojana Pejić, ed., *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* (Cologne: Walther König, 2009), Exhibition catalog; re.act.feminism, a Performing Archive (website). Accessed September 24, 2016. <http://www.reactfeminism.org/>.

³⁰ Modernity, Socialism, and the Visual Arts Conference (website). Accessed September 11, 2016. <http://mosocvisualarts.wordpress.com/programme/>.

³¹ Christoph Tannert, "Keine Chance für niemand," in *Bilderstreit und Gesellschaftsumbruch. Die Debatten um die Kunst aus der DDR im Prozess der deutschen Wiedervereinigung*, eds. Karl-Siegbert Rehberg and Paul Kaiser (Berlin and Kassel: Siebenhaar Verlag, 2013), 352.

conversation outside of studies that emphasize comparisons with West Germany.³² Indeed, the relative absence of East German scholarship from the Former West research initiative, the MoMA's C-MAP project,³³ or the Clark Art Institute's recent East-Central Europe Seminar Series, is quite striking. Here the research of "Infiltration and Excess" becomes doubly situated: it contests both the sidelining of experimental art from the GDR within Germany's art and cultural history, even as it fills a gap in Eastern Bloc historiography more generally.

If the study of the art of East Germany has been slow, and impeded—in no small part—by a geopolitical hangover that continues to conceptually divide East Germany from West Germany and Eastern Europe from Western Europe, then perhaps the most significant change I can forge in my scholarly approach comes from my home in Visual Studies. I embrace the interdisciplinarity of this nebulous field, particularly its willingness to interpret a cultural object as evidence of a proposition about larger culture, and not necessarily as a piece of a larger cultural teleology riven to the histories of specific media or geographic locations. I have also been encouraged by the inherently politicized vision of Visual Studies, that is to say, its way of framing a cultural history as evidence of political identifications in process. To that end, my most significant interlocutors have been Nicholas Mirzoeff (*The Right to Look*, 2011)

³² Here I think especially of Eckhart Gillen, whose work has been foundationally important to East German art history, but which nevertheless relies on comparisons of art in East and West Germany. See, for example: Eckhart Gillen, *Das Kunstkombinat DDR: Zäsuren einer gescheiterten Kunstpolitik* (Cologne: DuMont, 2005); Eckhart Gillen, *Feindliche Brüder?: der Kalte Krieg und die Deutsche Kunst 1945-1990* (Berlin: Nicolai, 2009).

³³ Associate Curator Christian Rattemeyer informed me at the *Gegenstimmen* symposium on East German art at the Martin-Gropius-Bau in September 2016 that C-MAP is looking to include the GDR in its areas of specialization, and invited me to present research on performance art in East Germany at MOMA in March 2017.

and Jacques Rancière (*The Politics of Aesthetics*, 2004; *Dissensus*, 2010), both of whom define the visual as a potential act of dissent or opening. My dissertation upholds the values both espouse of allowing an artwork to become a politics, rather than expecting it to announce a specific claim.

Method and sources

My predominantly qualitative method combines traditional art history research using archival materials and art objects with field research, including extensive interviews. In addition to the artwork itself, my research triangulates three major sources: (1) firsthand accounts from artists, art historians, and other protagonists, (2) publications and official state reports on culture, and (3) Stasi surveillance. Scholarship on this subject has tended to read these sources in isolation or contestation.³⁴ In contrast, I bring these multiple, often-conflicting sources together in order to illustrate how an artwork's significance depends on context, perspective, and the ideological motivations of its maker, as well as its audience. For example, I read *Verband Bildender Künstler* (Union of Fine Artists, VBK) accounts of art events as records of both the art and the art historian, and ask how the author's interpretation relates to his/her attachment to tradition, aesthetic theory, and attitudes about art's political function. I ask: How did the author's position within a state institution shape

³⁴ See, for example: Frank Eckart, *Eigenart und Eigensinn. Alternative Kulturszenen in der DDR (1980 – 1990)* (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1993); Frank Eckart, "Zwischen Verweigerung und Etablierung" (doctoral thesis, University of Bremen, 1995); Frank Eckhardt and Paul Kaiser, eds., *Ohne uns! Kunst & alternative Kultur in Dresden vor und nach '89* (Dresden: Efau Verlag, 2009), Exhibition catalog; Paul Kaiser, *Boheme in der DDR* (Dresden: Dresdner Institut für Kulturstudien, 2016); Kaiser and Petzold, *Boheme und Diktatur in der DDR*; Löser, *Strategien der Verweigerung*.

the report into a specific kind of art historical genre for the state? Conservative accounts likewise underscore the radicality of more progressive ones, also made within the VBK, and thus reveal another level of subjective tension within the union sources. For example, I trace the inclusion of experimental art forms within the confines of official culture, and describe these as symptomatic of a drive within the union itself for change. Stasi reports by *Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter* (unofficial collaborators, IMs)—citizens who secretly reported on people to the secret police—likewise offer a second perspective from people who had some kind of personal relationship with the person they observed. Sometimes IM accounts are careful and even seem motivated to protect or praise the people or events under observation. Other times, they are vitriolic and dismissive, motivated perhaps by personal incentives that, unlike the VBK records, are less easily defined. In dialogue, I interpret the ambivalence of the VBK and Stasi sources as a partial explanation for the agency that experimental artists claimed under conditions of extreme observation and judgment. By taking seriously the official records that have traditionally been interpreted in terms of their artistic oppression, I seek to defang the power of the East German state by revealing its bureaucracies as disorganized, contradictory, and insecure.

Among the most important resources for my dissertation are files of state bureaucracy held at the *Akademie der Künste* (Academy of Arts) in Berlin, and records of Stasi surveillance of East Germany's creative subculture. Permission from each person observed is required to work with the secret police files. I have acquired

these through interviews and extensive contact with many subjects described in this dissertation. Since beginning my field research in 2012, I have conducted interviews with more than two-dozen artists, writers, art historians, and scholars. Christoph Tannert, a curator and critic, has been a particularly forthcoming interlocutor. Because of his prime significance to the GDR's experimental art scene, as well as his advocacy of this history since Germany's 1990 reunification, he is also one of the most important voices in my dissertation.

Because the work I study scarcely exists in public archives or museums, access to original artworks, films, publications, and documentation must be obtained through personal relationships. The oral histories that I have collected as part of gaining access to private archives uniquely shape my conclusions. However, because not all people responded to my requests for interviews, I have sought to balance anecdotes from those I could interview with a variety of printed sources from the Cold War-era, as well as my own scholarly interpretation. Each person I spoke with has provided me with primary material, including artworks, publications, and personal effects, otherwise unavailable in the public record. My most important private archives have been the *ex.orientelux* collection of East German experimental film, organized by the filmmaker and film historian Claus Löser, and the EIGEN+ART gallery archive, for which the gallerist and founder, Judy Lybke, has given me exclusive access. Several people I spoke with were cautious about how their histories have been (or would be) narrated into scholarship; I am fortunate to have gained the trust of so many.

Of course, as tends to be the case, the majority of my archival research is not present in the pages that follow. These documents now comprise my own scholarly archive, and give me ample material to continue research on East Germany for years to come.

Theoretical overview

The theoretical underpinnings of this dissertation, which interrogate questions of art's unpredictable political efficacy, reach beyond the specific regional, historical, and material scope of the artists under review. Addressing fundamental issues in the study of art and its intersections with politics, "Infiltration and Excess" asks how experimentation and innovation both influence and reflect culture, writ large. I draw from early 20th century debates on aesthetics and politics that influenced the foundations of East Germany's official art policies³⁵ and trace these debates into the Cold War-era through foundational Frankfurt School aesthetic philosophy,³⁶ as well as post-structuralist theory on power and subject formation.³⁷ I unite this scholarship to contemporary research on art, politics, and the avant-garde to suggest that East German artists may offer a model for the politically and economically autonomous art

³⁵ Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Bertolt Brecht and Georg Lukács, *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 2007); Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968); Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *On Literature and Art* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1967); Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

³⁶ Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978); Herbert Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).

³⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

practices that are today so hotly contested.³⁸ These references are often implicit, rather than explicit, and come from the same interest I have in repurposing the legacies of modernism to understand the art of the Eastern Bloc.

Rancière’s aesthetic philosophy of *dissensus* is particularly relevant to my analysis. *Dissensus* requires that in order for artwork to be politically impactful it must “rupture and then forget itself.”³⁹ In this view, art should neither predict nor revel in its impact, but rather remain committed to a continuous, ongoing process of cultural expansion, which may eventually lead to political change. Indeed, creative actions that might be considered dissenting today often emerged inadvertently, that is to say without a specific political purpose. Describing “new, unanticipated meanings” in the late Soviet context, Alexei Yurchak explains that these emergences “should not necessarily be seen as ‘resistance’ to the norms and meanings articulated in [authoritative] discourse.”⁴⁰ Similarly, the artists I introduce in this dissertation were invested in myriad outcomes—from the social to the aesthetic to the historical. To understand how their work represents an act of *dissensus* thus requires a careful consideration of multiple contexts, from that of the state as a cultural formation that begot its own resistance to those of individual artists who identified themselves as independent creative agents.

³⁸ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*; Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus. On Politics and Aesthetics* (London and New York: Continuum, 2010); Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetic: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Continuum, 2004).

³⁹ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 140.

⁴⁰ Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, 27.

Even though they maintained a clear relation to the state, I argue that East Germany's artistic underground, a "*Notgemeinschaft*" as Christoph Tannert has described it,⁴¹ existed primarily for itself, a self-sustaining niche society that was as contextually specific as it was temporary and requisite for its time. Artists and their advocates imagined themselves extending Germany's cultural legacy (from romanticism to expressionism to Dada) as well as contributing to global contemporary culture. Because, as limited as their access was to western—and often also other Eastern Bloc—developments in art, those active in the GDR's experimental scene often wanted to define their work as relevant beyond their own milieu. Aesthetic resistance was thus a way for artists to define themselves as more than their context. Their resistance to state definitions of culture equaled a rejection of the prescriptive, future-oriented picture advanced by state doctrine, particularly its principles of socialist realism. In the context of the GDR, where art was expected to function beyond its maker and its time in the service of a specific ideology, experimental artists resisted being incorporated into the fold of national or international definitions of culture unless that incorporation happened on their terms. There was, in Mirzoeff's parlance, a claim to the "right to look"—a self-determinacy that operated day-to-day within the private enclaves of artists who found themselves succeeding because they saw the state for what it was: frail, failing, and out of touch. Mirzoeff's term, in conjunction with Rancière's *dissensus*, helps to conceptualize the search for "authenticity" that many of these artists yearned for. It makes room for a

⁴¹ Tannert cited in Elisabeth Jappe, *Performance, Ritual, Prozeß* (Munich & New York: Prestel-Verlag, 1993), 61.

political interpretation of their work that is missing from some of the most groundbreaking research on the East German underground.⁴²

Research on the GDR's experimental culture has tended to both compartmentalize producers by medium and to homogenize the direction or purpose of their creative agenda.⁴³ None of the artists explored in this study worked exclusively in one medium, but rather operated—often spontaneously, often pragmatically—across media. Painters picked up Super-8 film cameras when materials were scarce or—as in the case of Cornelia Schleime—the pressure to conform to state principle required a different mode of expression. Activists like Gabriele Kachold devised collaborative projects that would bring her community of women artists together more organically. In terms of homogenizing the motivations of experimental artists, a tendency to define official culture in opposition to unofficial culture in both the literature, but more importantly in the popular conception of the Eastern Bloc, has come at the expense of understanding more carefully the agency that artists could claim even within state-sanctioned spaces.⁴⁴ The tendency to homogenize artistic projects has missed some of the finer points of creative

⁴² See, for example: Karin Fritzsche and Claus Löser, eds., *Gegenbilder. Filmische Subversion in der DDR, 1976 – 1996* (Berlin: Janus Press, 1996); Kaiser and Petzold, *Boheme und Diktatur in der DDR*; Galenza and Havemeister, *Wir wollen immer artig sein*.

⁴³ See, for example, the media divisions institutionalized in Kaiser and Petzold's groundbreaking work *Boheme und Diktatur in der DDR*, or the fairly schematic way that even a carefully researched and highly nuanced text, like Claus Löser's *Strategien der Verweigerung* inadvertently defines multi-media practices of people like Lutz Dammbeck, Cornelia Schleime, or Gabriele Stötzer as secondary to their film work.

⁴⁴ See Alexei Yurchak's discussion on this topic in *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, 6 – 7. Studies on consumer culture in the GDR, such as Katherine Pence and Paul Betts' *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics* (2008), or Mary Fulbrook's recent histories of the GDR (i.e., *The People's State. East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*, 2005), likewise carefully nuance the distinctions between official and unofficial culture.

individuation. These were not necessarily artists working to consciously build something together (or against the state). Rather, they were people working side-by-side, responding to like frustration, limitation, as well as unanticipated cohesion. With the Germanist Anna Horakova, who argues that East Berlin poets “contradict rather than confirm their stated claim to *Aussteigertum* (outsider-ness), or utter disassociation from the East German state,”⁴⁵ I likewise resist descriptions that categorize or reduce an often contradictory scene into binaries of official versus unofficial culture. Allowing for the state to be an ontological category for artists opens analysis in two directions. First, it describes the ways in which artists consciously considered their cultural condition as contingent, something that could be distressed and weakened through critical practice. As Horakova writes, the Prenzlauer Berg writers’ “poetic and visual practices evince an actively engaged attitude towards [the state] by formally mimicking the political and cultural context from which they emerge.”⁴⁶ This form of critical citation was also relevant to East Germany’s visual artists.⁴⁷ Second, I maintain that defining experimental artists as “drop outs” or “outsiders” reifies the marginalized status the East German state actually wished them to inhabit.⁴⁸ In reality, for experimental artists, adaptability and the ability to move

⁴⁵ Anna Horakova, “Mimicry as Critique: New Perspectives on the Prenzlauer Berg, Avantgarde Aesthetics and Communist Cultures of Dissidence” (doctoral thesis, Cornell University, 2016), 9.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ See, for example, Judith Butler on mimicry in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (1993): “Fine, I don’t want to be in your economy anyway, and I’ll show you what this unintelligible receptacle can do to your system; I will not be a poor copy in your system, but I will resemble you nevertheless by *miming* the textual passages through which you construct your system and showing that what cannot enter it is already inside it (as its necessary outside)...” (45).

⁴⁸ I refer also to the “Dropping out of Socialism” conference (University of Bristol, June 5 – 6, 2014) and conference volume, in which the definition of “drop out” culture in state socialism was seriously

between official and unofficial culture fluidly defined an important line of defense, while also opening them up to new modes of creativity.

Moreover, I argue that East German artists succeeded in their experimentations in part because they produced a dynamic, and hard to regulate creative infrastructure. This included a pragmatic manipulation of state resources with little to no compromises, which effectively detached or retooled experimental art from both the institutional and the attendant economic pathways forged in and by official culture. For example, most of the artists included in this study joined the Union of Fine Artists so that they could reap the benefits of membership, including financial support, guaranteed studio space, access to equipment and materials, as well as permissions to travel and exhibit work in the West. Similarly, both experimental events organized at official cultural centers and exhibitions mounted at independent galleries benefitted from bureaucratic loopholes that brought marginalized artistic practices to wider audiences, and did so legally—and even to some extent with state funding. Here the discussion develops from the role that culture was meant to play in the GDR, including the ways that public culture inadvertently supported—even fortified—the state’s own demise in the 1980s.

Because market and career pressure was fairly non-existent for East Germany’s experimental artists, the burden to produce art for the sake of itself engendered artistic collaboration and experimentation. In fact, people active in the East German underground have consistently pointed to the lack of competition among

distressed. See: Juliane Fürst and Josie McLellan, eds., *Dropping out of Socialism: The Creation of Alternative Spheres in the Soviet Bloc* (London: Lexington Books, 2017).

artists as a great advantage, a “*Paradies im Diktaturrahmen* (paradise in a dictatorship),”⁴⁹ that enabled a lively and supportive community. This definition of an Eastern Bloc freedom categorically opposes traditional narratives of artistic freedom in western art historical discourse, particularly during the Cold War. Indeed, both Boris Groys and Piotr Piotrowski argue that state socialist artistic practices provide a model for alternative, non-market dependent production, and suggest that the underexplored communist Cold War culture offered—if ironically—more democratic working conditions for artists than are available today.⁵⁰ It is to this discourse, which has largely not interrogated an East German contribution, that my dissertation stakes an immediate claim.

Chapter outline

The idea of East German totalitarianism has led scholars to a more divisive approach to the study of experimental culture. I nuance this reading to reveal how art practices actually troubled and eroded this conception of state authority, creating other ideas of citizenship. To that end, I have organized “Infiltration and Excess” incrementally, focusing each of its chapters on elements of society that move from

⁴⁹ Christoph Tannert, personal interview, November 3, 2014. See also: Cornelia Schleime, “Jeder Satellit hat einen Killersatelliten,” *Hätten wir es nur wörtlich genommen* in Michael Boehlke and Henryk Gericke, eds., *Ostpunk! Too Much Future: Punk in der DDR 1979 – 89* (Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2005), 185, Exhibition catalog.

⁵⁰ Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008); Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe* (London: Reaktion, 2012).

individual to public experience. A Conclusion, which relates this history to the contemporary moment, bookends four chapters.

In the 1980s new modes of photography developed simultaneously with performance art. Chapter One “The Body is a Ruin – Photography, Performance, and the Alienated Subject” examines this phenomenon through the examples of Gundula Schulze, Thomas Florschuetz, and the performance art group, the Auto-Perforation Artists. In the context of the GDR where art and politics were inherently intertwined, all visual representation, especially of the human form, mapped the political. This chapter argues that artists confronted state expectations of the perfected socialist body by developing new modes of body-based expression—whether in its photographic representation or in its performed activity. For instance, Schulze’s portraits highlight the experience of neglect at the hands of the East German state. From her *Tamerlan* series, which documents an elderly woman as she undergoes a series of amputations, to her worker photography, Schulze’s images redefine the “ordinary” East German citizen. The Auto-Perforation Artists embodied that state of humility and abuse through aggressive works in which they put their bodies at the limits of comfort and dignity. Done on their own terms, their performances redefined the experience of living in the GDR as one of corporeal suffering—a representation gravely at odds with the state’s image of itself. I mediate the link between photography and performance through Florschuetz’s *Körperstücke (Body Fragments)*, a series of performative self-portraits that symbolize the experience of self-alienation through a visual rupture in the figure.

Chapter Two “Observed, Romantic – Super-8 Looks Back” interprets a selection of experimental films by the painter-filmmaker Cornelia Schleime and the poet-filmmaker Gino Hahnemann as unions of multimedia practice, reflections on history, and explorations of sexuality that challenged the state’s pedantic interpretations of Germany’s socialist cultural legacy. Moreover, it takes up the tension between desirable forms of culture and lived experience. The state actually encouraged Super-8 as a socialist hobby, both at home and in public; the implication of self-surveillance was central to this support. I treat Schleime and Hahnemann’s films, thus, as records of self-documentation and argue that, in turning the cameras on themselves, artists creatively translated the state’s tactics of surveillance, while inverting its principles. At the same time that artists produced films that turned conditions of cultural restriction into starting points for experimentation others used the medium to resituate local cultural production within a historical trajectory that redefined the limits of state culture. The second half of the chapter thus analyzes the work of Hahnemann, a writer, model, and a gay rights activist to demonstrate how films challenged the state’s pedantic interpretations of Germany’s socialist cultural legacy (i.e., its *Kulturerbe*) and in so doing revealed the tenuousness of a central tenet of state power. It concludes by introducing how films were both discrete objects and facilitators of communal experience in the event-space of the screening.

This leads into the next chapter’s discussion on the importance of multi-media practice and collaboration to the experimental scene, characteristics, which I describe in relation to the official definitions of the collective. Chapter Three “Crossing Media,

Forging Community – Experimental and Collective Practice” examines how by redefining the limits of media and by demonstrating the necessity of working collectively, experimental artists challenged the official state policy’s desire to categorize and craft its public through culture. Indeed, the impulse to compartmentalize artistic practice is the twin of the impulse to delineate the ideal socialist subject. The core case studies of this chapter are the Intermedia I festival, which took place in June 1985 at a state cultural center, and the GDR’s first feminist art collective, the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX* (Women Artists Group Exterra XX). The first half of the chapter uses the multi-media practices of several artists, including Lutz Dambeck and Christine Schlegel, to illustrate how artists worked across media as a way of exceeding the limits of culture imposed upon them by the state. In the second half, the collaborative film work and performances of the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX* demonstrate how the group’s blending of media represents a pragmatic response to the constraints of both official and experimental culture that impacted especially women artists at this time. Combining Intermedia I with the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX*, this chapter illuminates the ways in which artists who banded together redefined the very principles of collectivity and interdisciplinary engagement in culture that the state defined as essential to socialist culture, but failed to institute.

Chapter Four “DIY Public Sphere – Independent Galleries and Publications as a Counter-Public” targets the work of the gallery EIGEN+ART and the magazine *Anschlag*—both based in Leipzig—to describe how East Germans produced an

alternative platform to share ideas and assemble, effectively contesting the state's monopoly on public life. While galleries became physical gathering spaces, a robust network of independent publications expanded the reach of experimental artwork by creating printed matter that could literally pass from hand to hand. This chapter describes how EIGEN+ART and *Anschlag* shared a vision for a dialectical and globally-oriented East German culture, as well as the ways in which the work of one emboldened that of the other. By concluding the dissertation's core content in a discussion of infrastructural modes of production, I seek to emphasize how reliable and adaptable sites of exhibition and exchange made the East German cultural underground viable, sustainable, and impactful beyond its own geographic confines.

Conclusion

“Infiltration and Excess” uses case studies of artistic practice and cultural emergence that promiscuously limn media, as well as official or unofficial cultures to narrate an image of East German artistic culture that surprises and challenges traditional conceptions of the Eastern Bloc. It recovers GDR culture from a propaganda bias that equates East German art with state ideology, a bias with near full-scale influence on scholarship, pedagogy, and museum collections globally. Oversimplified narratives of the Cold War era have consistently defined the Eastern Bloc by its victimization or complicity under Communism, leaving little room for details about regional variation in culture or civic politics. My scholarship highlights one case among many, joining an emerging field of academics and artists whose work

examines the Cold War past as a means of revitalizing and globalizing areas of the world once again at risk of cultural and political isolationism.

Chapter One.
The Body is a Ruin – Photography, Performance, and the Alienated Subject

[Figure 1.1] Her name is Tamerlan. She is 66, but aged well beyond these years, seated on a park bench with her legs wide apart, both casual and confrontational. She leans forward in her seat, calling out to her viewer with her mouth open in an enigmatic expression of simultaneous indignation and amusement. The black and white photo conceals the color of the thick overcoat that covers her slim upper body to bare knees. The blackness of her eyes, set in shadow by a furrowed brow, render her gaze imprecise—its reach arcing the entirety of the photo’s vertical frame. A cigarette is crushed deeply into the crevice of the second and third finger of her right hand. Behind her, blurred tree leaves and a stretch of grass reveal this to be a spring or summer day. A second less confrontational image shot from above records a pause in Tamerlan’s spoken exchange with her photographer, Gundula Schulze.⁵¹ [Figure 1.2] Here, Tamerlan is passive, her look distracted as she directs her gaze to the ground before her feet. A slight hint of a smile renders her mood once again hard to discern. The photo is framed as a swirl that envelops the woman, almost cupping her but for the horizontal cut of the park bench that extends off frame. Lightly blurred bushes in the upper left carry the viewer’s eye toward and then around a tree that intersects Tamerlan’s back. Footprints guide this movement to her toes peeking through plastic sandals, and lead finally to an unseen object that holds her attention off-screen.

⁵¹ The photographer added the name “Eldowy” from the Arabic word *el dowy* (the light) in the mid-1990s. This text uses solely “Schulze,” the name she used in the GDR. Nevertheless, all citations will be listed as “Schulze Eldowy.”



[Figure 1.1. Gundula Schulze Eldowy. *Tamerlan Berlin*, 1979. Silver-gelatin print.
Image courtesy of the artist. © Gundula Schulze Eldowy.]



[Figure 1.2. Gundula Schulze Eldowy. *Tamerlan Berlin*, 1979. Silver-gelatin print.
Image courtesy of the artist. © Gundula Schulze Eldowy.]

These images document Schulze's first meeting with Tamerlan, so named after a song her husband loved from the 1920s. The chance encounter in the East Berlin neighborhood of Prenzlauer Berg in 1979 inaugurated an eight-year collaboration. Schulze photographed Tamerlan—a retired postal worker—until 1987, producing more than two-dozen images that follow her through a series of carnal ends: amputations that progress from her toes to knees to lower to upper legs, the death of her boyfriend Erwin, as well as the slow decline she shared with her nursing home companions.

Tamerlan is one of dozens of people Schulze photographed during her years active as a photographer in East Germany. Between 1977 and 1990 Schulze produced five black-and-white series while simultaneously working on the photo essay *Berlin in einer Hundenacht* (*Berlin on a Dog's Night*).⁵² Schulze's aspirations are existential, but nevertheless are rooted to German history and especially the Berlin landscape, which she found to be mysterious and unforgiving. In 2011 she would reflect: "Berlin swallows its inhabitants without mercy. Layer by layer, the city covers them under a cloak of forgetting... In Berlin nothing lasts long. Sooner than normal, everything vanishes without trace."⁵³ Her records of everyday life in the German Democratic Republic act as substitutes for the socialist state's art and visual culture, which in its preference for idealistic fantasy over reality rendered the common man invisible. Her project aims to stop a vanishing in process, to record the

⁵² A 2011 monograph combines 246 of her black-and-white photographs under the *Hundenacht* title, but divides them by series.

⁵³ Gundula Schulze Eldowy, "Im Herbstlaub des Vergessens" in *Berlin in einer Hundenacht* (Leipzig: Lehmanns Verlag, 2011), 13 & 16.

body of a public in ruins. These are portraits of East Germany, though as it did not want itself to be.

* * *

This chapter evaluates three concurrent artistic practices as signs of broader developments in the art of East Germany that targeted the ambiguity and contradictions inherent to the GDR's official economy of representation as the "workers and farmers state" (*Arbeiter-und-Bauernstaat*).⁵⁴ It argues that photographers and performance artists devised alternative uses of the body to represent the lived experiences of state socialism ignored by official art and visual culture. Beginning with Schulze's photo essays, this analysis unfolds with works of increasing abstraction, interrogating next the experimental self-portraiture of Thomas Florschuetz and finally the aggressive performances and multi-media projects of the Auto-Perforation Artists.⁵⁵ The chapter thus unfolds from a literal approach to representing the citizen body in documentary-style photography to its metaphorical disintegration in photographic abstraction to interpretive actions that perform the body in—and into—ruins. Central to the stylistically-divergent approaches of these

⁵⁴ This formation follows Lenin's vision of post-proletarian revolutionary state governed by a "dictatorship of the proletariat" as delineated in his 1917 book *The State and Revolution*. Lenin's political theory rejects social democracy, which he believed veiled the control of bourgeois interests in representative modes of governance. He argued that the state would slowly wither away once Communism had taken hold. East Germany modeled itself on this vision, establishing a hierarchical single-party system installed to direct the interests of the working (and farming) class. Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *State and Revolution: Marxist Teaching About the Theory of the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1978).

⁵⁵ Micha Brendel, Else Gabriel, Rainer Görß, and Via Lewandowsky. Gabriel names only herself, Brendel, and Lewandowsky as the core members of this group, with Görß a later collaborator. (Else Gabriel, personal interview, June 24, 2015) I have included him because most scholarship on the Auto-Perforation Artists includes Görß.

artists is an investment in exploring the body as a functional object at once adored and exploited by the East German state through the politics of its socialist aesthetic.

The GDR—like the rest of the Eastern Bloc—advocated socialist realism, a politico-aesthetic cultural philosophy that united art and culture to the ideological vision of Communism. Cultural policy was then political policy. Although socialist realism in East Germany was dynamic and evolved over time, the country’s Nazi past—which had so severely distorted the role of art and culture in a political society—rendered the GDR’s cultural system especially conservative within the scope of the Eastern Bloc. Artistic experimentation wrought outside the purview of official culture was deemed suspect, “decadent,” and potentially criminal. At best, all visual objects were meant to reaffirm the national vision. Gilded, unrealistic images of a utopian proletarian community were conventional. Within the scheme of Communism’s vision—which laid its potential out boldly in future goals materialized in visual culture—even obviously utopian images of the state were considered realistic. Though the wooden figures of High Stalinism emblematic in monumental paintings of chiseled laborers working the proverbial motherland were long replaced by more dynamic forms of state culture by the 1980s, a uniform vision of art as an allegory for the state remained relevant at this time. This was especially true for visual culture deemed documentarian, like photography, which because of its more direct, unmediated relationship to its subjects, was considered to be more objective and true to life than other media. Performance art leveraged a similar indexicality, mocking the state’s vision for a collective public by performing its contradictions.

When artists directly used their bodies as an artistic medium they rebelled against the future promised by socialist aesthetics, in particular the reliance that the state had on producing a committed and predictable public. The immediate relationship between photography or performance art to the body intensifies the radicality of these artworks within the East German context. Quite simply, artists who directly thematized or used the body could not hide behind their media. In fact, as this chapter argues, they did not wish to hide at all.

Artists drew attention to the ways in which the individual body had been torn apart from the social body. In other words, they brought to the fore the unresolved—and unaddressed—division between the state’s official definition of the East German subject, and the way that those subjects lived and defined themselves privately. The curator and scene protagonist Christoph Tannert describes this experience as a “fragmentation of the individual.”⁵⁶ Everyday experience was embroiled in the contradiction between state rhetoric, which sought to produce predictable or “docile” subjects (to briefly summon Michel Foucault⁵⁷), and lived reality, in which the consequences of the government’s desire to streamline its public manifested themselves physically and psychologically. The tensions between the state’s image of itself and the experience of the average citizen are addressed incrementally throughout this dissertation. This chapter begins deliberately at the core of individual experience, specifically at the East German cult of the body.

⁵⁶ Christoph Tannert, personal interview, May 11, 2015.

⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, “Docile Bodies,” *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 135 – 169.

Although this dissertation will not consider the art of East Germany in a comparative frame, a latent relationship to other Eastern Bloc countries, where similar experiences of cultural and corporeal constraint were underway, will be occasionally examined. For example, the foundational work of Slovenian curator Zdenka Badovinac regards the problem of fragmentation that Tannert describes as a concern of the Eastern Bloc, writ large. Reflecting on her 1998 exhibition *Body and the East*, which represented the GDR through the work of the Auto-Perforation Artists, she writes, “After the belief in great ideologies started to crumble in the 1980s we witnessed a decline of the construct of the autonomous individual, and the myth of the artist-hero. At that time artists stopped searching for their authentic identities by torturing their bodies, which were no longer the bearers of individuality. Instead they emphasized the body’s ability to assume different roles.”⁵⁸ The work of Gundula Schulze who pointedly documented the dereliction of the East German body in her photographs of everyday citizens provides thus a baseline against which to interpret the more existential and performative affects of work by Thomas Florschuetz and performance artists, like the Auto-Perforation Artists. Quite simply, as Tannert explains: “These artists didn’t feel good in a 1980s GDR. And they expressed that.”⁵⁹ This took the form of two interwoven aesthetic impulses: the exploration of the social body in a state of deterioration and the announcement of individual experience as something different from, even deliberately contrary to, the public image. “It certainly

⁵⁸ Sven Spieker and Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, “Creating Context: Zdenka Badovinac on Eastern Europe’s Missing Histories,” interview with Zdenka Badovinac in ARTMargins [online], August 31, 2009, Accessed November 30, 2016, <http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/interviews/497-creating-context-zdenka-badovinac-on-eastern-europes-missing-histories-interview>.

⁵⁹ Christoph Tannert, personal interview, May 11, 2015.

makes sense,” Tannert adds, “that this photography that was so fixated on the body was simultaneously animated in actions and performances.”⁶⁰ In other words, the genre of performance grew out of the new modes of seeing being represented in photography—whether socially-minded, as in Gundula Schulze, or psychologically-distressed, as in the work of Thomas Florschuetz.

A contentious member of the Union of Fine Artists,⁶¹ Tannert advocated for the incorporation of experimental art practices, especially performance, into the GDR’s official culture. In fact, all of the artists under discussion in this chapter sought an official affiliation with the VBK. Union membership certainly provided a number of important supports—including financial stipends, studio space, admission to state exhibitions, as well as—though rare—travel and exhibition permissions in West Germany. In addition, union membership afforded a degree of influence on the future of state-sanctioned art. East German artists wanted to be taken seriously internationally, especially in West Germany where some forms of reciprocity took place in the form of cultural exchanges as for example within the pages of the West Berlin-based art magazine *Niemandsland*.⁶² Nevertheless, their work pretty specifically targeted the state of East German culture—an issue, which will be

⁶⁰ Christoph Tannert, personal interview, May 11, 2015.

⁶¹ The literature on this name is fairly inconsistent. Some people translate VBK as “Association of Fine Artists.” I have elected to follow David Bathrick’s use of “union” in his book *The Powers of Speech* (University of Nebraska Press, 1995), which is also consistent with the terminology in use at the Getty Research Institute’s DDR Collections. I also prefer the term “union” to “association” because it underscores the political identity—really an ideology—latent to East Germany’s cultural institutions and contrasts other important cultural organizations, like the *Kulturbund* or “Cultural Association.” The *Kulturbund* was comprised of many smaller groups of artists and writers that ranged from the professional to the amateur/hobbyist and did not hold as much of a bearing on a person’s career options as the VBK.

⁶² The West German interest should not be overstated. The truth is that, even though artists, curators, and art historians from the West could travel fairly hassle-free to the GDR, they most often did not.

developed throughout this dissertation. Bringing experimental art to the official realm of GDR culture worked to close the gap between the vision the state had for itself and the vision its artists had for their country. Schulze's projects sought to diversify representations of the everyday while the work of the Auto-Perforation Artists sought to embellish the GDR's surrealism. Florschuetz occupied a middle-ground between the two polarities of social documentation and radical performance. All of these artistic practices aggressively revised the norms of art and visual culture to such an extent that they could not be ignored. Their works were not coded or couched in mysteries that could explain away the politics of their content, a strategy in use for decades by even the GDR's most loved so-called "state artists," such as the painters Wolfgang Mattheuer or Bernard Heisig.⁶³ In contrast, their aggression was unequivocal—brazen and unapologetic.

In addition to sharing an ethics of confrontation, Schulze, Florschuetz, and the Auto-Perforation Artists likewise chose some of the most public of venues available to them to stake their claim. These were not "drop out" artists.⁶⁴ Rather, each maintained at some level an attachment to official culture, and circumnavigated a decidedly oppressive arts education and exhibition system to take their work to the

⁶³ On the coded language of official painting—and in particular the Leipzig School—see, for example: Eckhart Gillen, "Wiederkehr der Geschichte und des Realismus: Die Leipziger Schule," *Feindliche Brüder?: Der Kalte Krieg und die deutsche Kunst, 1945-1990* (Berlin, Nicolai: 2009), 327 – 350; Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, "Apotheose des Schreckens. Leipziger Geschichtsbilder" in *Abschied von Ikarus. Bildwelten in der DDR – neu gesehen*, eds. Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, Wolfgang Holler and Paul Kaiser, 259 – 271 (Köln: Walter König, 2012), Exhibition catalog.

⁶⁴ On this notion, I refer to the "Dropping Out of Socialism" conference organized by Dr. Josie McLellan and Dr. Juliane Fürst, where I presented very early research on the Auto-Perforation Artists in June 2014 at the University of Bristol. McLellan and Fürst have recently released a conference publication: Juliane Fürst and Josie McLellan, eds., *Dropping out of Socialism: The Creation of Alternative Spheres in the Soviet Bloc* (London: Lexington Books, 2017).

public. Their practices thus demonstrate the entanglement of the GDR's official and unofficial cultures and contravene traditional scholarly paradigms that reify the divisions of conformity and dissidence.⁶⁵

These artists intelligently inverted the socialist realism prescribed by the state. Indeed, the contours of the state's expectation for art and visual culture are in important ways explicitly referenced in the works under discussion in this chapter. Their artwork represents an upended return to the social, a kind of contrarian revival of the state's own mandate for a revolutionary or progressive form of art that aimed at connecting to a public by representing it. This is not to say that these artists set their sights on social change. Rather, they shared an impulse to reinsert everyday life and experience into a culture riven with ideological and practical hypocrisies.

The social photography of Gundula Schulze

Gundula Schulze's subjects are wide-ranging, and raw: an often physically weakened or emotionally dysfunctional working-class who appear in their private domestic settings as well as the steaming grit of hard laborers, imperfect, but confident nudes, agitated, drunken, or lecherous neighbors, babies and their mothers in anguished births, knock-kneed animals ready for slaughter, body builders and pre-teen dancers. Her landscapes vacillate between extreme and inhospitable urban

⁶⁵ See, for example, Paul Kaiser and Claudia Petzold, *Boheme und Diktatur in der DDR. Gruppen, Konflikte, Quartiere 1970-1989* (Berlin: Fannei & Walz, 1997); Eckhart Gillen, *Feindliche Brüder? Der Kalte Kriege und die deutsche Kunst 1945-1990* (Berlin: Nicolai, 2009), as well as most polemically, the "Bilderstreit" debates anthologized in: Karl-Siegbert Rehberg and Paul Kaiser, eds. *Bilderstreit und Gesellschaftsumbruch. Die Debatten um die Kunst aus der DDR im Prozess der deutschen Wiedervereinigung* (Berlin & Kassel: Siebenhaar Verlag, 2013).

settings: vacant lots, crumbling buildings, factory hollows, and trash yards, to mysterious and haunting natural ones: foggy bogs, swan lakes, and woods. The former's characteristic crispness contrasts the moody unfocused quality of the latter; both are almost always empty of people.

This analysis is dedicated to Schulze's black-and-white photographs.⁶⁶ In terms of the medium, non-color photography makes multiple references to photographic practices specific to East Germany, where shooting and printing in color were a near impossibility for most artists.⁶⁷ In fact, because artists could process monochromatic film in home or private studios, the advantage of working independently also afforded a level of security from the state, which could always confiscate or make duplicates of photographs processed in state-run studios. Schulze even muses that the Stasi has the most comprehensive collection of her GDR-era photographs—a suspicion that could likely bear out for others, as well.⁶⁸ In terms of content, the images visualize a range of citizen subjects unrepresented by official culture. Schulze frames her black-and-white series with compassionate curiosity: “How can so many people live in the most degrading circumstances? With this question in mind I approached and listened to them. I experienced their stories, for I was living beside them, became one of them.”⁶⁹ Schulze observes her subjects, almost

⁶⁶ Schulze made a second, nearly simultaneous color series: *Der große und der kleine Schritt* (The Big and the Little Step) between 1982 – 1990.

⁶⁷ Schulze printed her colors series in West Germany at the famous Niggemeyer Studio. A West Berlin boyfriend, as well as professional contacts with the studio, enabled this exchange. Nevertheless, most of the photographs she exhibited in the GDR were on black-and-white film, which she could print and process quite easily in country.

⁶⁸ Gundula Schulze Eldowy, personal interview, July 27, 2015.

⁶⁹ Schulze Eldowy, “Im Herbstlaub des Vergessens,” 17.

as if they reflected her own destiny. In her time, the ruins of Berlin were both an architectural and a human palimpsest. Buildings in ruin housed, confined, and produced bodies in ruin—people who spent their days laboring in similarly ill-begotten work sites. Schulze’s oeuvre is, however, not simply a project of lamentation or victimization. Rather, this is a project about questioning official representations of the everyday. “Officially,” she says, “the Communists had declared that there were no social problems anymore and I personally had learned of such an unbelievable poverty and abjection from these people. And I showed it exactly how I had lived it.”⁷⁰ Uniting financial to emotional poverty, Schulze’s images articulate the realities of a state that continued to claim it had achieved social harmony and idyllic conditions.

Schulze’s photographs complicate the public veneer of state socialism. She sometimes provides explicit detail about her subjects and their life circumstances, as in a brief biography that precedes the photographs of Tamerlan as well as three handwritten letters she wrote in correspondence with Schulze. Most of her photographs are less personalized, left open to viewer projection or conjecture: Tamerlan’s nursing home friend cuddles a stuffed animal, or from other series: the matter-of-factness of an older man who stands naked in his living room with left arm bracing a credenza and right elegantly poised on his hip; the hulking muscle of a strongman as he flexes on an empty stage; an enthusiastic bystander swinging his

⁷⁰ Gundula Schulze Eldowy, personal interview, July 27, 2015.

arms to the beat of the military band behind him. When read together, these images begin to tell stories.

Three photographs printed successively in her 2011 monograph of black-and-white photographs make gradually ambiguous the power of the East German state. The first pictures blockades at the Berlin Wall. [Figure 1.3] This is, in itself, a fascinating image. It was actually illegal to photograph the wall; Schulze took that risk. Photo number two is a classic vertical portrait. [Figure 1.4] Framed from the waist up, a helmeted patrolman stands before a crumbling brick wall clutching his machine gun as a prop and identificatory object. His cold stare seems affected, the elegant squint of his eyes and the left tilt of his head appear similarly performed. The metal studs on his leather jacket suggest an even more pronounced vanity—or dissident hobby—indulged off the job. The patrolman performs his duty...to a point. In the final image a young boy plays on an apartment block between two facing buildings, laughing as he points a pistol over his left shoulder. [Figure 1.5] On the building behind him posters of two of East Germany's foundational heroes appear between shuttered windows. Wilhelm Pieck, the communist party chairman and the country's first and only president, hangs to the left of his predecessor Ernst Thälmann, a communist leader who lost his life in the Buchenwald concentration camp in 1944. Both figures would be recognizable to any East German, made familiar by posters such as these plastered to public spaces. Cult of personality formed a leading modus operandi of East German visual culture, and persisted well into the country's final decades when the emotional pull of revolutionary forebears had



[Figure 1.3. Gundula Schulze Eldowy. *Berliner Mauer, Ostseite (Berlin Wall, East Side)*, 1980. Silver-gelatin print. Image courtesy of the artist. © Gundula Schulze Eldowy.]



[Figure 1.4. Gundula Schulze Eldowy. *Berlin*, 1982. Silver-gelatin print. Image courtesy of the artist. © Gundula Schulze Eldowy.]



[Figure 1.5. Gundula Schulze Eldowy. *Berlin*, 1982. Silver-gelatin print. Image courtesy of the artist. © Gundula Schulze Eldowy.]

drastically weakened for the average citizen. The age of the posters unknown, tears at their bottom edges suggest that their unflagging permanence in the everyday environment does not translate to an emotional investment in their viewers. Although they have watched the state rise from ruins and then crumble once again, Pieck and Thälmann remain unchanged as icons, fixtures with little relevance to the new generation represented by the boy. His lawless play—the shooting of a gun—indicates that he does not notice their surveillance. Or if he does, he does not care. This is a clear metaphor for the unresolved tension between the increasing imposition of the state in the private lives of the GDR public through the Stasi, and the increasing lack of concern for that imposition by its creative underbelly.⁷¹

The great generation gap between the three people in this final image likewise reflects the distance between the relevance of East Germany's foundational goals and their current status at the time Schulze took the photograph in 1982. Born in 1954, the photographer came of age in a country that continued to define itself by its pre-Nazi past, specifically communist antifascism, even as these ideals had long lost their emotional pull, especially for people of her generation and younger. If, as the historian Jeffrey Herf explains, “for the Communists, power meant a monopoly on interpretation of the past,”⁷² then a loss of citizen confidence in this hegemonic narrative would lead inevitably to a loss in state sovereignty over its public. Though

⁷¹ In 1976, on the heels of cultural relaxations that granted private citizens greater autonomy and freedoms, the Stasi implemented a technique of interpersonal spying known as *Zersetzung* (corrosion). Jens Gieseke, *The History of the Stasi. East Germany's Secret Police, 1945-1990*, trans. David Burnett (New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014), 147.

⁷² Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory. The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 33.

Schulze did not actively protest the state, her photographs nevertheless rectified the limitations on art and visual culture imposed by the GDR's overdetermined national mythos.

Crossing a threshold: A brief history of photography in East Germany

In her analysis of the foundations of photographic culture in East Germany, Sarah James describes official culture's vested interest in the pre-WWII photo essay, as well as its modernist confidence in photography's visual purity.⁷³ Essential photographic theory in the GDR promoted the idea of "seeing photographically."⁷⁴ This utilitarian use of the medium posited that photography possessed a visual and symbolic clarity that could instruct and educate its viewers. Berthold Beiler—a preeminent photography scholar in East Germany—described the medium's function as an "aesthetic education."⁷⁵ That education was meant to be universal as well as eternal. Photographs, he explained, "do not just enormously influence the visual, emotional and rational worldview of their viewers. Rather, at the same time they produce an...enduring image memory of mankind."⁷⁶ The futurity and grand scale of Beiler's thinking mirrors central tenets of socialist realism, namely its requirement that art and visual culture be progressive and oriented to a unified collective vision. At the same time it echoes notions of educational exhibitions—popular on both sides of the Cold War divide—in general.

⁷³ Sarah James, *Common Ground. German Photographic Culture Across the Iron Curtain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 42.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 42.

⁷⁵ Berthold Beiler, *Die Gewalt des Augenblicks* (Leipzig, VEB Fotokinoverlag, 1969), 9.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

Schulze was a trained photographer, one of the first in East Germany to complete an artistic, rather than journalistic, course of study through the Academy of Visual Arts in Leipzig. As her training was subsidized by the sports publishing house where she worked in East Berlin, Schulze enjoyed an important degree of autonomy from the art school and its faculty. Her technical skill and experience as a photo technician legitimated both her claims to independence and gave her access to uncommon materials, including an enlarger and high-quality printing paper, both of which afforded her work an enviable scale and depth in a country with marked material deficit.

Schulze names as her greatest influences the photographers Henri-Cartier Bresson, Diane Arbus, Paul Strand, and Robert Frank, who actually mentored her for years after they first met at an East Berlin gallery in June 1985.⁷⁷ She is likewise clearly indebted to live photography, a documentary-style genre popular in the early 20th century, especially in Germany and Russia but also in the post-war international photography cooperative MAGNUM. This genre-cum-style focused on portraiture and pursued an ethic of authenticity, that is to say, a lack of intervention in a shot or the resulting print. Live photography, referred more commonly in US-scholarship as “straight photography,” remained the prevailing underlying ethos of many influential

⁷⁷ The *Centre Culturel Français*, which opened in East Berlin in 1984, introduced a new range of especially French photographers from the early to mid-20th century. For official culture, artistic and socially-minded works by people like Henri Cartier-Bresson likewise legitimated the kinds of photography people like Arno Fischer, Sibylle Bergemann, Evelyn Richter, or Roger Melis advocated. For more experimental artists (i.e., Gundula Schulze, Harald Hauswald, Sven Marquardt) that legitimation likewise became a kind of springboard to even greater innovation. Christoph Tannert, personal interview, May 11, 2015. The American curator and erstwhile mail artist and photographer, John P. Jacob, likewise helped to connect Schulze with Robert Frank by smuggling copies of her prints over the Berlin border in 1985. John P. Jacob, personal interview, February 5, 2016.

East German photographers in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Progenitors included Evelyn Richter,⁷⁸ Arno Fischer, and Roger Melis who sought to move beyond the didactic figures prevalent in early GDR photography, while still abiding by a socially responsible documentary practice. As early as the 1950s, photojournalists had begun a movement to emancipate photography from the state's rigid publication policy—a reflection of its aesthetic demands—through semi-autonomous collective and artistic projects. Essentially, these photographers could not find a place in journalism for their incisive photographs, which publishers and censors alike defined as state-critical. For many, artistic venues became convenient platforms for photographers otherwise excluded from wider publics.⁷⁹ In the 1980s, photographers like Schulze would band together with independent publishers who produced magazines that featured experimental literature, graphic arts, and especially photography. These “samizdat” literatures, including the role they played in forming an infrastructure—or “counterproduction”⁸⁰—that rivaled the state's formation of a public sphere will be discussed in greater detail in the fourth and final chapter of this dissertation.

⁷⁸ For more on Richter, as well as how the photo essay form and photojournalism influenced East German photography, see Sarah E. James' groundbreaking study *Common Ground. Photographic Cultures Across the Iron Curtain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

⁷⁹ Art historian Christoph Tannert compellingly suggests that photography in the GDR should be divided not by journalistic or artistic, but rather by published or unpublished, “because there were also journalists that could not get anything published.” Acceptable photography was thus not a question of genre, but of a photograph's perspective on reality. (Christoph Tannert, personal interview, May 11, 2015)

⁸⁰ I draw from Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge's work on the socialist public sphere, *Public Sphere and Experience* (London: Verso, 2016).

Returning life to work

Though East German photographers, like Melis and Richter, had begun early on to advocate for more variety and complexity in the country's photographic landscape, Schulze represents a generation of makers—including Karin Wieckhorst, Ute Mahler, and Harald Hauswald—even more unwilling to compromise or bend to state doctrine. Photographers in the 1980s saw the gap between lived and represented reality as a dissonance that needed to be filled photographically. Their works thus enacted a politics of what Nicholas Mirzoeff names “countervisuality,” wherein a dominant mode of seeing and understanding the world is contested in visual and cultural artifacts or ways of inhabiting and using space.⁸¹

Countervisuality may offer an alternative perspective on conventionally represented subjects. Importantly, much of the straight or live photography produced in a 1980s GDR found some place in the official public sphere. For example, Karin Wieckhorst's series of disabled people (*Körperbehinderte*, 1981 – 5) coincided with an international year of disability, in which the GDR also took part. [Figures 1.6 and 1.7] One set of images documents a woman named Regina Reichert as she moves into a semi-independent living home in Berlin. In one portrait, Reichert is nude. The exposure of her body in Wieckhorst's images, as Josie McLellan has described them, complicated conventions for corporeal beauty: “Such photos broke the association of nudity with sensuality, nature and leisure, insisting that nudity could also feature in

⁸¹ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look. A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

[Figures 1.6 and 1.7. Karin Wieckhorst. *Regina Reichert* from the *Körperbehinderte (People with Physical Disabilities)* series, 1981 – 5. Images courtesy of the artist. © Karin Wieckhorst.]



[Figure 1.6]



[Figure 1.7]

scenes of drudgery, pain and boredom.”⁸² My research in the publications of the GDR also demonstrates that these and similar photos were reprinted and analyzed in the country’s official arts magazine, *Bildende Kunst (Plastic Arts)*. In one 1988 article, photography historian Gabriele Muschter lauds their vulnerability and honesty, and in particular Wieckhorst’s rare talent for representing such “complicated human problems.”⁸³ Bordering on the pejorative, Muschter’s sentimentality reflects both her own investment in advancing female photographers as “different” than their male counterparts, as well as a fairly undeveloped perspective on non-normative representation. Indeed, Wieckhorst herself sought to complicate the scopic impulse to look and pity the disabled by including autobiographical statements from the three sitters who participated in her *Körperbehinderte* series. Interestingly, she also explained in an interview with me that she wanted to give her audience the opportunity to stare and look at these bodies without feeling ashamed of their interest.⁸⁴ Looking was then a mode of developing sensitivity for the realities of these underrepresented subjects. Having seen her husband through the final stages of a very serious case of multiple sclerosis, Wieckhorst’s objective was both personal and political: she understood that greater visibility would likewise lead to greater social and medical services for the disabled. That much seems to have been indeed effective, insofar as the images appeared officially as a part of the GDR’s

⁸² Josie McLellan, “Visual Dangers And Delights: Nude Photography In East Germany,” *Past & Present*, no. 205 (November 2009): 166.

⁸³ Gabriele Muschter, “Frauen fotografieren – anders,” *Bildende Kunst* (February 1988): 52.

⁸⁴ Karin Wieckhorst, personal interview, June 26, 2015. Wieckhorst’s *Körperbehinderte* series also comprised the material she presented in her petition for candidacy in the Union of Fine Artists.

participation in the international year of disability in 1981. My point here is to nevertheless demonstrate that while photography was understood as a mode of political subjectification in state culture, that personhood remained carefully curated. While some “aberrant” beings were embraced and allowed into official visual culture, most were not.

Visualizing some bodies as different but acceptable came at the exclusion of others. It is into this visual discourse that Schulze’s images most clearly assert their countervisuality. This is arguably most easily demonstrated in her images of laborers, a series of sixteen photographs she produced between 1985 and 1988. Her *Arbeit* (*Work*) series is exemplary in the subtlety of its visual and symbolic inversion of worker photography, a genre popular throughout East Germany’s four-decade history. In Mirzoeff’s parlance, her images claim “the right to look,” because they redefine what is and can be seen, in this case of work in East Germany. Schulze’s photographs introduce the reality of labor into a national portrait practice that fairly denied anything but an idealized worker image. There is great discrepancy between the display of the disabled body—which is presented as a vulnerable subject in need—and that of the working body—which is universally heroized—in the GDR’s photographic culture. That unidimensional character was not lost on the laborers themselves, and reflects the disparity between the performative language of citizen equality advanced by the state and actual lived experience.⁸⁵ Schulze explains that she

⁸⁵ See, for example, Marc Silberman, “Problematizing the ‘Socialist Public Sphere’: Concepts and Consequences” in *What remains? East German Culture and the Postwar Public*, ed. Marc Silberman, 1 – 12 (Washington, D.C.: American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, 1997), and Mary

took these photographs because she wanted to see for herself how the men she lived among made a living. The workers did not regard artists highly, because, as Schulze writes, “they fall to their knees for the state.”⁸⁶ Entering the worksites, she prepared herself to meet the hostility of the workers. They were bitter towards the state, knew that it was not invested in them, but nevertheless required an image or idea of them to maintain the legitimacy of the socialist state. In an interview Schulze explained to me, “They were of course not very open to me at first, because they thought that I had been sent by the state...None of the artists went to the factories, only the state or party lackeys did, and of course they thought I was one of them, because no one else came!”⁸⁷ Here, we see how Schulze’s process—her desire to know workers, to meet them on their level—informed her practice. In fact, she explained to me that it took several weeks for her to gain the trust of her subjects. She had to crawl into and around machinery, show the men that she was serious about observing them, about telling their stories visually. Of course, she was also a woman entering a world of men. Her presence in the factories thus summoned the inherent contradiction between the state’s proclamation of gender equality and the reality of East German society.

Importantly, Schulze’s photographs filled a known visual gap in state culture. By the 1980s, it would have been difficult to find anyone who took seriously the images of harmonious workers churned out by official culture, which maintained its claim to proletarian allegiance. Schulze’s images thus visualize a fundamental irony:

Fulbrook, *The People’s State. East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

⁸⁶ Gundula Schulze Eldowy, “Die Plaudereien des Scharfschützen” in *Am fortgewehten Ort. Berliner Geschichten* (Leipzig: Lehmann Verlag, 2011), 192f.

⁸⁷ Gundula Schulze Eldowy, personal interview, July 27, 2015.

laborers were not only still alienated from their labor; they were uninspired by the heroic projections imposed upon them by the state.

One striking portrait in Schulze's *Work* series draws attention to the conditions of labor through an image that quite viscerally inverts the image of worker heroism. In *Andreas, der Rußkönig* (*Andreas, the King of Soot*) a man exhausted and covered in filth takes a moment of rest from the vile task of treating rubber with a mixture of coal and chemicals. [Figure 1.8] Married and of unknown age, Andreas' identity as laborer (rather than derelict) is revealed only by the context of Schulze's photo essay. Slumped over to his right, he appears weary and distant. Schulze assigns him ironic regalia. He is a king in the socialist state. Andreas looks more like a wayward clown than a king, with face made up in coal dust and curly hair frizzed by the steam of the factory. Dark circles weigh his eyes heavily downward. They are rimmed with ash, marks that Schulze elsewhere describes as permanent: "Despite daily showers I will never get rid of it," Andreas complained to her.⁸⁸ His nose, barely visible but for some gentle smudges of white skin, and his mouth, deeply recessed by black grime, reveal an extreme exposure to toxic working conditions. His body is clothed in soot-patina'd coveralls. Gaps of skin still clean indicate that he has unbuttoned several layers for this break, rendering the concentration of filth on his breathing, speaking, and eating orifices all the more alarming. Dehumanizing labor cannot erase the traces of the body. In fact, to the contrary, hard labor highlights the limitations of the human body. Andreas' orifices are vulnerable. The grime on their

⁸⁸ As cited in Gundula Schulze Eldowy, "Die Plaudereien des Scharfschützen" in *Am fortgewehten Ort. Berliner Geschichten*. (Leipzig: Lehmann Verlag, 2011), 194.



[Figure 1.8. Gundula Schulze Eldowy. *Andreas, der Rußkönig (Andreas, the King of Soot)*, 1985. Silver-gelatin print. Image courtesy of the artist.
© Gundula Schulze Eldowy.]

surfaces mark the places where he has swallowed, inhaled, and absorbed toxic filth. A cavernous backdrop of a room consumed by a heap of black, crumpled, and reflective material mirrors his polluted interior. This is the worker king on his throne.

Schulze's photographs of workers recall critical images of labor that emerged in cities across Western Europe and the United States at the turn of the 20th century. In a period of rapid urbanization, many were suspicious of not only the unfamiliar anonymity of city life, but the reliance those cities had on hard and especially factory labor. One prime example was Lewis Hine, a sociologist and documentary photographer. Hine's campaign to record the conditions of child labor in major American factories in the early 20th century was instrumental in changing these laws in the United States. Of course, Schulze never sought the scale or social messaging that Hine achieved. Nevertheless, both shared the spirit of using the camera to

document the underbelly of a society literally built on the backs of humans.

In important ways, Schulze may be more closely aligned to the Weimar-era photo essays of August Sander, but in the inverse. In his totemic work, *Antlitz der Zeit* (*The Face of Our Time*, 1929), Sander sought to collect every type of person in German society. The project was heavily schematic and based on rigid classifications and stereotypes. In this way, Schulze really contests his logic, which mirrors that later pursued by East Germany's photographic culture. In fact, as Sarah James has demonstrated, Sander's typologizing portraiture actually laid the groundwork for East Germany's divisive and compartmentalized form of photographic culture, and ultimately became a standard reference for photographic theory. James' research on Berthold Beiler demonstrates a critical, but nevertheless faithful relationship between the photographic theorist and the Weimar photographer. Beiler created a visual "training atlas"⁸⁹ on Sander, which became standard material for the study and practice of photography in the GDR, and discussed the artist in nearly two dozen articles that spanned a period from 1961 to 1989. As James explains, "For Beiler, Sander's typologizing series and the sober, frontal style of his photography...provided a central model for the photographic representation of social life through portraiture and, by proxy, a crucial means of photographically fashioning the socialist self."⁹⁰ It was, moreover, Sander's method of typologizing—which included, perhaps somewhat incidentally, figures like the communist revolutionaries

⁸⁹ James, *Common Ground*, 200.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Erich Mühsam and Paul Frölich⁹¹ who would become important icons to socialist and revolutionary culture in the GDR—which conformed so neatly to socialist realism’s penchant for visualizing “the typical,” that is to say, the “essence of a particular social force...the ‘ideal’ and the universal.”⁹²

Schulze deliberately made her worker portraits to contrast the idealized or typologized images of labor that populated official culture. Photographers typically cleaned up the reality of hard labor by emphasizing pleasure, satisfaction, leadership, and everyday heroism in the workers they posed before the lens. To take one example, a 1985 image by photography student Thomas Kläber, which appeared in the popular magazine *Fotografie* the following year, depicts an unnamed laborer installing a natural gas pipeline somewhere in the Soviet Union. [Figure 1.9] The man’s hands rest in his snug waistband, emphasizing a comfortable corpulence. His back right foot leans slightly forward on its toes, as if the photographer has caught him spontaneously. In contrast to Schulze’s image of Andreas, the backdrop is clear and open: a gas main to the man’s right directs the image back along a road that winds toward a receding horizon of buildings. These are documents of a future in the making. The laborer’s expression is uncomplicated, dull, and ironically lifeless compared with the acute exhaustion legible in Andreas’s entire body. Unnamed, the pipeline worker likewise remains indistinct within a wash of proletarian subjects.

⁹¹ In *Antlitz der Zeit*, Sander used these men to visualize the social schematics of “Revolutionaries” and “Communist Leader,” respectively.

⁹² James, *Common Ground*, 201.



[Figure 1.9. Thomas Kläber. *Untitled / Erdgastrasse (Natural Gas Works)*, 1983. Image from Hans Wulf Kunze, “Eine Bewährungsprobe für Fotografen,” *Fotografie*, no. 3 (1986): 93.]

Presented in a magazine within a photo essay awkwardly titled “A Test of One’s Worth for Photographers,”⁹³ Kläber’s photograph was a requirement for his professional advancement. A short introductory text praises the benefit such “socially-responsible assignments” had on the country’s photographers in training.⁹⁴ A similar agenda for the magazine’s East German readers is implicit. Intention is rendered sentimental in the images, which dramatize hard labor at the expense of a greater realism. In contrast Schulze’s photograph of Andreas visualizes the

⁹³ “Eine Bewährungsprobe für Fotografen”

⁹⁴ Kulturbund der DDR, “Eine Bewährungsprobe für Fotografen,” *Fotografie* (March 1986): 90.

physicality of hard labor, namely, its toll on the body. There is no idealism projected onto Andreas. His plight is both a familiar and taboo subject. This kind of sensitivity to the realities of labor is not only absent in Kläber's portrait. It is carefully concealed.

The status of the East German working class

Kläber's image also appeared in a large-scale 1985 exhibition titled "*Der einfache Frieden*" ("The Simple Peace") and is representative of the content—and patronizing framings—of a typical public exhibition. In contrast, for Schulze's viewers her images were without precedent, the first opportunity for many to see the real lived experience of East Germany presented in the public and discursive format of the art exhibition. Though by no means extolled by the state, Schulze exhibited almost exclusively in state-run galleries with progressive programming, preferring these venues to those popping up along the country's cultural margins.⁹⁵ Her exhibitions attracted a large audience; in 1989, for example, some 14,000 attended her exhibition at the *Galerie Weißer Elefant* (White Elephant Gallery) in East Berlin.⁹⁶ One is struck in looking through Schulze's images by the way they replace the ideological union imposed upon the East German public by the state with a more organic, everyday one. Her focus on the body, moreover, underscores the lived experience of East Germany as material, an ordeal actually inscribed on the faces and bodies of the public.

⁹⁵ Gundula Schulze Eldowy, personal interview, July 27, 2015.

⁹⁶ Gundula Schulze Eldowy, personal interview, July 27, 2015.

Worker photography remained even in the 1980s quite popular, especially as a reliable theme for the *Auftragskunst* (contract art) that many school-trained artists and/or official members of the VBK received. Because the East German state identified itself so strongly with the proletarian, state contract images were often idealistic, even fetishistic. These images comprised a significant portion of East Germany's dominant and dominating visual culture, that is to say, its authoritative discourse. During the final decades of the GDR, the state's attachment to a proletarian identity had, nevertheless, withered into superficial posturing. Mary Fulbrook observes that although at this time more people than ever, particularly those in top positions within the party, were claiming a working class identity, a unified proletarian community was not only largely absent, but strategically dismantled: "But while the notion of the 'working class' was almost grotesquely expanded in GDR official ideology, in what might be called the 'lived experience' of East German workers there was an uncoupling of many of these features, and a dissolution of 'class' bonds."⁹⁷ An inflated use of the image of the working class had replaced actual engagement with the needs of the working class, including addressing the difficult working conditions that Schulze documents in her series on work. Wolfgang Engler identifies a similar problematic in his description of East German society as an *arbeiterliche Gesellschaft* (workerly society): "Rarely has a political system held its public (*Getreuten*) on such a short leash, the responsibilities of its most important class more harshly reduced, its idealism more harshly tested as this one... And seldom

⁹⁷ Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 214.

has leadership in modern times incapacitated the working class for so long and to such an extent, while at the same time depending on it.”⁹⁸ Whereas the worker was consistently heroized and remained the leading prototype for East German society, the working class had very little political agency—that is of course, until it claimed it in 1989, abandoning all party allegiances en masse.

The workers were suspicious of Schulze when she wanted to photograph them. This doubt reveals a latent double-consciousness that both Fulbrook and Engler identify. Most artists did not necessarily commune with their subjects, but rather tended to enter a site with attitudes ranging from the disinterested employee (they, too, were on the job after all) to the ethnographer. Such is certainly one of the resounding issues in the *Fotografie* image by Thomas Kläber. Besides presenting a generic letter of introduction from the VBK to the factory manager, Schulze had no attachment to the state in the making of her series on work. Coming on her own volition, she explains that she “wanted to show under what conditions [these men] had to work in order to earn their money.”⁹⁹ Schulze’s guileless photographs of men with dirty, sweating, and drained faces, or those behind masks as they work through noxious substances are as unheroic as they are spontaneous, taken from the murky bowels of factory machinery. Her vision does not moralize or interpret, but rather shows a reality otherwise unexplored in GDR art and visual culture. Her photographs are average, unglamorous images of a day in, day out reality.

⁹⁸ Wolfgang Engler, *Die Ostdeutschen*, (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002), 194.

⁹⁹ Gundula Schulze Eldowy, personal interview, July 27, 2015.

The taboo of the ordinary: An East German countervisuality

When Schulze first exhibited her black-and-white portraits in 1983 at the state-run *Galerie Sophienstraße 8* (Gallery 8 Sophie Street) in East Berlin, a man who passed through during installation reported the photos to the Stasi, whose national headquarters were located just around the corner. On the day of the opening, a man and a woman from the party came by. The photos of Tamerlan in various stages of amputation brought the woman to tears as she exclaimed: “Hopefully this will never happen to us!”¹⁰⁰ “*Der Stasityp*” (i.e. the guy who apparently worked for the Stasi) pulled Schulze aside to congratulate her on the exhibition. Nevertheless, required to pull some of the images, the officials asked Schulze for her suggestions. She selected an image of an overweight man and a few other portraits, electing to save photographs she considered more politically charged, including ones of people at public marches. No doubt, she read an irony in these images, which would be more legible to colleagues than the conformist party members. She explained to me that today she would have removed these more didactic images, and kept those of everyday people on the wall.¹⁰¹ In the context of an official gallery, especially one just blocks away from the GDR’s central intelligence agency, representing the average East German citizen as a flawed and ambiguous subject had a starker defiance than any political image, regardless of sarcastic intent.

Of course, Susan Sontag writes that the most banal images are often more powerful than more iconographic or explicit ones: “Those occasions when the taking

¹⁰⁰ Gundula Schulze Eldowy, personal interview, July 27, 2015.

¹⁰¹ Gundula Schulze Eldowy, personal interview, July 27, 2015

of photographs is relatively indiscriminating, promiscuous, or self-effacing do not lessen the didacticism of the whole enterprise... Images which idealize... are no less aggressive than work which makes a virtue of plainness.”¹⁰² Schulze’s photographs of everyday people celebrate their imperfections and make abnormality plain by depicting her subjects in conversation with each other. Her images resist the typologies that proliferated in East German art and visual culture by blurring borderlines. The sentiment of her Stasi viewer—Schulze’s ostensible enemy—suggests that he too had had enough with state promises. Or, at the very least, it demonstrates the potential her images had for new kinds of group or personal identification that did not conform to state idealism.

Similar to Sontag’s politics of the ordinary, Jacques Rancière contends that an artwork’s political valence consists in its ability to rupture the “distribution of the sensible,” that is to say, the way in which art defies expectations of what defines the norm and thus weakens the rigidity of the status quo. Mirzoeff’s theory of countervisuality is, of course, clearly in conversation with that of Rancière. The sensible—what Mirzoeff calls “visuality”—is comprised of all the “perceptual coordinates of the community.”¹⁰³ These binding forces are ideological as well as material, and as such are able to be repeated. What becomes normative convention likewise has the inverse function of identifying the parts of culture deemed comparatively aberrant. Politics is enacted when an artwork interrupts a given reality to the effect that it gives voice to those who have been excluded. Mirzoeff calls these

¹⁰² Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Rosetta Books, 2003), 4.

¹⁰³ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2004), 3.

moments of rupture “the right to look,” a visual politics which “claims autonomy, not individualism or voyeurism, but the claim to a political subjectivity and collectivity.”¹⁰⁴ The right to look confronts the limitations placed on the social body by the discourse and operations of hegemonic culture. By demanding “the right to existence...the right to be seen,”¹⁰⁵ it thus targets the authority—the status quo—that projects those bounds on the bodies of its public and reifies them materially in art and visual culture. By elevating excluded subjects to the status of art, artists like Schulze asserted their political subjectivity as deserving of attention. Indeed, in the context of the GDR where art and politics were inherently intertwined, all visual representation, especially of the public, mapped the political.

As has been demonstrated through the example of Karin Wieckhorst’s images of the disabled, as well as those of a preceding generation represented by people like Evelyn Richter or Arno Fischer, Schulze emerged in a context less averse to artistic photography, in general. A French cultural center, which opened in the center of East Berlin in 1984, had also coordinated exhibitions and events on a number of straight photographers, including Henri Cartier-Bresson and the MAGNUM team. Independent of this, Schulze’s connections to Robert Frank—whom she met on his visit to Berlin in 1985—certainly strengthened her penchant for socially-engaged portraiture.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, the artists who Schulze claims as models (Robert Frank, Diane Arbus) or with whom her work has been compared or exhibited (Frank, Arbus,

¹⁰⁴ Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, 1.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰⁶ Gundula Schulze Eldowy, personal interview, July 27, 2015.

Nan Goldin) operate within a different set of cultural conditions that make the subjects of their photographs seem eccentric, marginal, or otherwise deviant. The Americans that Frank imaged in his 1958 series, the mentally, physically disabled, and social outcasts that frequently populate the work of Arbus, or the drug addicts and private partiers of Goldin's images are hidden, unseen, unknown, even alien subjects to their intended museum-going viewers. As historian Josie McLellan has argued, "[Schulze] chose to photograph the sort of people who were rarely depicted in socialist photography, but were nevertheless recognizable figures in East German life."¹⁰⁷ It is ironic then that Schulze's images are countervisual even though they represent a dominant majority public. I call this the taboo of the ordinary. Her anti-idealized subjects are unique within a shared global history of social photography because they are at once completely average in the lived everyday of East Germany and at the same time generally absent from the GDR's visual culture, which aimed explicitly at idealizing and controlling the everyday.

Spelling the body: Thomas Florschuetz's fragmented self-portraits

Whereas Gundula Schulze trained her camera on the ideological hypocrisy buried in East Germany's normative culture, Thomas Florschuetz aimed his at its very conventions of representation.¹⁰⁸ By working exclusively with the human body

¹⁰⁷ McLellan, "Visual Dangers And Delights," 168.

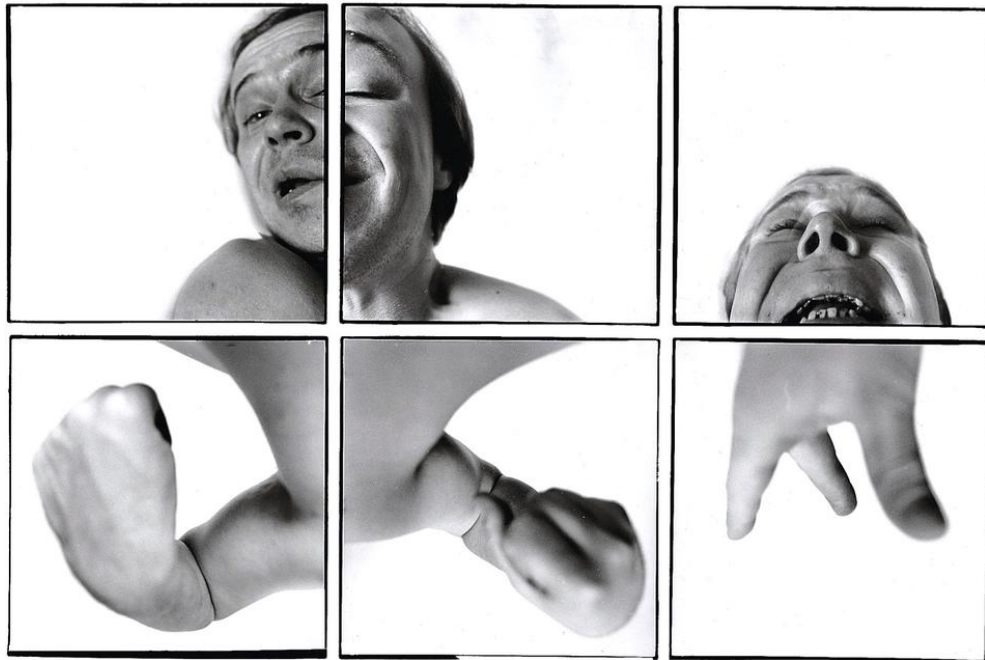
¹⁰⁸ I have written on this series elsewhere. See, Sara Blaylock, "Aufstand des Materials. Körperbilder im Prenzlauer Berg der 1980er Jahre" (A Material Revolt: Body Portraits in the Prenzlauer Berg of the 1980s) in *Gegenstimmen. Kunst in der DDR 1976 – 1989 (Voices of Dissent: Art in the GDR)*, ed. Christoph Tannert, 394 – 401 (Berlin: Deutsche Gesellschaft & Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2016), Exhibition catalog.

and by calling this series portraiture, Florschuetz obscures the language of the highly loaded genre, questioning its claim to realism both formally and conceptually. The formal inquiry of his *Körperbilder / Körperstücke (Body Portraits / Body Fragments)*¹⁰⁹ is rooted to questions of how photographic process or a unique photographic language influence a resulting image. He explains his process thus: “What you do to make an image is really a very minimal gesture, a very minimal expenditure. It is the picture itself, which makes something happen. So, you sit in front of the camera. You spell something out, speak certain words that will stay there.”¹¹⁰ Chance abides a logic designed by a series of controls: the camera itself, which was medium-format and so produced a specific size of image, the range of motion possible within the diminutive size of his East Berlin studio apartment, and the access he had to his own body, as well as the choices he could make about which parts of that body to show.

Dissected into six square black-and-white photographs, Florschuetz appears twice in a 1985 untitled *Body Fragment*. [Figure 1.10] The first body consumes the left-most four panels. Its right eye strains to remain open as the face squeezes against a bare shoulder. The second adjacent panel completes the head; its enlarged size bulges and swells. The jaw disappears into the folds of the neck. Two squares beneath the head and shoulders complete a figure. Clenched fists awkwardly hook upward and fade into smooth 45° angles that meet where the torso ends in the upper frame. This

¹⁰⁹ *Körperbilder* preceded the title *Körperstücke*, which is the title in use today. In an interview with the author, he explained that he neither prefers nor differentiates these names (May 12, 2015).

¹¹⁰ Thomas Florschuetz, personal interview, May 12, 2015.



[Figure 1.10. Thomas Florschuetz. *Untitled (15. XI. 85)* from the *Körperstücke (Body Fragments)* series, 1985. Silver-gelatin prints, each 50x50cm. Image courtesy of the artist. © Thomas Florschuetz.]

diamond-shaped trunk appears fixed and unmoving, rendering the twisting of the head and arms connected to it more animate—grotesque in that animation, exceeding formal and biological bounds. The figure at once recoils and prepares pitifully to guard itself with a spastic defense. The apprehension of this body contrasts the second more abbreviated one found in the image's two rightmost panels. This time the head in the upper frame begins at the bottom, shot from just at the chin. The perspective accentuates jagged and discolored teeth, the peak of a nose with flaring nostrils, and a head, which dissolves into a white abyss. The body is completed below the lower jaw by a hand reaching down with thumb, index, and middle finger from the top of the frame, poised as errant limbs.

Though disjointed and out of proportion, the figures nevertheless conform to the conventional logic of the human body: one head, one base. At nearly five feet wide and more than three feet tall with each of its six-pieces claiming an equal 50x50cm share, the photograph is imposing. Yet, these bodies seem babyish, vulnerable and weak. Florschuetz's self-imposed distortion of the body clearly signals an internal and psychological turmoil. This is the interior of Andreas, the King of Soot's body. The image's high contrast tone and blindingly white background render its contortions even more surreal.

Florschuetz aimed his camera at its conventions for representation. His photographs reveal a curiosity about how the production of an image ascribes it meaning. He is drawn to, but wary of the camera's presumed objectivity. Targeting form as a symptom of the cultural stagnation implicit in Schulze's more representational images, Florschuetz thus illustrates the visceral, incorporated experiences of living in East Germany's "real existing socialism" that her portraits imply. On working in a condition of cultural oppression, he explains: "That was definitely also the most exciting part—really the fundamental condition or the fundamental premise—that you did not make what you did not want to make... The need to find a language for yourself was always in one way or another the primary concern."¹¹¹ His drive to produce a unique expressive language of representation was thus a way of bending or adapting to what was available to him, to use art to make space for feelings and experience otherwise unrepresented.

¹¹¹ Thomas Florschuetz, personal interview, May 12, 2015.

Formally, Florschuetz's self-portrait project recalls the photographs of Hans Bellmer, a surrealist photographer who chose to produce images of grotesque fantasy as a way of contesting Nazi fascism. It is quite interesting that both artists chose to target their country's cult of the body. For both of them, this was one of the most immediately repressive tools of the state. Nevertheless, during his years in East Germany Florschuetz did not know of Bellmer.¹¹² East Germany was a very isolated country, and access to avant-garde artistic examples was fairly limited to bigger historical figures than Bellmer. To take an even more contemporary example, the work of the British-born, US-based photographer John Coplans likewise comes to mind. And, although Coplans' unusual distortions and close-up framings of the body certainly recall the *Body Fragments*, it was likewise not until after he had left the GDR in 1988 that Florschuetz first came across his work. Florschuetz's montage work is actually conceptually, politically, and biographically closer to the Weimar-era artist Hannah Höch. Like many experimental East German artists, he names Dada and the German avant-garde explicitly as inspirations for the way these artists attacked visual convention through critical citation. Access to these historical figures would have been mediated not only by other artists in the know, but actually by the East German state itself, which from the 1970s onward embraced some of Germany's more politically-minded creative traditions as a part of its progressive cultural canon.¹¹³

¹¹² Thomas Florschuetz, e-mail message to author, February 22, 2017.

¹¹³ Ulrike Goeschen, *Vom sozialistischen Realismus zur Kunst im Sozialismus. Die Rezeption der Moderne in Kunst und Kunstwissenschaft der DDR* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001), 192 – 193.

Florschuetz's interest in producing a unique photographic style through the genre of portraiture, and especially self-portraiture, likewise demonstrates a conceptual disavowal of the conventions of normative East German culture. By highlighting the camera as a technology, Florschuetz implies photography's vulnerability to context, manipulation, and instrumentalization. In this way, his work comes in direct conversation with Schulze's social photography. While her images make evident the exploitation of the East German majority public, Florschuetz's visualize a latent psychic distress. For Florschuetz, who worked decidedly along East Germany's cultural margins, his conceptual message is placid rather than additive; these are documents of artistic suspension.

Plötzliche Heimkehr (Sudden Return Home), a vertical diptych from 1985, underscores that suspension as a domestic crisis. [Figure 1.11] In the top image, Florschuetz lays his left cheek against the camera lens. His profile consumes only half of the frame; its white background has bled into the place where his nose ought to be. The tension in his forehead and eyelids indicate the physical discomfort required to capture his bony jowl close-up. Here Florschuetz's facial structure becomes a quality for formal inspection. The darkness that traces below the white mound of his cheek emphasizes its comparatively large size. His eyes are closed and mouth slightly open, making him appear somewhere between forced supplication and death. Beneath his face, a triangle of shoulder connects to the frame below in a forearm that extends into a fist clutching a piece of taught rope. If this is the right forearm, it has been shot from the front, as if the hand grips the rope to pull something toward itself. If the



[Figure 1.11. Thomas Florschuetz. *Untitled (Plötzliche Heimkehr)* from the *Körperstücke (Body Fragments)* series, silver-gelatin prints, 1985. Silver-gelatin prints, each 50x50cm. Image courtesy of the artist. © Thomas Florschuetz.]

image is shot from behind, then the rope held by the left hand follows the figure, perhaps supporting it. In contrast to his face in profile, here his hand is not necessarily bound or forced to the rope. A sense of subject agency is however not made clear by the images in unison. Read as a whole, the arm is the single appendage of a silent, sleeping, dreaming, or lifeless head in the midst of pendulating its way up the angled rope. Maybe it is being pulled, hoisted up the incline; the lean of Florschuetz's profile might suggest that the fist is clenched as a brake to the taut cable. The work's title partially disambiguates the photographs. The adjective "sudden" implies a lack of preparation. This return home is undesired, not chosen. The image's ambivalence reflects deferment, stasis, and enclosure.

A logic of disassembling and reassembling: Classification and realism

Florschuetz visualizes a generalized social agony—the gap between a society preoccupied with streamlining its representation and the individuals straining to find and express their subjectivity. Reimagining his own body over and over again, Florschuetz’s critique is not so much autobiographical as it is organized around a consistent visual language. Though his face appears in nearly every *Body Fragment*, it is never indexical. Rather, these photographs are excessively expressive, ambivalent, unclear, violated and visceral—stand-ins for the manipulated anonymous social body, as such. He splits the naked figure into its most utilitarian parts, more precisely, into units that labor: head, arms, legs, hands, feet, and shoulders. Printed, he re-assembles them, spells the alphabet of the body to emphasize its inherent utility or to invent novel uses for the body in pieces. These visual sacrifices allegorize a greater societal exploitation.¹¹⁴

Michel Foucault’s foundational theorization about the way that power and restraint constitute subjects in modern society supports the countervisuality of

¹¹⁴ The self-incisions of Florschuetz’s *Body Fragments* may be interpreted as visualizations of György Lukács’ anxieties over the alienation of the human subject’s reification in industrialized labor, which he describes in his 1923 *History and Class Consciousness*. The individual body when subordinated to its function becomes a quantifiable object. Parceled out in the service of labor, the individual’s humanity is lost: “...it freezes into an exactly delimited, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable ‘things’—the reified, mechanically objectified ‘performance’ of the worker, wholly separated from his total human personality: in short, it becomes space.” György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* [1923], “Soviet Literature [1934],” transcribed Andy Blunden for Marxists.org, Accessed December 15, 2015, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/history/hcc05.htm>.

Though Florschuetz would have likely been unaware of this text, just as Lukács identified a parallel problematic in both capitalist and communist labor practices, which produced like conditions of the “atomization of the individual,” Florschuetz’s contorted and disfigured bodies visualize the distance between the East German state’s fantasy of a satisfied laboring public and its lived reality. Lukács would famously recant this text after receiving pushback from Communist party leaders who envisioned an emancipated, but still industrialized proletariat. Its critique of the trappings of industry nevertheless remains foundational to critical theory, which in its Cold War inception targeted both the exploitation of capital and the woes of a technocratic form of Communism.

Florschuetz's *Body Fragments*. Foucault argues that the laboring body is disciplined towards efficiency and predictability, and produces "docile" subjects.¹¹⁵ Though Foucault was critiquing capitalism, he was certainly aware of contemporaneous critiques of East Germany's essentially totalitarian government, which maintained significant hierarchies and policed the movements of the population to much the same pacifying effect. The arms of the law targeted and criminalized deviance, both actively through aggressive surveillance operations and passively through an inflexible curation of art and culture. East German visual culture was regulated as a tool of state legitimation, deployed to make natural or "real" the state's ideological *modus operandi*.

Historian Greg Eghigian names the East German subject *homo munitis*, i.e., the sheltered or defended human. His usage of the term further elaborates on the specific role that a Foucauldian discipline played in East German society.¹¹⁶ "The guise of *homo munitis*," Eghigian writes, describes a "people historically repressed and denied access to happiness by the walls and overly protective political system ostensibly designed to defend them."¹¹⁷ Looking more specifically at East German photography, then, one might consider again the status of art and visual culture, and especially photography, which though intended to—as the Secretary of the Union of Soviet Fine Artists would explain in 1953—"represent reality in its revolutionary

¹¹⁵ Foucault, "Docile Bodies," 135 – 169.

¹¹⁶ Greg Eghigian, "Homo Munitis. The East German Observed" in *Socialist Modern. East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, eds. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 41. Note that Eghigian develops a GDR-specific character from the notion of the totalitarianized Soviet subject, *homo sovieticus*, theorized in the mid-1980s.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, 42.

development, in its most progressive appearances,”¹¹⁸ also served to shelter and protect the GDR citizens to their own detriment. For Eghigian, also writing after Foucault, the state exploited its public by defining it in a narrow view, implementing a “medical and scientific management of normality and abnormality” meant ostensibly to define and in so doing prevent deviance for this and every generation.¹¹⁹ Reality was thus predicated on a predefined vision of the real.

The *Body Fragments* intervene on the expectation for photographic “realism” in two ways. First, they call attention to the processes that produce those norms, namely, the technology of the camera. As the West German art historian Karin Thomas observed in 1987 of these images: “For Thomas Florschuetz the photographic medium is no longer simply reproduction and interpretation of a given reality; rather, he uses . . . the potential within the art form to create a different, meta-empirical reality.”¹²⁰ But that reality is, from my perspective, more than a formal or aesthetically-driven critique. Rather, it targets the East German state’s claim to reality, to visibility, to the real levied in large part through its visual culture. Indeed, in their attention to portraiture as a process of seeing and constructing an image, the *Body Fragments* summon to mind the ideological techniques in use by the state’s own photographic production. At the same time, however, they submit to the photographic mechanism, rendering the body hyper-docile, malleable, that is to say entirely

¹¹⁸ W.P. Jefanow (Secretary of the Union of Soviet Fine Artists) interview in *Fotografie* (December 1953): 331, cited in John P. Jacob, *Recollecting a Culture. Photography and the Evolution of a Socialist Aesthetic in East Germany* (Boston: Photographic Resource Center at Boston University, 1998), 6.

¹¹⁹ Eghigian, “Homo Munitus,” 43.

¹²⁰ Karin Thomas, “Thomas Florschuetz. Körperbilder,” *European Photography*, vol. 8, no. 4 (December 1987): 16.

subjected, a vessel. Florschuetz's misshapen figures allude to the deformities wrought by meager living and hard labor: from the crook of Tamerlan's arthritic hand to the permanent eyeliner tattooed on Andreas' face. Though her intervention on East German photography's claim to realism is less metaphorical than Florschuetz's, Schulze of course addresses similar issues. Yet, his dismembered self-portraits are arguably less ambivalent than hers, because their message is consistently distorted. The *Body Fragments* cannot find place within the conventions of East German portraiture. Instead they abrade those practices by multiplying the photographic space and making it a site of the unclassifiable. Schulze's viewers identify with her subjects and in that identification slowly dismantle the authority of East German visual culture. Florschuetz's images invite an incisive, dehumanized gaze. At the same time that they underscore the mechanics of a photograph's production, the *Body Fragments* submit to the privileged access granted by the technology of the camera. Through framings that cut and smash, gawk and inspect, sever and contort, the viewer is given free access to angles of a person otherwise unavailable. This kind of looking—unlike the sensitivity that Wieckhorst hoped her series would inspire—cannot exceed self-indulgence. In fact, Florschuetz's viewers indulge the experience of inspection that in fact constantly threatens them. The pleasure in that curiosity thus cites the cycle of state oppression.

A divided city

There is an inherent antipathy to Florschuetz's self-portraits, which seize and

inspect the body unglamorously. He explains that the series emerged in part out of material excess: the access he had to his own body afforded limitless permutations and photographic confrontations.¹²¹ Prior to this project, Florschuetz had focused on portraiture, specifically, capturing images of his friends and artistic colleagues in the mythic Prenzlauer Berg, a run-down working class neighborhood in East Berlin. All of his GDR-era portraits share an unfocused or slightly skewed quality that, as I have argued elsewhere,¹²² reflects an aesthetic of linguistic play characteristic of the artistic and especially literary scene.

Schulze, who also lived in East Berlin, was far less committed to the Prenzlauer Berg's alternative milieu than Florschuetz who exhibited almost exclusively in unofficial (i.e., non-state) arts spaces across East Germany. Disaffected by state culture and frankly disinterested in establishing long-term plans in the GDR, he took advantage of the benefits afforded him as a member of the Union of Fine Artists—including a tax identification number required of all those able-bodied and of working age—but did not otherwise play the state artist part. Ironically exhibition allowances granted by the VBK that brought him to the West ultimately enabled Florschuetz's illegal exit from the GDR in 1988.¹²³ This kind of outsider and insider status was common for experimental artists in the period. It likewise demonstrates the extent to which these makers could identify with the state as part of their rebellion. Such was likewise—but even more aggressively certain—for the Auto-Perforation

¹²¹ Thomas Florschuetz, personal interview, May 12, 2015.

¹²² Blaylock, "Aufstand des Materials," 395 – 397.

¹²³ Thomas Florschuetz, personal interview, May 12, 2015.

Artists.

The body in motion: The animated critique of the Auto-Perforation Artists

The tedium that foregrounds Florschuetz's self-portraits is more actively confronted in the multi-media artwork of the Auto-Perforation Artists.¹²⁴ The core group comprised Micha Brendel, Else Gabriel, Rainer Görß, and Via Lewandowsky, all students in the set design department at the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts in the early 1980s. Their "Auto-Perforation" moniker makes explicit the centrality of self-abuse in a largely performance-based practice and suggests the lengths these artists went to experiment with their bodies as artistic tools and subjects. More than mere works of cathartic abuse, their performances and installations were designed as multi-sensorial, immersive experiences that both passively and actively incorporated their audiences. The Auto-Perforation artwork reflected simultaneously the alienating experience of a single body working to escape constraint and the totalizing effects of that constraint on the community of the East German public. Working with structural

¹²⁴ The hermeneutics of performance art requires a different set of methodologies than those of other objects. My analysis is inspired by Amelia Jones who in 1997—at the very nascence of Performance Studies as a discipline—wrote convincingly that not being witness to a performance does not inherently limit a person's ability to interpret a time-based work. Indeed, the logistical problems of analyzing performance art actually highlight a greater analytical problem for the art critic, namely "that there is no possibility of an unmediated relationship to any kind of cultural product" Amelia Jones, "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation," *Art Journal* vol. 56, no. 4, Performance Art: (Some) Theory and (Selected) Practice at the End of this Century (Winter 1997): 12. I follow Jones' lead in her dual attentions to both the performance work and its documentation, and agree that the archive of a live art work can tell a great deal about its reception history, and how the archive influences contemporary perception. Historical distance thus enables a critic to identify "the patterns of history" in which the performers and their viewers are embedded (12). Whereas, I will not interrogate sources in the way that Jones has so adroitly modeled in her scholarship in her 1997 text and elsewhere (i.e. *Body Art. Performing the Subject*, 1998) I do approach the archive with a healthy level of skepticism and use as much as possible a variety of sources to present these art events holistically. A discourse analysis about performance art in East Germany is here not possible, but is woven in as necessary.

and cultural impasse as a motivation rather than an obstacle, the Auto-Perforation Artists used creative restraint to redefine the definitions of art in East Germany.

* * *

The sounds of loud experimental music spill out of the Academy of Fine Arts in Dresden onto the romantic Brühl's Terrace that overlooks the Elbe River. After passing through two heavy wooden doors a steam of smoke and sweat engulfs the air of the school. Hundreds of people fill the floors and halls of the academy. It is *Fasching*, the school's annual Carnival celebration, a party of epic proportions that would run a full two days for this February 1986 permutation. In the foyer, a spectacle is underway. A group of six people variously populate a raised stage. Four guide the action; these are the Auto-Perforation Artists staging one of their first public performances, *Spitze des Fleischbergs (Top of Meat Mountain)*. Ropes, metal bars, and sheets of plastic-y fabric extend from the floor to an ad hoc backdrop, encircling the performers in a crescent before their captivated audience. Each in the quartet of leaders plays a specific role, spontaneous in action, but nevertheless foregrounded by rigorous conceptual preparation.¹²⁵ Dressed in a German *dirndl* with bosomy floral smock gathered tightly to her waist by a black bodice, Else Gabriel uses a hairdryer to desiccate the feathers on a dead chicken. [Figure 1.12] The gleam of the metallic instrument contrasts Gabriel's feminine softness; her right hand, which is gripped assuredly to the bird's left leg makes her folkloric domesticity seem affected, a deliberate ruse in this concatenation of discordant symbols. Via

¹²⁵ Christoph Tannert, "Ereignisgeschichte" in *Autoperforationsartistik*, ed. Christoph Tannert (Nürnberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 1991), 8, Exhibition catalog.

Lewandowsky's contribution to the performance likewise counters the definitions of a heteronormative East German subject. [Figure 1.13] He wears a long red wig, dramatic stage makeup, jewelry, and short fingerless gloves made of lace. The black leather strapping at his waist both exaggerates his long, thin frame and suggests deviant sexual play. During the performance, he belts into a microphone elongated by the raw flesh of a phallic cow's gullet. Elsewhere, Lewandowsky takes a more submissive pose. [Figure 1.14] Bending his weight into the outstretched arms of Micha Brendel and Rainer Görß, Lewandowsky appears enraptured, maybe exhausted. Brendel and Görß seem likewise hypnotized by each other. The undress of the former is a vulgar foil to the latter's mannered appearance, which is complicated by white stage makeup. Brendel, whose small body is stenciled with the hexagonal pattern of chicken wire, appears at times driving the air with a large white hoop, his lips stiffly opened to the guttural incantation of a long vowel. His outburst, described by the poet Durs Grünbein as a "tantrum,"¹²⁶ culminates in an automatic painting made from splatters of green liquid feces dripped onto a canvas from a punctured animal's intestinal tract. The performance concludes after all four artists blackout from exhaustion.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Durs Grünbein, "Protestantische Rituale. Zur Arbeit der Autoperforationsartisten" in *Kunst in der DDR*, eds. Eckhart Gillen & Rainer Haarmann (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1990), 312.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

[Figures 1.12 – 1.14. Auto-Perforation Artists (Micha Brendel, Else Gabriel, Rainer Görß and Via Lewandowsky). *Spitze des Fleischbergs* (*Top of Meat Mountain*), Hochschule für Bildende Künste – Dresden, February 1986. Performance. Photos by Andreas Rost. All images courtesy of the artist. © Andreas Rost.]



[Figure 1.12. Else Gabriel in *Spitze des Fleischbergs*.]



[Figure 1.13. Via Lewandowsky in *Spitze des Fleischbergs*.]



[Figure 1.14. Micha Brendel, Via Lewandowsky and Rainer Görß in *Spitze des Fleischbergs*.]

* * *

As a training ground for those whose hands the state would bestow its future representation, the East German art school was an exaggeratedly ideological space, where studio courses were supplemented by Marxist-Leninist art history and obligatory party celebrations or commemorations. Beginning with the *Top of Meat Mountain* omnibus performance—with a name as inscrutable as the actions themselves—the Auto-Perforation Artists introduced a generative artistic alternative into this domain. They chose the Carnival party as a site of least resistance for this early public performance. Their efforts would hastily accumulate greater risk. Though performance art was well underway in East Germany’s artistic enclaves before these artists met,¹²⁸ the Auto-Perforation Artists’ were unprecedented in both the scope of their performance work as well as the way in which they brought the art form to a greater public. Their use of official art spaces, as well as their auto-aggressive actions and abject aesthetics, tore wider holes in GDR artistic culture than ever before. In so doing, though their work is decidedly individualistic, the Auto-Perforation Artists performed a different kind of subjectivity as both artists and art objects. Their works aggressively represented the degraded East German subject, both calling attention to and making something out of the state’s ideological hypocrisy.

¹²⁸ See Eugen Blume and Christoph Tannert, “Dokumentation zur Aktionskunst in Berlin-DDR,” 1989, Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Verband-Bildender-Künstler-Archiv, Zentral-Vorstand, no. 1054. Tannert explains that he and Blume first drafted this document in 1987 to demonstrate that performance art had a longevity that preceded any possible West German influence, and assigns the first performance in the GDR to Robert Rehfeldt in 1953. In 1989, the document would later be expanded for the VBK. Tannert says that the first iteration was published independently in 1987 via the evangelical church, which had special publishing permissions not otherwise available. (Christoph Tannert, personal interview, January 26, 2015)

Else Gabriel describes East Germany as a vacuum where “nothing was present” aside from an impending sense of self-destruction.¹²⁹ This is the fragmentation of the individual that Christoph Tannert likewise described. The Auto-Perforation Artists explored that pathological void and its impending ruin in performances and installations that inverted the definitions of excluded and included. Sadomasochists replaced the image of the strapping young man. Meandering, baroque, and non-narrative performance demanded an attentive audience that the artists refused to educate. Transitional materials were used instead of more permanent ones; the human body interacted with excretions—feces, blood, vomit—or materials with extra-symbolic utilitarianism—brains, staple foods, bread dough. Gabriel often used animals or insects in her artwork, calling on, as she explained to me, “everything in the kitchen that you would usually smack at with a rag, all those small little things that are annoying in some way.”¹³⁰ Flies, worms, and eventually a mainstay, her pet rat Elke, accompanied her on stage. Gabriel would likewise combine pests with materials in various states of transition: a decaying bird carcass, ice cubes, blood. She explains the intersection of material, performance, and concept thus:

On the one hand these were the things at hand, what was just lying around. And on the other hand, this was also certainly another kind of provocation, because the GDR always made itself out to be the “workers and farmers state” where everyone had it so good. We showed, both with the performances themselves and the materials we used, that we are all sad saps and we will show ourselves as sad saps.

¹²⁹ Else Gabriel, “Interview with André Meier, November 1, 1989 & December 19, 1990” in *Bemerkungen den Unterschied*, eds. Liane Burckhardt and André Meier (Nürnberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 1991), 12, Exhibition catalog.

¹³⁰ Else Gabriel, personal interview, June 24, 2015.

We are pathetic creatures who are very far removed from the triumph of Socialism.¹³¹

Importantly, in Gabriel's original German, she uses the term "*arme Würstchen*" (little sausages) to describe the pathetic condition of the average East German. Her recourse to food is symbolic, a gibe against the state's promise to satisfy the essential needs of all its citizens as a means of enabling their self-emancipation. The Auto-Perforation work disavowed the image of the public as propagated by the GDR's state socialism by indulging a reviled reality in the extreme. They defined the abject, the marginalized, and the crushed as Communism's true face and outcome.

A double-defense: Thesis work as iconoclasm

On July 3, 1987, Micha Brendel, Else Gabriel, and Via Lewandowsky performed—with the art academy's permission—their most iconoclastic artwork, *Herz, Horn, Haut, Schrein* (*Heart, Bone, Skin, Shrine*¹³²). To this point, the literature on this work has treated it in isolation. Doing so of course highlights the significance of the work, but is nevertheless deceptive, and in fact detracts from its radicality within the art academy system it emerged. In my discussion with Else Gabriel, she explained to me that all three artists were required to defend individual thesis works.¹³³ Thus, *Heart, Bone, Skin, Shrine* must be understood as, on the one hand, a compromise on the side of both the artists and the Dresden Art Academy, and on the other, as a real triumph against the state's own institutions. Obligated to party officials

¹³¹ Else Gabriel, personal interview, June 24, 2015.

¹³² *Schrein* is also a play on the word "*schreien*," to scream, and may allude to the performance's noisy conclusion.

¹³³ Else Gabriel, personal interview, June 24, 2015.

to graduate as many of its students as possible, it would have caused a greater stir to expel or fail Brendel, Gabriel, and Lewandowsky than to give them this unprecedented opportunity.¹³⁴ For the artists a completed degree meant professional status as well as the convenience of membership in the Union of Fine Artists. Generally thesis defenses were not open to the public. Gabriel remembers, at least for her part, a fairly sober individual defense. Nevertheless, upwards of 300 people attended *Heart, Bone, Skin, Shrine*, filling a dank basement for the hour-long performance. Film¹³⁵ and photographic documentation, as well as textual accounts, do not offer much in the way of narration for this complicated artwork. Though this is not unique to these performance artists, as is well described by Amelia Jones in her methodology,¹³⁶ the indefinability of Auto-Perforation artworks is both ontological and deliberate, a reaction against the demand for message-oriented artworks in socialist realism.

A cloth-draped Gabriel appears spastically jabbing at the keys of a typewriter. Perhaps she strikes the keys in unison with a soundtrack, which in the filmic version, ranges from high-pitched noise to rhythmic incantations of “*Nein Nein Nein Nein*”

¹³⁴ Investing in a student was not taken lightly in the GDR. Art students were promised three-year appointments after graduation as part of their candidacy period for membership in the VBK, and were also promised supplementary art contracts (*Auftragskunst*). The schools only admitted as many students as it had positions or art contracts, which were likewise created in preparation for anticipated graduates. School bureaucracy was thus deeply tied to the national economy.

¹³⁵ Three versions of the *Herz, Horn, Haut, Schrein* film exist. In the 1980s, Via Lewandowsky edited a 27-minute version for film screenings as well as a seven-minute version for promotional purposes. In 2002, Lewandowsky and Else Gabriel co-edited a 14-minute version, which was released on a commercial DVD for a 2006 exhibition catalogue, see: Constanze von Marlin, ed. *Ordnung durch Störung* (Nürnberg: Verlag für Moderne Kunst, 2006), Exhibition catalogue.

¹³⁶ Amelia Jones, *Body Art / Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

(No No No No) to a Midi-style version of the key theme in Ravel's *Bolero*.¹³⁷ Well into the performance, Gabriel appears to recite something, perhaps the words she has typed out. Uncovered she appears loosely swaddled in red cloth, which gradually reveals her breasts as the performance unfolds. In general, she stands apart from her two collaborators, at times overseeing the action, at times completely absent from it, at times seemingly directing it.¹³⁸ Lewandowsky and Brendel taunt and play-fight with each other across the stage. Their interactions are as homoerotic as they are animalistic. Each man seems to wager the other as a competitor-companion, someone with whom he can cohabite this strange otherworldly stage. [Figure 1.15]

Lewandowsky appears in a characteristically femininized outfit: a pink corset holds tight to his torso. His legs are covered to the thigh in shorts of like-fabric that lace up along the sides. Underneath this soft bodily armor, he wears a khaki-colored body suit the color of his bald head and flesh. Brendel is Lewandowsky's aggressive contrast. His hair tightly shorn—at times adorned with a wrestler's chin strap—he wears black from head-to-booted-toe. An over-layer made of neatly tessellated photographs of two eyes on black ground covers his pants and top. At the beginning of the performance, Brendel stands in a corner whipping himself lightly. Later, he engages the audience, speaking directly to them or peering at them through binoculars next to a similarly curious Lewandowsky. The two men eventually wrestle their way into a hut-type structure made of bent metal covered in empty toilet paper rolls. Gabriel

¹³⁷ According to Durs Grünbein, the No No No No incantation directly referenced Joseph Beuys. Although he does not name the artwork, he is likely referring to the piece *Ja Ja Ja Ja Ja, Nee Nee Nee Nee* (Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes, No No No No, 1969). (Grünbein, "Protestantische Rituale," 312)

¹³⁸ Film credits indicate in fact that all three contributed to the filming of the performance. This suggests that each artist was at times off stage.

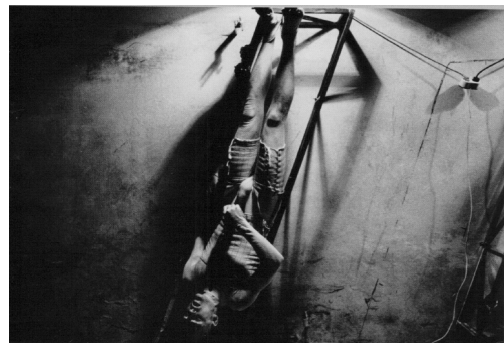
[Figures 1.15 – 1.17. Auto-Perforation Artists (Micha Brendel, Else Gabriel and Via Lewandowsky) *Herz, Horn, Haut, Schrein* (*Heart, Bone, Skin, Shrine*), Hochschule für Bildende Künste – Dresden, July 3, 1987. Performance.]



[Figure 1.15. Via Lewandowsky, Micha Brendel and Else Gabriel in *Herz, Horn, Haut, Schrein*. Photo by Karin Wieckhorst. Image courtesy of the artist. © Karin Wieckhorst.]



[Figure 1.16. Via Lewandowsky, Else Gabriel and Micha Brendel in *Herz, Horn, Haut, Schrein*. Photo by Karin Wieckhorst. Image courtesy of the artist. © Karin Wieckhorst.]



[Figure 1.17. Via Lewandowsky in *Herz, Horn, Haut, Schrein*. Photo by Werner Lieberknecht. Image courtesy of the artist. © Werner Lieberknecht.]

joins. [Figure 1.16] Inside this chamber the action is barely visible; a bright light is turned on while the rest of the performance space goes dark. The rest of the performance involves a series of violations: The two men force water into Gabriel's mouth through a tube until she must spit it out as if it were vomit. Later Brendel uses this same tube as if to suck Lewandowsky's brains from the crown of his head. *Heart, Bone, Skin, Shrine* ends when the artists are affixed by their feet to wrought-iron coffins, where they begin to bang on instruments and shout. [Figure 1.17]

In a visual and artistic culture dominated by didactic, iconographic works, the enigmatic content of performance art (explored to an extreme by the Auto-Perforation Artists) was a necessary, perhaps inevitable, creative outcome of growing artistic frustration. Writing under the pseudonym "Anita Kenner" (literally Anita Expert or Knower)¹³⁹ for the West Berlin-based arts magazine *Niemandsländ*, Christoph Tannert argued for the ontological and contextual significance of GDR performance art's incomprehensibility: "In view of the mechanisms of surveillance—which are oriented toward transparency—these performers invest these works with private myths and commit themselves to obscurity by using indecipherable layers of meaning."¹⁴⁰ The idea of "transparency" is at once ironic and sincere. The state maintained a message of simplicity: if one followed the rules, nothing could go awry.

¹³⁹ Tannert says he published under a pseudonym not for fear of political retribution by the East German state, but for tax purposes. By the 1980s, he explains, the greatest legal threat to the non-conformist was economic. It was illegal for an East German to make money in the West without reporting and paying inflated taxes on it in the East. Christoph Tannert, personal interview, January 26, 2015. In *The People's State*, Mary Fulbrook also writes that "although writers were often to some degree protected by international status and visibility, they might then be pursued by euphemistically framed 'tax' laws, or other unpleasant consequences..." (255).

¹⁴⁰ Christoph Tannert [Anita Kenner, pseud.], "Avantgarde in der DDR heute? Ein Panorama der Kunst-, Literatur-, und Musikszene," *Niemandsländ* vol. 2, no. 5, "Avantgarde" (1988): 107.

Tannert thus observes that performance art railed against the affected simplicity of the state by making works that were deliberately nonsensical. As with Rancière: “Art lives so long as it expresses a thought unclear to itself in a matter that resists it. It lives inasmuch as it is something else than art, namely a belief and a way of life,”¹⁴¹ the constantly evolving work of the Auto-Perforation Artists demonstrates this aesthetic of unfolding.

Subjecting the East German body: An action of communion

In East Germany, physical restraints amplified the psychological consequences of a heavily bureaucratized state. Walled in, East Germany was “a tremendous cage... a stable and secure enclosure of perfect control and training... oriented toward performance and obedience.”¹⁴² Here East German psychologist Hans-Joachim Maaz, whom the art historian Eckhart Gillen has cited in his descriptions of the Auto-Perforation artwork,¹⁴³ uses the disciplinary object of the Berlin Wall as an extra-symbolic form, which led him to diagnose East German society with a pathological “emotional blockage” (*Gefühlsstau*). Responding to the immense pressures to conform to the expectations of the state, this blockage manifested in the East German public an inability to process complex emotions or to confront or reconcile the contradiction between state ideology and lived reality. The Auto-Perforation artworks penetrated this emotional impasse by forcing a self and

¹⁴¹ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 123.

¹⁴² Hans-Joachim Maaz, *Der Gefühlsstau. Ein Psychogramm der DDR* (Berlin: Argon Verlag, 1990), 84.

¹⁴³ Eckhart Gillen, “Fear of Germany” in *German Art from Beckmann to Richter. Images of a Divided Country*, ed. Eckhart Gillen (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag, 1997), 324, Exhibition catalog.

system reflection. In a country “so dead that the only thing you could do was laugh about it,”¹⁴⁴ the Auto-Perforation Artists confronted their dissatisfaction through disruption, inversion, and abuse that bordered the absurd. Gillen, a West Germany who also produced the *Niemandsländ* journal, interprets these artistic moves as “shock techniques,” devices aimed not only at reviving a lifeless or passive public, but also at redefining the contours of an East German self-definition in the positive: from the repressed and coordinated to the expressive and spontaneous. Isolating the arts as a force of contestation, he writes:

In contrast to many artists in East Germany who tried to spread their belief in a better socialism within “real existing socialism,” the Auto-Perforation Artists’ contemporary public was given no consolation, alternative, or hope in the state. [The artists] destabilized the comfortable and uncontested status of the alternative art scene.¹⁴⁵

Gillen’s final observation is of particular importance. The Auto-Perforation Artists challenged rather than succumbed to the communal alienation that characterized the East German underground art scene. By creating what Gillen describes as “ambiguity, fakes, farces, and confusion,” they created alternatives to a counter-public that were more agentic than marginalized. Rather than lamenting, protesting, or creating a detached alternative to a fractious environment, the Auto-Perforation Artists produced works that sought to identify and define their state-imposed alienation so as to better distress and exceed it.

¹⁴⁴ Else Gabriel, *Vom Ebben und Fluten* (Dresden: Leonhardi-Museum, 1988), cited in Gillen, “Fear of Germany,” 324.

¹⁴⁵ Gillen, “Fear of Germany,” 324.

In the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, Tannert would define the Auto-Perforation Artists as a source of emergency salvation for the country: “The benefit of the Auto-Perforation Artists for which the art of East Germany is indebted, lies particularly in the way in which their performances instrumentalized and provoked fear, effectively exposing the conditions of social repression, while simultaneously denying any ‘positive’ outcome or cathartic effect.”¹⁴⁶ Thus, in spite of its nihilistic, aggressive, and individualistic aesthetic, this artwork deliberately targeted its audience to shock and eliminate complacency. Their use of abject materials combined with painful bodily manipulations was deliberately repulsive, demanding a certain level of predictable spectator empathy. They enhanced these effects by creating an immersive environment, using sound, smell, and temperature to literally touch (or violate) their spectators.

Subjecting the public to a test of one’s worth

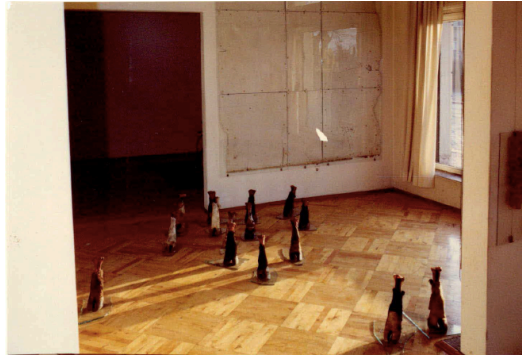
The exhibition *Menetekel*,¹⁴⁷ which took place in the state-run *Galerie Nord* (Gallery North) in Dresden in early 1989, represents a pinnacle example of the way the Auto-Perforation Artists sought to capture an audience. A kind of Gesamtkunstwerk, *Menetekel* consumed the four-room gallery space with a multi-sensorial atmosphere. Video documentation records that dynamism: A high-pitched buzz emanates from four speakers installed in the ceiling. A rhythmic *CLANG!!!-----*

¹⁴⁶ Christoph Tannert cited in Elisabeth Jappe, *Performance, Ritual, Prozeß* (Munich & New York: Prestel-Verlag, 1993), 61.

¹⁴⁷ The exhibition was as apocryphal as its namesake, which refers to a Biblical parable and means essentially “the writing on the wall.”

---*dunk--dunk* amplifies off the walls from an unseen source. Assembled across the parquet floors of two large, naturally lit rooms, the feet of twenty-five cows severed at the hock joint adhere to individual shards of clear glass. The elegant slope of each hoof as it leads to the leg makes the amputated limbs appear poised to move, as if they have been severed suddenly from a grazing herd. [Figure 1.18] Torn and mildewing remnants of wallpaper from a recent émigré to the West hang on the walls above the cow's feet and are protected behind glass. The sheets of paper appear almost as scars along the comparatively clean gallery walls they adorn. They are both memorials to the continued loss of community members to the free West, as well as reminders of the material realities that drove them away. The phantom animals march toward the gallery's two other rooms: the first is large and has drape-covered windows, the other, more of a corridor, is abundantly lit with fourteen red stage bulbs. In the large darkened room, an industrial-strength magnet lifts and lowers a piece of lead. The mechanism is guillotine-like, with two oppressive-looking coils of coppery wire powering the crude animation of lead smacking up from the force of the magnet and then gently releasing as the pull subsides. [Figure 1.19] The ominous rhythm that greets the *Menetekel* visitor finds its source here. Back in the entry room, red light spills from the narrow corridor. [Figure 1.20] At the end of the passage stands a rectangle of white light. Once approached, the rectangle reveals itself to be a water-filled aquarium populated by a group of eight miniscule plastic figurines, a mixture of construction workers and farmers. This is the *Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat* (workers and

[Figures 1.18 – 1.20. Auto-Perforation Artists (Micha Brendel, Else Gabriel and Via Lewandowsky) *Menetekel*, Galerie Nord – Dresden, January 8 to February 18, 1989. Installation with cow's hooves, glass, wallpaper, plexiglass, industrial magnet, pillow, lamps, aquarium, and miniature plastic figurines. All photos courtesy of the Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik via the Stasi Records Act (StUG) § 32. File number: MfS, BV Dresden AKG Pl, Nr. 69 – 89.]



[Figure 1.18]



[Figure 1.19]



[Figure 1.20]

farmers state) in miniature. The toys work the sand beneath their feet, inanimate and caged in a watery capsule.¹⁴⁸

Stasi reports provide additional sensorial details unrecorded in the visual documentation.¹⁴⁹ *Inoffizielle Mitarbeiterin* (IM, unofficial collaborator) “Nora Steege” (a fellow classmate at the Academy of Fine Arts) reports on an unanticipated sensorial dimension: “The rooms in the *Galerie Nord* were consumed by such a stink from the cow’s feet that you were glad to leave the exhibition. Nevertheless, in terms of the work’s theme, the smell also works as a kind of provocation.”¹⁵⁰ Elsewhere, Steege further details *Menetekel*’s sensations: “The exhibition presents the visitor with various kinds of stimuli. Optical and acoustic impacts are directed at the viewer through several kinds of materials and objects. These stimuli are in part horribly presented, as in for example the overdose of warmth upon entering the ‘Red Light

¹⁴⁸ One month into the exhibition, the artists hosted a night of performances. These included the collaborative reading/performance “*Verlesung der Befehle*” (Reading of the Orders) with Via Lewandowsky and the writer Dürs Grünbein and “*Lacheisen IP*” (a play on words that means something like “Laughter Iron”) with Micha Brendel and Else Gabriel. Both projects mixed ephemeral non-art materials (gruel and cabbage in *Verlesung der Befehle* and ice, water, and ground beef in *Lacheisen II*) with linguistic discord.

¹⁴⁹ My use of a clearly loaded source is both deliberately provocative and practical. The Stasi files are obviously controversial because of their context, but nevertheless my extensive work with the Stasi archives, coupled with interviews and research, has demonstrated to me that these records must not be abandoned full-scale. In terms of their sources, a spy’s (IM) motivations for reporting were far from clear-cut. That is to say, the IM is not necessarily ideologically motivated or hostile to the person under review. This is certainly the case with “Nora Steege,” whose reports are often laudatory, and not simply critical. Moreover, using Stasi files as source material adds details about an event that were not elsewhere adequately recorded—as is the case for *Menetekel*. Note that a leading scholar of the art of East Germany, Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, has also published his advocacy of this kind of use of Stasi files, specifically with regard to the Auto-Perforation Artists. He writes, “The Stasi’s ‘Summary Reports’ (*Sachstandberichte*) on the ‘operational findings in the work on observed people (*OV-Personen*)’ were written in great detail, and have today proven themselves to be precise descriptions of art actions” (Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, “Verkörperungs-Konkurrenzen. Aktionskunst in der DDR zwischen Revolte und ‘Kristallisation’ in *Ohne Uns! Kunst & alternative Kultur in Dresden vor und nach ’89*, Frank Eckhardt & Paul Kaiser, eds. (Dresden: efau-Verlag, 2009), 269).

¹⁵⁰ BStU, MfS, BV Dresden AOP, Nr. 2784/90/2: 391.

District,' or through excessive noise caused by a very strong magnet."¹⁵¹ The Auto-Perforation Artists' explicit incorporation of the viewer's body into their exhibition underscores their implicit agenda. The metaphoric body is violated in multiple: the amputated limbs of the beasts of burden symbolize the East German public valued as an expendable instrument for the state; the lead that smacks uncontrollably to the magnet summons the public's endless cycle of exploitation; and finally, the figurines who work the land in the flooded aquarium recall the trap of the proletarian sycophant. Sound, smell, and feel make these metaphors tangible, visceral.

The Stasi's official report on the exhibition reveals a pointed anxiety at the significance of the *Menetekel* exhibition both within its own walls and in terms of East German culture, writ large. Officials tried once to close the exhibition for hygienic reasons after one cow's hoof began to rot. With a few bottles of disinfectant and the approval of a friendly veterinarian, *Menetekel* remained open.¹⁵² Advocating a political reeducation as their most effective measure to curb the Auto-Perforation artist influence, the Stasi ultimately suggest that the artists "be furnished with a practical artistic ability through education. Therein they will receive the appropriate partners who will guarantee a positive political influence."¹⁵³ This reversal of course was not only improbable, but impossible. Too much had happened, the terms had been changed, and a community had been built around that change. As Rancière observes: "The efficacy of art resides not in the model (or counter-model) of behavior

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*

¹⁵² Else Gabriel, personal interview, June 24, 2015. See also, Tannert, "Ereignisgeschichte," 11.

¹⁵³ BStU, MfS, BV Dresden AOP, Nr. 2784/90/1: 145 – 46.

that it provides, but first and foremost in partitions of space and time that it produces to define ways of being together or separate, being in front or in the middle of, being inside or outside, etc.”¹⁵⁴ Because, if aesthetics—when understood as a way of knowing the world—are the root of a political order, disturbing that order causes a rupture that cannot go ignored or remain unfilled. For Rancière that process of filling is the unstoppable experience of creating new unified political subjects: “Politics invents new forms of collective enunciation; it re-frames the given by inventing new ways of making sense of the sensible, new configurations between the visible and the invisible, and between the audible and the inaudible, new distributions of space and time—in short, new bodily capacities.”¹⁵⁵ To return then to the subject of this chapter, the Auto-Perforation Artists shrewdly targeted the capacities of their bodies—or in this case that of their visitors—to viscerally evoke, that is to say simulate, the shared experience of a frustrated and confined body of the public. There is, however, much more to the equation.

The Auto-Perforation artworks make the phenomenology of the East German body not simply an experience of lack, but use the space of art to define that lack as generative, potentially even political. The normative framework of the official exhibition space set a backdrop against which the Auto-Perforation Artists’ spectators could compare experience. By turning to the spaces where East Germans had been trained to see and find themselves, the Auto-Perforation Artists ironically normalized their artwork, calling a perceived strangeness contingent, just waiting to be integrated

¹⁵⁴ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 136 – 37.

¹⁵⁵ Rancière, *Dissensus*, 139.

into hegemonic culture. Finally, it is quite significant—though heretofore unexplored in the literature on this exhibition—that Brendel, Gabriel, and Lewandowsky used *Menetekel* as their defense for full membership into the Union of Fine Artists. This, a “test of one’s worth” in its own right, demonstrates a tangible shift in official metrics of art. All artists were admitted to the VBK.

An imminent end

Just four months after the *Menetekel* exhibition closed, the first—and only—performance art series organized under the official auspices of the Union of Fine Artists opened in East Berlin. The *Permanente Kunstkonferenz* (continuous or permanent art conference, depending on translation and perspective¹⁵⁶) ran from May 29 to June 30 in the state-run *Galerie Weißer Elefant* (White Elephant Gallery) featured more than twenty performances, lectures, and film screenings, and accompanied the Berlin Regional Art Exhibition.¹⁵⁷ Produced just a few short weeks before both Else Gabriel and Via Lewandowsky would legally exit the GDR, the Auto-Perforation Artist contributions, which were more solo than collaborative, represent a dual disaffection from both the group and the socialist state. Gabriel’s contribution, *ALIAS / die Kunst der Fuge* (*ALIAS / The Art of the Fugue*) in particular,

¹⁵⁶ In other words, the name might indicate either the conference’s literal 31-day contiguous programming, or it may ironically refer to the impermanence of the artwork presented, or perhaps the permanent introduction of the genre into East German official culture.

¹⁵⁷ This event followed a several year public debate on performance art among the VBK and published in its official arts journal, *Bildende Kunst*, particularly in October 1981 and April-June 1982. After these debates, which were almost uniformly derisive of the medium, a gradual shift in reporting on performances or other multi-media artworks transpired.

signals a need for excision from East Germany—of both her person and of the performance art form that she had helped to legitimate.

The setting is the *Galerie Weißer Elefant* in East Berlin. Ulf Wrede, Gabriel's partner, appears on stage first. He works gummy bears and raw beef through a meat grinder into a pan. After setting the concoction on a burner, he begins to play music on a grand piano.¹⁵⁸ An aquarium loosely draped in dough is placed to the front left of the piano. Wrede performs a fugue masterfully; this is part of his thesis project, and thus another *Bewährungsprobe* (“test of one's worth”).¹⁵⁹ After he is done, Gabriel begins to recite a text from a hiding place beneath his instrument. Her words are difficult to discern. After some time, she appears dressed in grey coveralls. Her hair is pulled to the front of her face in a bun. Her eyes and nose are obscured. She kneels to the ground. Wrede pours the warm and bubbling meat-candy mash into a metal bucket on the ground before her. Without warning, she dunks her head into the bucket. [Figure 1.21] After a few seconds she emerges dripping long, thick streams of pig's blood mixed with the ground meat and gummy bears. She takes a seat next to the aquarium, tears the dough encasing it aside and releases a swarm of flies. Behind her, someone turns on a fan so that the stench of blood, sugar, meat, and dough spread into the hot and overcrowded gallery. Gabriel recalls waiting for her audience to leave.¹⁶⁰ A full eight minutes passes. The bloody mass begins to coagulate, sticking

¹⁵⁸ The piece was actually part of Wrede's thesis project, and thus another *Bewährungsprobe*.

¹⁵⁹ Again, this aspect of the performance, which Gabriel revealed to me in our interview, has never been explored in the literature on the Auto-Perforation Artists.

¹⁶⁰ Else Gabriel, personal interview, June 24, 2015.



[Figure 1.21. Else Gabriel and Ulf Wrede, *ALIAS / Die Kunst der Fuge (ALIAS / The Art of the Fuge)*, Galerie Weißer Elefant – Berlin, June 17, 1989. Performance. Photo by Jochen Wermann. Image courtesy of the artist. © Jochen Wermann.]

Gabriel to the ground. Her gaping spectators are finally roused when a woman begins to vomit. Relief comes only at the risk of their discomfort. In reflecting on these grueling minutes, Gabriel told me that she understood the passivity of her audience as a sign of the institutionalization of the Auto-Perforation artwork. Their performances had thus inadvertently become a disciplinary mode; their audience had grown

accustomed to watching the abused artist body on stage.¹⁶¹ The end was near, not just for the group, but for the country.

Whereas looking to the art under discussion in this chapter does not demonstrate a clear link to the East Germany's 1989 revolution, it nevertheless visualizes the unrest that had been brewing for many decades among its activists, comprised largely of the working class. Stylistic variations aside, Gundula Schulze, Thomas Florschuetz, and the Auto-Perforation Artists responded to like necessity, namely the absence of artistic models that adequately represented the myriad experiences of the East German citizen. Their bodily practices are significant because they record dynamically a country in a state of decay. The dissent of this work lies in the artists' insistence on defining state-imposed limitations of artistic possibility as unnatural impositions with real consequences on the happiness of the East German public. Those impositions had normalized, turned the average person into a docile subject.

There is a normalcy to the bodies represented in the artworks analyzed in this chapter. The exhausted, overextended, deformed, frustrated, abjected body is elevated as a shared cultural condition, perhaps *the* unifying identity of the East German population. The abnormality of Tamerlan's devastated body, or Florschuetz's fragmented image, or Gabriel's blood-soaked head is then arguably less provocative than the commonality they share. In other words, these are not aberrant figures, but ordinary ones. This work thus redefined commonality, replacing the imposed image

¹⁶¹ Else Gabriel, personal interview, June 24, 2015.

of a perfected or predictable public with that of the unpolished and uneasy. Though the state remains at the center of the conditions of East German experience, it nevertheless does not predetermine that experience or to get the final word. Herein lies the politics of these projects: to at once acknowledge the conditions of exploitation, while also using them as points of contact to other people, ways of knowing, and, finally, as springboards for creative innovation.

Chapter Two. Observed, Romantic – Super-8 Looks Back

The remains of sculptures litter a gated-in overgrown park on the Sanssouci Palace grounds in Potsdam.¹⁶² Two punks walk along a seashore. A conveyor belt of buckets drop into the water beside a quarry. A slow tempo version of Erik Satie’s “Gymnopédie 1” fills the soundtrack, which is exclusively extra-diegetic. Spanning twelve-minutes, the film *Das Puttenest (Den of Cherubs)* vacillates between black-and-white and color. The plodding of its melancholy soundtrack contrasts the frequent changes of a discontinuous arrangement of images that moves from the space of the palace to the Baltic Sea to random sites of industry—the quarry, a set of railroad tracks. The camera lingers on the faces of Jens Ernst Tukiendorf and Christian Duschek, alias “Spinne.” [Figure 2.1] They hang out along the water, drinking and smoking, scarcely interacting. Conspicuous appearances give form to their boredom: Jens’ hair is cropped to a Mohawk; Spinne’s falls languidly in his face. Thick eyeliner exaggerates his brooding gaze. Others enter the frame at random. People cavort in the rolling waters of the Baltic Sea. The sculptures return, shot at high angles that give them a sinister look amplified by the high contrast of low quality Super-8 film. This den of cherubs oversees a parade of visitors shot through the lattices of a thick iron gate. Young soldiers in the national army walk to morning exercises. An elderly man laboriously moves his wheelchair forward with hand cranks. Nearing its end, an unexplained drama cuts the film’s pensive atmosphere.

¹⁶² Claus Löser speculates that these sculptures had been taken from the City Palace of Berlin, which had been demolished in 1950. Claus Löser, “Drang nach Bewegung und Beweglichkeit. Zu den Super-8-Filmen von Cornelia Schleime” in *Cornelia Schleime. Ein Wimpernschlag*, eds. Thomas Köhler and Stefanie Heckmann (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2016), 36 ft. 18, Exhibition catalog.



[Figure 2.1. Cornelia Schleime, *Das Puttenest (Den of Cherubs)*, 1984. 12min, Super-8 film. Image courtesy of the artist. © Cornelia Schleime.]

Jens bludgeons a man five times with a makeshift weapon. Spinne falls victim next, struck by a guitar case.

* * *

This is the final of six Super-8 films the painter, writer, and musician Cornelia “Conny” Schleime completed in the GDR. Filmed shortly before she legally exited the country in 1984, *Den of Cherubs* is for Schleime a Cain and Abel parable. Its motifs of envy, wrath, and jealousy offer rare narrative form to her GDR-era films, which dwell in absurdity, and the surreal—giving the feeling of, as Schleime reflects, “vastness, but also an emptiness in that vastness.”¹⁶³ *Den of Cherubs* documents the

¹⁶³ Cornelia Schleime, “DEFA 50 – Die Sechste. 17.10.1996. Filmische Subversion – Das andere Kino (panel discussion with Schleime and others, moderated by Knut Elstermann)” in *DEFA 50: Gespräche aus acht Filmnächten; Protokolle*, ed. Ingrid Poss (Potsdam: Brandenburgische Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 1997), 163.

country in a state of emptiness, a state of suspension. Schleime's punks bear witness to this imbalance. Their right to be seen is equaled by a right to look.¹⁶⁴

Schleime was an original player in the Super-8 film scene that boomed in a 1980s East Germany. Like her, most filmmakers worked in multiple media. Picking up the camera was both improvisational and pragmatic—a reflection of the material and ideological conditions of a late GDR. In a country with marked material privation, small gauge black-and-white or color reversal film cassettes were easy to acquire. With no definite ideological motive—though a centralized system for film developing and reproduction made the state's acquisition of citizen-made films an eventuality¹⁶⁵—amateur filmmaking was, like still photography, a state-sanctioned hobby. Filming in public thus met little resistance. Schleime's *Den of Cherubs* illustrates that acceptability, its use of public space more a rule than an exception for the nearly 150 films produced by some fifty East German artists between 1976 and 1989.¹⁶⁶ Working in film permitted a high degree of autonomy for experimental artists, with fairly limited risk. With 16mm film difficult to acquire and 35mm forbidden from use outside the national DEFA film studio, low quality and soundless film material and cheap consumer cameras unavoidably influenced the GDR's low budget and low fidelity experimental film aesthetic. As curator and key organizer in the experimental scene Christoph Tannert explains, the historic (and especially

¹⁶⁴ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look. A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

¹⁶⁵ Claus Löser, "Vorab" in *Gegenbilder. Filmische Subversion in der DDR, 1976 – 1996*, eds. Karin Fritzsche and Claus Löser. (Berlin: Janus Press, 1996), 18.

¹⁶⁶ Claus Löser, *Strategien der Verweigerung. Untersuchungen zum politisch-ästhetischen Gestus unangepasster filmischer Artikulationen in der Spätphase der DDR* (Berlin: DEFA-Stiftung, 2011), 13.

German) avant-garde's explorations of structure and form also inspired a creative use of film that worked within Super-8's material limitations and advanced an aesthetic with intended historical corollaries that looked back to Germany's pre-Nazi artistic culture.¹⁶⁷ Deemed contrary to the state's expectations for socialist culture, the majority of avant-garde practices represented an alternative that could further distance the experimental art scene from state culture.¹⁶⁸

At the same time that artists produced films that turned conditions of cultural restriction into starting points for experimentation others used the medium to resituate local cultural production within a historical trajectory that redefined the limits of state culture. This chapter unites these two impulses by focusing on the work of two contemporaries: Cornelia Schleime and Gino Hahnemann (né Karl-Heinz Tanzyna). The two filmmakers were not only friends. Their use of Super-8 film, which supplemented or augmented other artistic practices in painting and music (Schleime) and writing and architecture (Hahnemann), was characteristic of an experimental scene that was markedly interdisciplinary. An in-depth discussion of the ramifications of multi-media practice appears in the chapter that follows. The current chapter principally argues that Super-8 film demonstrates the frailty of the state's claim to cultural authority in two parts. First, it uses Schleime's work to reveal how artists

¹⁶⁷ Christoph Tannert, "Von Vertönern und Erdferkeln. Die Filme der Bildemacher," in *Gegenbilder*, 25.

¹⁶⁸ From the early 1970s onwards, the Union of Fine Artists accepted people like the photo-montage artist John Heartfield into the socialist canon. Heartfield's political commentaries were considered exemplary for state socialist artists working in the GDR. Nevertheless, the more directionless, that is to say aesthetically incisive, aspects of the historical avant-garde, including the majority of Dada artists, were rejected by official culture. See: Ulrike Goeschen, *Vom sozialistischen Realismus zur Kunst im Sozialismus* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2001), 210.

occupied and redefined public space both in film and in the space of the film screening, in a sense surveilling the world even as they themselves were being surveilled. State surveillance was not only a means of public monitoring; it was an outgrowth of cultural orthodoxy. Thus, the second part of this chapter turns to Hahnemann to demonstrate how films challenged the state's pedantic interpretations of Germany's socialist cultural legacy—its *Kulturerbe*—and in so doing revealed the tenuousness of a central tenet of state power.

After these core analyses, this chapter returns to the overall experimental scene to argue that these films were not so much discrete objects as they were facilitators of experience in the event of the screening space where these experimental films came to completion. Live music, recited poetry, and other forms of performance compensated for soundless film, unreliable cameras, and inferior projectors. Whether or not the Super-8 scene may be called a GDR-form of expanded cinema, as the filmmaker and film historian Claus Löser has suggested, will be considered in this chapter's conclusion.¹⁶⁹

Insistent ignorance: Being within and without the state

At the beginning of his comprehensive study on Super-8 in the GDR, *Strategien der Verweigerung (Strategies of Refusal)*, Löser proposes that “the very act

¹⁶⁹ See Löser, *Strategien der Verweigerung*, 82 and Claus Löser, “Vorab,” 21. See also, Gene Youngblood's original and definitive text, *Expanded Cinema*. New York: P. Dutton & Co, Inc., 1970. Youngblood's preference for the term *intermedia* over *mixed media*—“an environment in which the organisms are merely mixed is not the same as an environment whose elements are suffused in metamorphosis (347)” —will likewise be useful in the next chapter, which describes collaborative and mixed media practices, including the *Intermedia 1* exhibition of 1985.

of filming was a political undertaking.”¹⁷⁰ Elaborating on his definition of these cinematic “strategies of refusal” Löser quotes the art historian Rüdiger Thomas who describes the politics of the 1980s experimental scene thus: “Even if this autonomous art had wanted to appear above all as apolitical, its political explosiveness lay precisely in the ways artists insistently ignored the state, which had become completely irrelevant to them.”¹⁷¹ This chapter seeks to complicate the idea of “insistent ignorance” through the two polarities of filmmaking represented by Schleime and Hahnemann.

On one end are aggressive, confrontational films; on the other are ones, which propose an alternative modality of understanding German (or East German) cultural history. Schleime’s films clearly represent frustration, demand recognition, and even tacitly implore an engagement with the state. By reading her films as consciously contentious—rather than willfully detached—I emphasize the presence of the state in Schleime’s life as ontological. For her, Stasi surveillance became a real form of material oppression. The state began to observe her in 1979 and—as her observation file reveals¹⁷²—deliberately prevented her from having interpersonal or career success. The Stasi broke apart her relationships, set her best friend against her, and from 1981 onwards ensured her systematic exclusion from official public exhibitions. For Schleime film became a final viable creative option in the wake of this

¹⁷⁰ Löser, *Strategien der Verweigerung*. 14.

¹⁷¹ Rüdiger Thomas, “Selbst-Behauptung” in *Jenseits der Staatskultur. Traditionen autonomer Kunst in der DDR*, eds. Gabriele Muschter & Rüdiger Thomas (München: Hanser, 1992), 38.

¹⁷² Here, my interpretation of Schleime’s Stasi file is limited to the excerpts she has used in her 1993 photography series *Bis auf weitere gute Zusammenarbeit*, Nr. 7284/85. The artist did not grant me permission to consult her Stasi file.

prohibition. Acknowledging the state as a latent presence in Schleime's life does not necessarily reaffirm its power. Rather it clarifies the direction of her experimentation. The state, in other words, formed a central part of the visual vocabulary of Schleime's films. My second examination, via Hahnemann, looks at films that dispute not the conditions, but the definitions of state-sanctioned cultural practice. In fact, Hahnemann's films, which weave together canonical culture with homosexuality and self-reflexive explorations of the film form, are conspicuously uninhibited. This chapter thus begins within a familiar framework of state surveillance as a form of cultural oppression in the GDR to advance an understanding of how, in its desire to claim power in culture, the East German state ultimately created the institutional forms against which filmmakers like Schleime and Hahnemann railed.

A great number of films have been excluded from this chapter's binary framework. Thomas Werner's *Sanctus, Sanctus* of 1988—a playful culture jam of a May 1st demonstration and West German television broadcasts—and Via Lewandowsky's *Eloi – aus dem Reisetagebuch (Eloi, from the Travelogue, 1988)*—a journey through public streets—invite their viewers to consider questions about the permissibility of “objectionable” activities in public that parallel ones raised by the work of Schleime and Hahnemann. In both film and live performance, the Auto-Perforation Artists (of whom Lewandowsky was a core member) likewise explore the contours of representing the frustrated experience of living in the GDR's closed society that inspire Schleime's work. A number of films engage the themes of cultural heritage and personal biography central to Hahnemann's oeuvre: Jürgen Bottcher's

Verwandlungen (*Transformations*) trilogy of 1981—the first and last state-funded experimental film—which revises three canonical European paintings,¹⁷³ Lutz Dammbeck's *Hommage à la Sarras* (1981) and *Herakles (Hercules)* media collages, or A. R. Penck's films on German expressionism all come to mind. In addition, the significant explorations of film as a moving painterly medium—exemplified in the works of Helge Leiberg and Christine Schlegel, both contemporaries of Schleime's—are latent, but unexplored in this chapter. Likewise, the performative, especially with regard to the female body—which marks the film, performance, and photography of Schleime and Schlegel, as well as Yana Milev and Gabriele Kachold—must be put on hold for the next chapter of this dissertation, which is in large part dedicated to Kachold's work with a women's art collective.

The preceding list of moving image-based practices demonstrates the range of interpretive paradigms possible in an accounting of East German experimental film. It also illustrates the variety of crossovers and parallel investments that other artists shared with Schleime and Hahnemann. In other words, these two filmmakers were unique, but not anomic. In any case, Schleime and Hahnemann have been deliberately selected for a number of reasons. First, both are regarded as forerunners in the GDR's experimental film scene. Second, their periods of greatest activity coincided (1982 – 1984). Both lived in East Berlin, worked together—in fact, Schleime appeared in two of Hahnemann's films—, screened films together, and shared equipment. Third, both artists abandoned the medium fairly quickly after several years of intense film work.

¹⁷³ An entry on this film that I have written will appear in the forthcoming *Handbook of East German Cinema: The DEFA Legacy*, eds. Henning Wraage and Evan Torner (De Gruyter, 2018).

This choice reflects a broader tendency in the period for artists to work spontaneously across multiple media and genres, particularly in the space of the film screening. It also explains why I have chosen to use the terms “artist” and “filmmaker” interchangeably throughout this chapter.

To this point, research on East German Super-8 film has been exceedingly historical. Analysis that interrogates this experimental cinema within a global framework, or even in relation to other Eastern Bloc forms of alternative film, is sorely lacking. Nevertheless, among the media explored by the experimental scene of a 1980s GDR, Super-8 film has been the most exhaustively studied. Here the filmmaker and film historian Claus Löser is the leading authority. Of course, the overviews of films and their connections to state cinema that Löser provides in *Strategien der Verweigerung* are essential reading for the field. Indeed, they supplement an incredibly limited access to original film objects, even if at the same time they privilege the position of the researcher over the artwork *an sich*. The 1996 text Löser co-edited with Karin Fritzsche, *Gegenbilder. Filmische Subversion in der DDR, 1976 – 1996*, provides a greater set of raw, that is to say primary, materials on Super-8 in the GDR. In addition to thematic historical overviews, their volume includes essays by core protagonists in the scene, including Christoph Tannert, whose analysis of the multi-media practices of painters-cum-filmmakers has been particularly influential on my approach to experimental art in the GDR, writ large.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, Löser and Fritzsche’s 1995 *Gegenbilder* includes a number of artist

¹⁷⁴ Christoph Tannert, “Von Vertönern und Erdferkeln,” 25 – 59.

statements. These, as well as the archival documents and other primary material provided in *Grauzone 8MM*, edited by Dieter Daniels and Jeannette Stoschek and released as part of an exhibition in 2007, offer fundamental texts for building new analyses and interpretations. The work of these three books is unequivocal in its significance for the understanding of the experimental film scene in a 1980s GDR. What is needed now are analyses that work beyond the summative frameworks provided in the extant literature. Scholars are making headway, with the Germanist Seth Howes' current research on experimental film, multi-media practice, and the conceptualization of history and politics in the GDR an important development.¹⁷⁵ In this chapter, my approach is to focus the possibilities of analysis through an interpretation that advances the dialogical character of Super-8 film. In other words, I wish to demonstrate how experimental film responded to hegemonic culture as an arm of state control, and in that response identified—if not explicitly, than implicitly—a loss of significance of that control. To return, then to Rüdiger Thomas, this chapter asks: what was it exactly that these artists insistently ignored?

To that end, and in contrast to existing scholarship, which has tended to read Super-8 film as a defining expression of the aesthetic autonomy of East Germany's 1980s subculture, I will analyze the works of Schleime and Hahnemann as foils to official culture. In the case of Schleime, that contrast demonstrates the ineffectiveness of state surveillance in its aims to homogenize culture. Hahnemann's films, in turn,

¹⁷⁵ Howes' manuscript in process is titled *Moving Images at the Margins: Experimental Film between Media in Late Socialist East Germany*.

reveal the state's inability to control or anticipate the relationship a person might have to the very cultural figures it ennobled.

Situating Super-8

While it is tempting to place East Germany's Super-8 within a western history of avant-garde or experimental film, doing so runs the risk of imposing unrealistic cultural precedents and material realities onto the GDR. The truth is that East German artists were overwhelmingly isolated from the rest of the world. There were no independent film festivals bringing over films or film theory from the West, and surprisingly little exchange with other Eastern Bloc countries transpired. The former is certainly explained (to a point) geopolitically. Indeed, it was possible for western artists to travel to the GDR—on day visas to East Berlin, to the Leipzig trade fair, and so forth. The extent of this taking place is, however, negligible. In short, the “free” Germany's artists or filmmakers did not reciprocate the desires that East Germans projected onto imagined freedoms in the West.¹⁷⁶ The lack of exchanges across East Germany and the Eastern Bloc, which were much more probable than those heading in the other direction, is somewhat perplexing. Paul Kaiser and Claudia Petzold have demonstrated that the GDR's jazz scene, as well as an emergence of autonomous

¹⁷⁶ A few important exceptions: In 1985, East German filmmakers (including Hahnemann and Gabriele Kachold [Stötzer] who remained in the GDR and Schleime and Helge Leiberg who had emigrated to the West) were included for the first time in the Interfilm Festival, held in Kreuzberg. In 1988, Kanal 4, based in Cologne, broadcast a forty-minute segment on experimental film from the GDR, which included films by Mario Acshnick, Yana Milev, Cornelia Klauß, and Thomas Werner. The KAOS Film- and Video-Team, a project of the KAOS gallery in Cologne, assembled the program from videos it had acquired via Gerd Harry “Judy” Lybke, the founder of the EIGEN+ART gallery in Leipzig. The program was titled “Bericht über Super-8-Filmszene in der DDR.” An exact broadcast date is unknown, but an excerpted copy of the program is in the EIGEN+ART archive in Potsdam, Germany. See: EIGEN + ART 1988 – 045 [Videoarchiv].

artistic summits emerged simultaneously in the 1970s in response to the jazz festivals that took place in neighboring, and much more lenient, Poland.¹⁷⁷ While over the border, East Germans acquired new music and books, which exposed them to a small scope of western (and Eastern Bloc) cultural production otherwise unavailable. Of course, the multi-media explorations of free jazz ultimately inspired the cross-disciplinary practices that became characteristic of a 1980s GDR, a topic discussed at length in the following chapter. Nevertheless, (and no doubt owing to the fact that East Germans required a travel visa for every country except Czechoslovakia),¹⁷⁸ examples of the GDR's experimental artists collaborating with other artists from the East were a very rare exception. My research in archives, as well as in conversation with a number of artists corroborates this conclusion. The fact is that East Germany's experimental artists were far more interested, in general, in work coming out of West Germany. The linguistic and historical continuities between the two states had been geopolitically divided, but nevertheless, the Berlin Wall remained extremely porous.¹⁷⁹

It is likewise difficult to compare the Eastern Bloc's variegated official (i.e., state) forms of culture. Interestingly enough, although the state cinemas of the Eastern Bloc tended to follow a similar path with regard to the relationship between film

¹⁷⁷ Paul Kaiser and Claudia Petzold, "Perlen vor die Säue. Eine Boheme im Niemandsland" in *Boheme und Diktatur. Gruppen, Konflikte, Quartiere. 1970 – 1989* (Berlin: Fannei & Walz, 1997), 29 – 30.

¹⁷⁸ Wolfgang Engler, *Die Ostdeutschen. Kunde von einem verlorenen Land* (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenverlag, 2002), 169.

¹⁷⁹ On this, see for example April Eisman, "East German Art and the Permeability of the Berlin Wall," *German Studies Review*, vol. 38, no. 3 (2015): 597 – 616.

content and state ideology,¹⁸⁰ rebellion and constraint,¹⁸¹ East Germany's experimental film scene seems to have followed a very different path than the other Eastern Bloc states. For example, although both Löser and Tannert name the significance of the Hungarian filmmaker, Gábor Bódy, in bringing works from his country to the GDR, and vice versa, exchanges and collaborations appear not to have transpired in terms of production. Moreover, Löser suggests in *Strategien der Verweigerung* that contact to Bódy was initially made as a result of the filmmaker's fellowship with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in West Berlin, a still renowned residency program begun in the Cold War, which was dedicated to bringing international artists to West Germany (with obvious ideological aims to influence cultural production, and in this case, cultural relations across East and West.)¹⁸² A lack of organic cross-Bloc influence may be attributed to starkly different

¹⁸⁰ This is especially pronounced with regard to themes of work and the everyday. For example, like the GDR's DEFA films, which turned toward everyday themes in the 1960s (*Alltagsthemen*), Czechoslovakia's New Wave cinema of the same period was also marked by more less idealistic and heroic content. Poland's Cinema of Moral Concern, a movement in the 1970s, likewise took up the realities of work. These comparisons are both great oversimplifications. For more on these topics, see: Joshua Feinstein, *The Triumph of the Ordinary. Depictions of daily life in the East German Cinema 1949 – 1989* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Jonathan Owen, " 'Heroes of the Working Class'? : Work in Czechoslovak Films of the New Wave and Postcommunist Years," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, vol. 53, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 190 – 206; Ewa Mazierska, "What Happened to the Polish Multitude? Representation of Working People in Polish Postcommunist Cinema," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, vol. 53, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 207 – 227.

¹⁸¹ See, for example, the short-lived wave of critical cinema in Germany in the early to mid-1960s (the so-called "New German Wave"), cut short by an aggressive and reactionary decision by cultural bureaucracy to censor nearly all of DEFA's feature films in 1965. Though his examples do not in this instance include the GDR, Amos Vogel uses the cases of Polish cinema and Czech cinema in the 1950s and 1960s to diagnose the cycle of cultural relaxation and cultural control as a pathology of the state socialist system's cultural program in his groundbreaking text *Film as a Subversive Art* (New York: Distributed Art Publisher; United Kingdom: C.T. Editions, 1974), PDF format, https://monoskop.org/File:Vogel_Amos_Film_as_a_Subversive_Art.pdf, 188.

¹⁸² Löser, *Strategien der Verweigerung*, 280. Löser also writes that filmmakers in West Berlin sometimes traveled to the East and established contacts with filmmakers there. He allows,

film cultures. In Hungary experimental cinema was a part of public discourse, rather than something marginal and hidden as was the case in the GDR.¹⁸³ For example, in 1985 a major exhibition titled *Film/Art: A Short History of Hungarian Experimental Cinema* took place in Budapest, and from 1989 onward, avant-garde cinema on an international scale was programmed into the annual Mediawave Festival in Győr. Perhaps Bódy did not need the GDR as much as the GDR needed Bódy. Amos Vogel takes up this issue briefly in his 1974 *Film as a Subversive Art*, when he observes that in comparison to other Eastern Bloc countries, like Czechoslovakia and Poland, “no ‘subversive’ films exist in East Germany [that are] directed against its own establishment.”¹⁸⁴ Conditions of production—rather than artistic intention—have made a comparable East German experimental scene an impossibility: “It is not that there are no social or political problems: it is simply that the state owns all motion picture production, distribution, and exhibition.”¹⁸⁵ Vogel’s lack of awareness of a state-critical cinema (the so-called “German New Wave” of the early 1960s) demonstrates, moreover, the full-scale effectiveness of centralized control over the GDR’s cultural production, including its discourse.¹⁸⁶

nevertheless, that “a real exchange did not take place, not from West to East, nor in the opposite direction” (279).

¹⁸³ For a much more complete introduction to the relationship between the state and cinema, as well as the evolution of experimental film in Hungary, see John Cunningham, *Hungarian Cinema. From Coffee House to Multiplex* (London & New York: Wallflower Press, 2004).

¹⁸⁴ Vogel, *Film as a Subversive Art*, 192.

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ There are a few important cases of experimental films made within the GDR’s state film house, DEFA. These include Jürgen Böttcher’s triptych *Verwandlungen: I. Potters Stier; II. Venus nach Giorgione; III. Frau am Klavichord* (1981) and Lutz Dammbeck’s animations, including the narrative short *Einmart* (1981). See Claus Löser’s chapter on painting and experimental film, which discusses both of these filmmakers at length: “Malerfilme der ersten Generation,” *Strategien der Verweigerung*, 97 – 169.

The GDR's closed cinema culture comes into sharper focus in a second Eastern Bloc comparative example. In 2010, the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana, Slovenia organized the first ever exhibition of experimental film from Yugoslavia. This late date is significant to explaining why experimental film from the Eastern Bloc remains somewhat enigmatic. The catalogue provides some insight into ways to construct a comparative methodology of non-state film in the Eastern Bloc. Yugoslavian filmmakers shared the frustrations of those in the GDR with regard to film quality and variety of equipment. Citing Zivojin Pavlovic, one of the major figures in the "New Yugoslavian Film" (aka Black Wave) scene of the 1960s who got his start with the Cinema Club Belgrade, Steven Vukovic disabuses notions of the group's lo-fi aesthetic: "In fact, he claimed that experiments in the Cinema Club Belgrade were for the most part not conducted on purpose, but out of plain necessity—out of the lack of technical equipment, resulting in a characteristic 'Mayaderenian quasi-symbolic style'."¹⁸⁷ Pavlovic's reference to Maya Deren differentiates his Yugoslavian context distinctly from that of East Germany. Yugoslavia's "amateur" filmmakers looked to the historical avant-garde of the early 20th century, as well as to the post-war American avant-garde cinema as both models and interlocutors for their own experimental practice. Filmmakers and their audiences benefitted from a much more permissive self-managed cultural system. Film festivals, and especially film clubs made up of self-proclaimed amateurs, hosted films from all

¹⁸⁷ Stevan Vukovic, "Notes on Paradigms in Experimental Film in Socialist Yugoslavia" in *This is All Film! Experimental Film in Yugoslavia*, ed. Zdenka Badovinac (Museum of Modern Art Ljubljana, 2010), 53, Exhibition catalog.

across the country and beyond. Live discussions also continued in national printed matter. Whereas it differed across regions, the influence of experimental film on Yugoslavian national film culture, in general, was prodigious. Part of this success may be attributed to a clarity of intention, rendered in specific schools of thought that emerged out of the country's film clubs. The so-called Croatian school, out of Zagreb and Split, referred to their work as "antifilm," and proposed a vision of film that emphasized the "precision of artwork, balance of ideas, purity of impression...purity of the visual-acoustic phenomenon [and] freedom."¹⁸⁸ In contrast to this form-oriented manifesto, the Belgrade films (referred to as "alternative film"), as per Miroslav-Bata Petrovic, intended to "underscore...our yearning for the freedom of artistic expression, free of any rules—esthetic, ideological, formal, market."¹⁸⁹ In contrast, no specific method or vision (let alone schools of thought) united East Germany's experimental filmmakers. And, although amateur film circles were also state-sponsored and popped up all over the GDR, aside from a few people like Claus Löser who recall borrowing equipment from these clubs, there was little cross contact across hobby and experimental filmmakers.¹⁹⁰ Influence across the amateur film circles and official state film was likewise essentially non-existent, aside from the opportunities that the former afforded people to make portfolios that might gain them

¹⁸⁸ Jurij Meden and Bojana Piskur, "A Brief Introduction to Slovenian Experimental Film" in *This is All Film! Experimental Film in Yugoslavia*, ed. Zdenka Badovinac (Museum of Modern Art Ljubijana, 2010), 24 ft. 2.

¹⁸⁹ Miroslav-Bata Petrovic, *Alternativ film* DATE?, cited in Meden and Piskur, "A Brief Introduction to Slovenian Experimental Film," 24 ft. 3.

¹⁹⁰ Thomas Frick, "Der Greifswalder Kreis – oder 'Lizenz zum Filmen' in *Gegenbilder*, 112 - 118; Andreas Dresen, February 9, 2015, "Eine Zeit, in der alles möglich schien," presentation, Freie Universität zu Berlin, Germany.

admission to the GDR's *Filmhochschule* (film academy) outside of Berlin in Babelsberg.¹⁹¹

Use of Super-8 film among East Germans also confronted a different set of variables than were present some decades earlier in the US context, where Super-8 film was—as Lenny Lipton and David E. James have both established¹⁹²—seen as a tool for exploring the possibilities of cinema, as well as immersive art experiences. In contrast, those who worked in Super-8 in the GDR consistently report the medium as frustrating and fairly limited. There was essentially only one kind of camera available to the average East German (the Soviet-made Quartz, which used cassette film stock)¹⁹³ and synchronized sound was an impossibility on the reversal black-and-white or color film. Copies of films could be made, but only through the country's one reproduction facility. Reproduction was thus not only costly, but ran the risk of exposing work to state oversight as copies were expected to fall in the hands of the Stasi.¹⁹⁴ Whereas some may have wanted to work in other formats, 35mm film was strictly prohibited outside professional studios (and thus nearly impossible to come by). It was less tricky, but still quite difficult to acquire 16mm film without strategic connections to someone at the film school or DEFA studio who could provide stock, equipment, and processing. The risks were, needless to say, high. In contrast to western or other Eastern Bloc contexts where experimental film emerged in dialogue with film culture or the visual arts writ large, in the GDR the form emerged in the

¹⁹¹ Claus Löser, personal interview, October 20, 2014.

¹⁹² Lenny Lipton, *The Super-8 Book* (New York: Straight Arrow Books, 1975); David E. James, *Allegories of Cinema. American Film in the Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

¹⁹³ Löser, "Vorab," 17 and 17n19.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 18.

1980s as a form of self-assertion for a very small group of self-selecting individuals—another tool in the kit of the “*Notgemeinschaft*” (emergency society).¹⁹⁵ Super-8 was a tool of expression and documentation, first and foremost. Secondly, it became a node to bring people together.

As a tool for gathering, GDR Super-8 not only represented, but also produced an alternative to everyday reality. This may be taken literally, as experimental film was completed in the event space of the screening, a point to be taken up at the end of this chapter. Metaphorically, Super-8 film represented an alternative way of being in the socialist state. Here, Vogel’s 1974 text offers a point of entry for understanding East Germany’s experimental cinema as a form of avant-garde. He writes, “The basic intention of subversive cinema—the subversion of consciousness—is now attempted in films that experiment with new forms and contents and aim not to humor the viewer but to involve him.”¹⁹⁶ Because, just as the American avant-garde filmmakers of the 1960s recast reality in cinematic environments staged to urge a meta-cognitive reckoning of the world as a kind of representation rather than truth, the East German experimental filmmakers of two decades later used film to forge forbidden connections, to represent the undesirable, and to produce alternative realities constructed around the temporally and multi-media friendly cinematic mode. Although his particular agenda is to advance a continuation of committed (i.e., politically-oriented) practice in American film culture, Vogel likewise concedes that

¹⁹⁵ Christoph Tannert cited in Elisabeth Jappe, *Performance, Ritual, Prozeß* (Munich & New York: Prestel-Verlag, 1993), 61.

¹⁹⁶ Vogel, *Film as a Subversive Art*, 506.

avant-garde practices in the American context had shifted from direct politics to “explorations of states of being.”¹⁹⁷ There is no need to put too fine a point on this. Seeing and then inhabiting the world differently is, as Nicholas Mirzoeff argues, a fundamental way to start changing it.¹⁹⁸ Nevertheless, the drive to explore new modes of being in the world as a form of psychological emancipation with eventual percolations in the real world did not motivate the artists of a 1980s East Germany. Theirs was not a post-modern project. Their immediate preoccupations were far too tangible, too visceral. Their work was not visionary, but pragmatic. Experimental in the sense of testing, Super-8 was an escape route, a means of retooling the limits of the state.

Ironically, East Germany’s normative culture had already self-defined—and actively defended—itsself as a kind of cultural avant-garde. In fact, although Vogel cynically states that Stalin is the last of the Eastern Bloc’s truly avant-garde artists, the success of the East German state’s translation of ideology into culture likewise fulfills the contours of avant-garde practice to which Vogel alludes. Boris Groys has provocatively developed this relationship between socialist realism and the avant-garde in *The Total Art of Stalinism* (1992). He writes that in its vision to recast society in total, and to “treat man as a material,” socialist realism fulfilled the priorities of the historical avant-garde to reshape the world.¹⁹⁹ Beginning from his definition that the avant-garde’s “basic spirit [is] the demand that art move from

¹⁹⁷ *ibid.* 48.

¹⁹⁸ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *How to See the World* (London: Penguin, 2014); Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*.

¹⁹⁹ Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 121.

representing to transforming the world,” he demonstrates that by advancing the political world of Communism as a calculated outcome, the government of the Soviet Union directed the development of its nation in the manner of an artist drafting, manipulating, and revising a masterpiece.²⁰⁰ In fact, Groys defines socialist realism as an improved avant-garde in so far as it replaced the former’s need for “constant novelty” with platitudes and a clear teleological vision, based—as will be discussed shortly—in a manufactured historical legacy that offered stability to a public in the post-Revolutionary era. Indeed, socialist realism took lessons from the techniques of the historical avant-garde, and applied them purposefully to “automatize consciousness, to shape it in the desired mold by controlling its environment, its base, its subconscious.”²⁰¹ To automatize was to optimize, to create the perfect conditions to meet the reality of a communist future. As an outcome of the failed promise of the avant-garde, Groys writes, “Stalinist culture [i.e., socialist realism] both radicalizes and formally overcomes the avant-garde; it is, so to speak, a laying bare of the avant-garde device and not merely a negation of it.”²⁰²

Even though the GDR had significantly distanced itself from the tenets of Soviet socialist realism well before the 1980s, its cultural program is clearly indebted to this theory of politics as cultural practice. The GDR’s state project was then at root avant-garde. Experimental artists thus acted *avant* the avant-garde as institution, forming an alternative art form that resisted the demands of a prescriptive culture

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*, 14.

²⁰¹ *ibid.*, 44.

²⁰² *ibid.*

imposed upon them from above. Because Super-8 defined itself against the state, understanding this form as more than an anomaly requires a definition of state culture that accounts for what the East German state demanded of its artists and why. The question is plain: Why did culture matter so much to the GDR? And how, in challenging state culture, did films ultimately challenge state authority? Beginning with the GDR's method of surveillance, I will examine the state's well-known extrajudicial authority as a line of cultural defense, rather than as evidence of offensive state power.

Counterpoint: Stasi looks

A lo-fi color video shot from a slow-traveling vehicle captures three vignettes of young punks drunkenly occupying a city street. First: Three punks rest along the street curb—two are seated, one lies on the sidewalk. The camera operator firmly commands his driver to stop. The camera pans around them in a gentle c-curve as the vehicle hugs the sidewalk. The three faces are obscured, but all acknowledge the camera, moving their heads warily to meet its gaze. One appears to raise his/her hands in a gesture of irritation. Second: Cut to a man lying along a bench encircling a tree planted in a cobblestone sidewalk. [Figure 2.2] The camera zooms in, its operator commenting: “A pile of puke right next to him. Niiiiice.” Third: The video concludes with a lone Mohawked punk, first spotted vomiting between two cars. The image cuts, and then proceeds to advance at several feet distance behind the man as he stumbles along the sidewalk. The clatter of an engine, the occasional mumbled



[Figure 2.2. Stasi surveillance video, 1989. 1:30min, Video. Image downloaded from YouTube November 2016.]

exchange between the cameraman and his driver, and a bit of light traffic fill the soundtrack. A woman passes by. The beleaguered punk pauses at a garden wall and rests to lean his head in his arms. As he begins to walk again, the camera pans left. A group of young people gathers at the end of the block; another three cross the street.

* * *

Two Stasi patrolmen shot this one-and-a-half minute video on a sunny spring or summer morning in 1989. This redolent (and rare²⁰³) example of state surveillance is too brief to reveal anything concrete about fraying state power or the fascinated looks of the Stasi as they watched a world expanding increasingly out of reach.

Nevertheless, it clearly demonstrates the attitude of the observed—the subjects who

²⁰³ Because it is online, it does not require the elaborate paperwork that would otherwise be necessary to view and publish image surveillance from the Stasi records. I have elected to use this video because it is representative of the still surveillance images I have seen in the Stasi archives, and because readers of this text may easily view it. See: Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatsicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR, “Farewell Comrades! Stasi watching punks,” YouTube video, 1:36, posted by “Farewell Comrades,” February 23, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLehmoEH7IE>

the state could not turn into controllable objects. These punks, like Schleime's den of cherubs, take up the space they are meant *not* to claim. The threat of state power meant to contain them fails to make them go away. They remain seated on the curb; their Mohawks still stand; they vomit indiscriminately. The Super-8 film scene of a 1980s GDR, moreover, demonstrates that there were in fact cameras looking back. Because, there were punks wielding cameras, and homosexuals wielding cameras, and they were not cowering in corners, but tramping through the street. Not drunken, but sometimes naked. Not always with glue in their hair, but sometimes wearing gas masks.²⁰⁴ It is this looking back—this claim of the right to look, to summon Mirzoeff²⁰⁵—which begins the political annunciation that Löser and Thomas call insistently ignoring the state. Yet, this is more than an act of disregarding the state. It is an intentional affront. Social outcasts film themselves and name it art. They identify cultural precedent and claim it as their own. Experimental film is thus a double offence: both a disregard for Stasi looks and a disregard for the very purpose of that observation—to craft, curate, and produce a like-minded collective cohered around state culture.

Quid pro quo: A culture of equivalences

The art historian Paul Kaiser argues that East Germans were meant to “acquire

²⁰⁴ Cornelia Schleime, “Immer wenn das Leben so intensive wurde, griff ich zum Film” in *Gegenbilder*, 66.

²⁰⁵ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*.

the state”²⁰⁶ through its art system—to self-identify with the socialist Germany in the art and culture propagated by the government. In its first official party platform, the Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED) defined a national culture as a precondition for a unified, emotionally fulfilled socialist public: “The insights and feelings that are formed in an artwork serve to change man in the spirit of socialism. They *stimulate* socialism to great effect, awaken the love of work from within, enrich the spiritual life of the people, produce the rational and emotional abilities of the people of the socialist community and *educate them in the true joys of life.*”²⁰⁷ The emphatic text quickly moves to art’s relationship to modeling strategies for “innovative production” that would improve the quality of life for all. Art was thus a product: the manifestation of state speculation, its future anterior. As public employees, artists were contracted to shape a “new socialist feel for life.”²⁰⁸ That responsibility afforded them special social and economic status. From financial benefits to travel privileges to the West, artists were handsomely rewarded. With the benefit of a sizable art contract system, many artists—according to Kaiser, the majority by 1984²⁰⁹—worked as freelancers with little or no oversight. Moreover, the tax identification number granted to those who joined the Union of Fine Artists was a particular draw for experimental artists in the 1980s, guaranteeing them immunity

²⁰⁶ Paul Kaiser, *Boheme in der DDR. Kunst und Gegenkultur im Staatssozialismus* (Dresden: Dresdner Institut für Kulturstudien, 2016), 42.

²⁰⁷ Emphasis in the original; Stefan Thomas, *Das Programm der SED* (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1963), 95.

²⁰⁸ Thomas, *Das Programm der SED*, 95.

²⁰⁹ Kaiser, *Boheme in der DDR*, 79. The precise statistic states that 3,645 of 5,500 VBK members in May 1984 were registered as freelancers. Original Citation: SAdK, VBK-Archiv, ZV, vorl. Sign. 13/2: Politische Zusammensetzung der Mitglieder und Kandidaten in den Bezirken (Stand Mai 1984), o.S.

from the so-called “asocial paragraph” in the law book, without actually having to work for the state.²¹⁰

Even before artists had learned to work the system, these unique benefits made cultural workers particularly vulnerable to state suspicion. In a Stasi report from 1957,²¹¹ Paul Kienberg, who would later head the secret police’s cultural administration, recommended that surveillance operations against freelance artists, in particular, be amplified: “[These freelancers] are writing for various papers or work in various organizations without any specific oversight at hand...[W]e know well enough what they are saying, but they are not being actively dealt with in any way. For this reason, we need to observe them with the highest priority and attend to them internally.”²¹² Kienberg reveals the state’s pivotal ambivalence towards its artists. Because the state expected much of its professional (i.e., union) artists, it rewarded them in turn with a great deal of autonomy and benefits that were fairly unmatched for the average citizen. Moreover, sustaining the rhetoric of artistic significance represented a diplomatic boon to the state—both internally and internationally. If people were to really “acquire the state” through culture its institutions had to maintain—and perform—a scripted reverence for its artists.²¹³

²¹⁰ The so-called “*Assi-Paragraph*,” §249 in the GDR’s penal code, punished all able-bodied and jobless citizens with upwards of two years imprisonment.

²¹¹ According to Joachim Walther, attention to artists shifted as a reaction to the cultural thaw initiated under Nikita Khrushchev in the period destalinization. Officials believed bureaucratic relaxation had led to the Hungarian Uprising and the Poznań Protests of 1956. Walther writes: “The fear of similar developments in the GDR precipitated a stronger observation of intellectual circles, including ‘freelance artists.’” Joachim Walther, *Sicherungsbereich Literatur. Schriftsteller und Staatssicherheit in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1996), 69.

²¹² cited in *ibid.*, 69 – 70. Original citation: BStU, ZA, SdM 1920, Bl. 90 f.

²¹³ Kaiser, *Boheme in der DDR*, 42.

In his 1986 speech at the SED's eleventh party conference, Erwin Pracht, a professor of Art History at the Humboldt University, scarcely shifts the rhetoric of the GDR's formative years vis-à-vis the significance of art to state unity. He defines art and culture "as an irreplaceable contribution to personal development and collective understanding about the principle questions of [socialism]." ²¹⁴ Speaking against both the "passive observer or the critic of our society" he doubles down on an official hardline on the non-conformist: "It is of course necessary in our time of struggle that we take a more rigid stance." ²¹⁵ In fact, simultaneous to what may be interpreted as a relaxation in the protocol of cultural unions (as evidenced, for example, in the admission of auto-didacts into the VBK from 1983 onward) was an increase in state surveillance operations that targeted artists, including cultural functionaries at the highest level. ²¹⁶

Conforming to state principle required demonstrable appreciation for the state. That appreciation was measured through active or passive, that is to say non-dissenting, participation in state culture. As Henryk Gericke explains, the consequences for conspicuous non-conformity remained stringent: "If you weren't deeply grateful for the social benefits [of the state]—the kindergarten, the guaranteed education, the world peace all secured within state borders—you would be made to be

²¹⁴ Erwin Pracht, citing himself from his "Bericht des ZK der SED an den XI. Parteitag der SED," (70), in *Ästhetik der Kunst* (Berlin: Dienst Verlag, 1987), 589.

²¹⁵ *ibid.*

²¹⁶ The MfS observed Willi Sitte, President of the VBK, aggressively. Kaiser, *Boheme in der DDR*, 74. ft. 92. See also: Paul Kaiser, "Suggestion und Recherche. Eine quellenkritische Fallstudie zur Aktenlage um Willi Sitte" in *Politik und Kunst in der DDR. Der Fonds Willi Sitte im Germanischen Nationalmuseums*, ed. Ulrich Großmann, 96 – 107 (Nürnberg: Verlag des Germanischen Nationalmuseums, 2003).

saved from yourself: in state detention, in prison, in the army, or in a state of constant surveillance, which itself was a kind of middle ground—outside, but still inside.”²¹⁷

Here, Gericke speaks from the perspective of a 1980s punk. It was arguably even more controversial for an artist, especially an academy trained and union-approved one, to behave out of line. For, the central importance of art and culture meant that artists who sparked controversies or antagonisms represented an existential threat to both the GDR’s identity and its action plan. Artists had, after all, received all of the state’s advantages—and so they were told. That generosity came at the cost of conformity and expectation. Were the quid pro quo that Gericke describes not in balance, they could be denied exhibition opportunities, petitions to travel, and other benefits promised by their professional status. Schleime met all of these fates in 1981 when she lost her right to exhibit her paintings. Unbeknownst to her, the Stasi launched surveillance operations against her in 1979 while she was still a painting student at the Dresden Arts Academy. She would only come to understand the extent of the state’s psychological manipulation in the 1990s after she read her newly opened Stasi file. The Stasi targeted not only her artistic career, but took a special interest in her relationship to the painter Ralf Kerbach. Their union, so it seems, would have proved too formidable for the powers that be. Schleime was made to pay for her unwillingness to conform. With four applications to leave the country already

²¹⁷ Henryk Gericke, “Too Much Future” in *Ostpunk! Too Much Future*, 22.

rejected, it was only when she threatened to go on a hunger strike that authorities granted her legal permission to leave the GDR in 1984.²¹⁸

Interlude: Gender and the Stasi

In her 1993 *Stasi Series*²¹⁹ Schleime pairs self-portrait photographs with excerpts from her extensive surveillance file. The photo series reveals a petty and overwhelmingly personal operation. The specific reasons for Schleime's high level of targeting by the state are somewhat uncertain. Explanations are abundant: Did her gender and good looks titillate her Stasi minders? Was it her unwillingness to apply her talent as a painter to the state's benefit that frustrated most? Or, was it her close friendship with the poet-spy Sascha Anderson that both amplified their suspicion and allowed the secret police access to her intimate details? Of similar importance is the near absence from the Stasi record of Gino Hahnemann, an out gay man and an experimental artist and writer who occupied a doubly marginalized status in the GDR.²²⁰ A more complete understanding of the Stasi's bias towards female artists, including the way Anderson's misogyny motivated his deception, may help to answer some of these questions. I have made minor efforts in this direction in my recent

²¹⁸ The irony is that Schleime confessed this over the phone to her friend Sascha Anderson, a poet and scene extraordinaire who, as it turned out, was actually a Stasi operative charged with observing and reporting on Schleime. Schleime, "Immer wenn das Leben," 71.

²¹⁹ Also known as *Bis auf weitere gute Zusammenarbeit, Nr. 7284/85 (Until Further Useful Collaboration, Number 7284/85)*.

²²⁰ My research in the Stasi archives yielded very little mention of Hahnemann; no surveillance operation was ever opened against him. Hahnemann tacitly confirms this in his unpublished diary *Die Schleifspur des Geschwindigkeitsmessers im Fluchtausch*. In a section in which he briefly discusses the Stasi, he includes only a few typed copies of reports. Given the high degree of self-reflection and personal narrative he invested in his 1200+ page diary, it may be reasonably inferred that Hahnemann also did not uncover much Stasi documentation. See: "Die Schleifspur des Geschwindigkeitsmessers im Fluchtausch," Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Gino-Hahnemann-Archiv, nos. 1 – 5.

analysis of the *Stasi Series*.²²¹ Gabriele Kachold's passionate art and poetry both from the GDR and in the contemporary, as well as a number of other Stasi-related artworks, almost exclusively made by women,²²² offer comparative possibilities. Nevertheless, a quantitative study that explicitly investigates gender and the Stasi is as of yet unwritten.²²³

The inevitability of experimentation

“Whenever life got too intense, I’d pick up the camera.”
Cornelia Schleime, 1996²²⁴

The delicate plucking of a finger harp accompanies a backlit image of a woman and a man alone in an apartment. They smoke and pace gloomily around the home, which is nearly empty but for a dreamy installation of Eva Hesse-like white woolen cloths that hang from the ceiling. These are the first of a series of textiles that ornament Schleime's 1983 film *Unter weißen Tüchern (Draped in White)*. The woman appears with a veil on her head and smiles. The sound turns dissonant—a recording played backwards. She changes into a white dress meant, according to the artist, to suggest that she is preparing for a wedding; her future husband also now wears white. After a quick shot along a quiet sunlit harbor where the couple stand with another man, the film returns to the apartment. It is now lit by the gloomy dusk

²²¹ Sara Blaylock, “La femme de leurs rêves: Cornelia Schleime et les archives de la Stasi,” *Gradhiva*, no. 24 (December 2016): 21 – 49.

²²² Verena Kyselka, Christine Schlegel, Else Gabriel.

²²³ See also Alison Lewis' article on the role that gender played in collaborations with the Stasi: Alison Lewis, “En-Gendering Remembrance: Memory, Gender and Informers for the Stasi,” *New German Critique*, no. 86 (2002): 103-34.

²²⁴ Schleime, “Immer wenn das Leben,” 66.



[Figure 2.3. Cornelia Schleime, *Unter weißen Tüchern (Draped in White)*, 1983. 9min, Super-8 Film. Image courtesy of the artist. © Cornelia Schleime.]

of winter and a light snowfall animates the window. The camera pans left. Affixed by white bandages, three people seem as if held in cocoons that are suspended from a wall. Their faces are painted white, their eyes are streaked in black, and their mouths are deeply red. Their look vacillates between insects trapped in a web to growths shrouded in plaster. A postcard depicting a large ship at sea that Schleime has over-painted with a milky black figure breaks the scene irregularly. The bride now wears all black; her eyes are outlined darkly. [Figure 2.3] She crouches among a pile of yellow apples set on the ground before the trapped bodies. She combs the pelt of a white rat. No exchange between the woman and her bandaged companions ensues. The mood shifts. The soundtrack grows increasingly frantic and the people slip out of their cocoons. They cavort around the apartment; the woman looks increasingly

troubled. She finally appears affixed to a door, which swings open and shut. She holds an apple in her hand. It drops, returns, drops, returns, repeatedly. The film escapes this cyclonic nightmare and ends at the harbor where the camera lingers on a tree hung with large sardines. The woman turns to her husband, who is smoking, and smiles faintly.

* * *

In a nearly forty-year career as an artist, Schleime has only dedicated about two years to the moving image. Between 1982 and 1984, she made five²²⁵ films, one of which is now lost.²²⁶ These years were also markedly and uniquely collaborative. The films, performance art, and punk music that dominate her final years in the GDR were all but abandoned after she legally exited the country. Working in these media was both instinctual and pragmatic. Schleime had moved to East Berlin after finishing her degree in Dresden with the intention of moving to the West as soon as possible. Film, performance art, and music took up less space in a rather austere living situation. She describes the period before her emigration as overwhelmingly depressing, spent living on a pile of suitcases, as she waited for the state to permit her legal exit: “I still painted my sweet, dreamy themes, but life was so much more

²²⁵ She made one more film in the 1980s. Listed in Claus Löser’s encyclopedic text (2011) as a “double projection,” *Zwischen Gold und Gelb kann nur noch Licht fallen* (*Between Gold and Yellow Comes only Light*) features animations of the artist’s image-filled journals. Although it was filmed in 1984, due to her emigration Schleime was unable to complete the film until 1989. She exhibited it a year later in Holland. In terms of motion picture work made entirely outside of the GDR, in a 1996 text Schleime describes a video interview project she made in 1989 while on a DAAD fellowship in New York (Cornelia Schleime, “Immer wenn das Leben,” 67). The work, titled *Do You Like Chicken*, was included in the exhibition *Außerhalb von Mittendrin* (*Outside of the Inside*) held in 1991 at the *Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst* in Berlin.

²²⁶ *Die Spiegelfalle*, 1982. This is apparently the first film Schleime made. (Löser, *Strategien der Verweigerung*, 185).

agitating; it had nothing to do with my paintings anymore...I became increasingly aggressive, but I didn't want to put that in my pictures."²²⁷ Nevertheless, she explains, "I didn't want to subdue the intensity I was experiencing. I actually loved it."²²⁸ Film was one medium, which found the form for her experience. Moreover, Schleime names the mobility of film as an intuitive supplement to her own inability to move in the space of the GDR. Working in Super-8 "came out of the need to move and to be moved, as well as a desire for something real."²²⁹ Of course, Schleime's preparations came during the so-called "*Ausreisewelle*," a wave of emigration, which peaked in 1985, when hundreds of artists were being allowed to depart the state with relative ease.²³⁰ Schleime submitted five applications to exit the country and faced a number of rejections, each with no clear explanation.²³¹ She believes that the state kept her in country as a means of trying to corrode both her own morale and creative dissidence, and to functionally dissolve her relationships, particularly with her boyfriend, the painter Ralf Kerbach who had been permitted to leave the GDR in 1982. Her application was finally accepted after she threatened to go on a hunger strike; she later learned that her friend and collaborator, Sascha Anderson, had reported her hysteria to the Stasi, and thus expedited her leave.²³²

²²⁷ Schleime, "Immer wenn das Leben", 67.

²²⁸ *ibid.*

²²⁹ Schleime, "DEFA 50 – Die Sechste," 139.

²³⁰ Between 1980 and 1985, roughly 400 artists and art historians left the GDR. Werner Schmidt, ed. *Ausgebürgert. Künstler aus der DDR und aus dem Sowjetischen Sektor Berlins 1949 – 1989* (Berlin: Argon Verlag, 1990), 65 – 72, Exhibition catalog.

²³¹ Cornelia Schleime, e-mail message to author, November 19, 2016.

²³² Cornelia Schleime, "Ich sagte, ich trete in den Hungerstreik," interview by Herlinde Koelbl, *ZEITmagazin*, no. 35 (August 25, 2011), Accessed March 29, 2016, <http://www.zeit.de/2011/35/Rettung-Cornelia-Schleime>.

Although Schleime did continue to paint, after entrusting them in the hands of Anderson, all of these works went missing after she emigrated West. Her films as well as a box of photographs and some artist books, which she had given to a West German diplomat, made it across the border. She herself took a few small paintings by hand. More than ninety paintings were lost. Her films are thus not only some of the only works that remain from her GDR period. I see them as fragmentary archives of a unique period of intense and site-specific practice: Fragments of paintings appear in background scenes. The bound bodies of *Draped in White* recall recurring performance art motifs that appear in extant photographs from Schleime's 1980s GDR work. The painted faces and masks her protagonists don in her first film *In der Sanduhr* (*In the Hourglass*, 1982), which return in 1983's *Das Nierenbett* (*The Bed of Kidneys*), likewise recall her years studying mask-making at the Dresden Arts Academy (1970 – 75). In fact, treating them like sketch books for future experiments, years later Schleime would sometimes translate the moving images of her GDR films into paintings.²³³

Schleime met Gino Hahnemann shortly after her exhibition prohibition. He encouraged her to start working in Super-8 film as an effective creative substitute.²³⁴ Film stock was cheap and readily available, cameras could be easily shared, and—contrary to the usual impression of the GDR—filming in public posed few risks. Moreover, because film is a generally communal object—both in its making and in its presentation—working in this medium secured Schleime the audience the state had

²³³ Schleime, “Immer wenn das Leben”, 72.

²³⁴ *ibid.*, 66.

denied her: “I didn’t want to lock myself up at home and bumble around, just making paintings by myself.”²³⁵ She wanted to reach people, to communicate with them, and in turn “smuggled”²³⁶ in her films to as many public forums as she could. The process of filmmaking also facilitated a kind of contact that made the present moment more interesting. Schleime describes how sexual intrigue motivated *Den of Cherubs*: “I saw this guy in a café and asked my friend, woah, how do I get to know him? I just went up to him and said that I thought he was interesting and that I make films, and so on.”²³⁷ She dropped him once the production was over. Film as flirtation; film as seduction—this work will also bear out in the films of Hahnemann.

Schleime’s films are, nevertheless, sexually modest when compared with Hahnemann’s. That difference reveals a finer auto-biographical point, namely the frustration and aggression that had inspired her decision to begin making films in the first place. Equal to this was Schleime’s desire to provoke the powers that be. By the time she filmed *Den of Cherubs*, she had already submitted several failed petitions to legally exit the country. It is now well known that Sascha Anderson had been working as an unofficial collaborator (*Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter*, IM) for the Stasi, and had betrayed Schleime even as he had collaborated with her in their punk band *Zwitschermaschine* (Twittering Machine). The extent of that deception was certainly unanticipated. Nevertheless, Schleime counted on the Stasi’s observation: “I always hoped that the Stasi was sitting in and that they would say to themselves: ‘Schleime is

²³⁵ *ibid.*, 67.

²³⁶ Löser, *Strategien*, 184.

²³⁷ Schleime, “Immer wenn das Leben”, 67.

making such garbage, we have to let her go to the West’.”²³⁸ Her expectation was both a kind of perverted desire—a way of playing with power—and a mode of dialogue with her oppressors—or rather, a response to them on her own terms and on their turf. They watched her, but she looked back, even produced the content upon which they would report—and perhaps set her free. Here, Schleime opens her surveillance up to dialogue much in a way that she later will do in her *Stasi Series*. In so doing, she not only casts doubt on the sovereignty of state power, but on contemporary views of what it meant to live in a surveillance state. Schleime’s cinematic ruse is categorically theatrical. This is experimental media delivered to a powerful enemy audience, an oppressive condition turned advantageous.

The anticipated threat of observation motivated Schleime to make work that could be deemed morally and physically repugnant: “That’s why I made such provocative things,” she reflects, “like that one with the meat. I thought I had to do something really disgusting to get them to let me out.”²³⁹ Here she speaks of *Bed of Kidneys*—a twelve-minute color film from 1983, in which raw meat plays a pivotal role. A naked woman appears on a bed, where a man’s body is severed at the head, as if he were trapped in the middle of black sand. She proffers herself and a silver tin of meat. Later, she sits at a table and consumes the flesh, while chicken feathers blow and land on her meal. The carnal themes culminate in a brief, but potent scene: The man is now himself naked, strapped on an old army cot covered in rotting meat. Random snips of images flicker through the film at varying speeds, sometimes

²³⁸ *ibid.*, 68.

²³⁹ *ibid.*



[Figure 2.4. Cornelia Schleime, *Das Nierenbett* (*The Bed of Kidneys*), 1983. 12min, Super-8 Film. Image courtesy of the artist. © Cornelia Schleime.]

animated in stop motion. [Figure 2.4] *Bed of Kidneys* bears a latent affinity to methods of abject critical practice that consumed the experimental scene in the 1980s, and which I discuss at length in the preceding chapter. Essentially, from the portrait photography of hard laborers by Gundula Schulze to the metaphorically divided body in Thomas Florschütz's self-portraits to the self-abuse in the Auto-Perforation Artist performances, films, and installations, visualizing devastation at the most intimate level of the body became an important tactic for artists to both differentiate themselves from the state and to identify its internal hypocrisies. For Schleime, the meat is one part of “a card catalogue of images”²⁴⁰ that punctuates metaphorical references with no clear meaning: sculptural heads, people wrapped in bandages,

²⁴⁰ Schleime, cited in Löser, *Strategien der Verweigerung*, 187.

pigeons, feathers, a person dressed as a horse. Her film may thus be understood as a regurgitation of internal decay—a psychological burlesque and horror show.

Being seen: A cast of romantics

East Germany's experimental film may be defined as a speech act—a document of personhood that manifested the contours of an alternative public in distributable form. Of course, the public for these films should not be overstated. The experimental art circle was by all accounts oppressively predictable and small. According to Christoph Tannert no more than a few hundred people, who were nevertheless “permanently active,” made up the scene.²⁴¹ Although most private or small-scale film screenings held in private homes, studios, galleries, or the church attracted small groups of like-minded people, because of the school's public-facing programming, the three film festivals that Claudia “Wanda” Reichardt organized at the student club at the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts (*filma morgana*, *filma secunda*, *filma tribuna*, 1987 – 1989) had the potential to draw a larger, more unexpected crowd.²⁴² This was, however, the exception. And yet, as Schleime's anticipation of Stasi surveillance suggests, using art as a means to assert and even communicate a person's unhappiness had unanticipated agency. In the end, although *Bed of Kidneys* was not the last straw for Schleime, the artist's desire to be provocative found a willing muse. Buried in Schleime's abject scene is yet another communiqué, a call to be seen. Scipio, the young man who played Schleime's main protagonist, was as she

²⁴¹ Christoph Tannert, personal interview, May 11, 2015.

²⁴² Claudia Reichardt (Wanda), “Die Treffen der Super-8-Filmer in Dresden,” in *Gegenbilder*, 104-5.

recalls, “totally fascinated with the idea of getting tied to the heap of rotting meat.”²⁴³ Scipio was a small, effeminate, biracial man. His willingness to lie prone on a bed of flesh, and to enjoy it, suggests a bevy of emotional realities, for which he—as a clear and quite underrepresented minority—may have been seeking a form. Of course, Schleime may have tempted Scipio to participate, or she may be recalling his enthusiasm with some nostalgia. Nevertheless, the title of a later video work *Do You Like Chicken* (1991), which features interviews with African Americans she met while on an artist residency in New York, suggests that she has had some questionable racial sensitivity in the past. Regardless of filmmaker intent, Scipio—an untraceable figure—is now archived in film as a participant and a contributor to an alternative artistic reality.

Scipio would appear in at least one more experimental film in the GDR: Gino Hahnemann’s 1984 Friedrich Hölderlin homage, *Ein Zeichen sind wir, bedeutungslos, und haben die Sprache in der Fremde verloren* (*We Are a Sign, Meaningless, and We Have Forgotten Our Language in Exile*). Casting Scipio as Sinclair, Hahnemann references the brief, but intense friendship the author and statesman Isaac von Sinclair shared with the 19th century poet Hölderlin. As a dress-wearing Sinclair, Scipio mirrors Cornelia Schleime, who appears in the film as Diotima, the original emissary of platonic love who becomes the object of Hyperion’s desire in Hölderlin’s eponymous work. The references to Sinclair are thus twinned for the fan of German romanticism: On screen appears Hölderlin’s actual friendship with Sinclair, as well as

²⁴³ Schleime, “Immer wenn das Leben”, 69.

the imagined one he lionized in the Sinclair-inspired character, Alabanda—who is Hyperion’s trusted, if contentious, confident.

We Are a Sign’s nineteen-minutes offer few clues into these relationships.

[Figure 2.5] This is a “scene” film, that is to say, a film about being seen. Some of the experimental art circle’s most prominent figures lead the cast. In addition to Schleime, the poet-spy Sascha Anderson plays the lead role of Hölderlin. The film’s main settings—the Seusslitz castle grounds along the Elbe River and Wilfriede Maaß’s ceramics studio—likewise draw connections across temporalities and cultural actors. The former, a key site for the Dresden Romantics, is reincarnated in the latter, a locus point for East Berlin writers and artists in the 1980s.²⁴⁴ A loose drama, *We Are a Sign* begins with Hölderlin floating lit red candles in the Elbe. Candles recur throughout, a rather pat symbol of the artist showing his followers the light.²⁴⁵ The refrain to the Rolling Stones’ “Lady Jane” repeats on a loop, knit between the droning organ of Philip Glass’ “Koyannisqatsi,” the post-punk band Bauhaus, and Anderson’s music group *Fabrik* (Factory), rendering the film a psychedelic tone that in another context may come across as affected. As Claus Löser has observed, the soundtrack almost seems to anticipate the film’s hidden farce: The Bauhaus song “Spy in the

²⁴⁴ This is Wilfriede Maaß’s ceramics studio, which was an important meeting point for artists, writers, and musicians. Maaß also employed her friends, including Cornelia Schleime, to help decorate her ceramic pieces. For more on this see: Ingeborg Quaas and Henryk Gericke, eds. *Brennzeiten: die Keramikwerkstatt Wilfriede Maass 1980-1989-1998: ein Zentrum des künstlerischen Offgrounds in Ost-Berlin* (Berlin: Lukas, 2014), Exhibition catalog.

²⁴⁵ Claus Löser critiques Hahnemann’s recurring use of didactic tropes in his second *Gegenbilder* essay. In the text, he also disparages Hahnemann’s long titles, which he says “betray a certain mannerism/affectation.” (Löser, “Das Phänomen des Schmalfilmbooms” in *Gegenbilder*, 82 – 3)



[Figure 2.5. Gino Hahnemann, *Ein Zeichen sind wir, bedeutungslos, und haben die Sprache in der Fremde verloren* (*We Are a Sign, Meaningless, and We Have Forgotten Our Language in Exile*), 1984. 19min, Super-8 Film. Image courtesy of Matthias Fischer. © Gino Hahnemann.]

Cab” plays as Anderson, the experimental scene’s greatest betrayer, shuffles along as angst incarnate.²⁴⁶ But Hahnemann’s film is earnest—that is to say, secure and unself-conscious in its yearning to communicate a feeling of admiration for Hölderlin. His film bears the poet’s message; his candles return. Like Hahnemann and his crew of artists, Hölderlin was underappreciated in his time, and made fairly obscure by East Germany’s own official (if somewhat idiosyncratic) disinclination for romanticism. Whatever autobiographical elements Hahnemann may be projecting here are amplified by the touches of non-normative sexuality that he fluidly weaves into his film. From Sinclair’s dress to the submissive mien Anderson takes in the young man’s presence, these are not exotic or aberrant moments, but participating elements

²⁴⁶ Claus Löser, “Der Spion, der aus dem Kino kam,” *tip* (November 1995): 47.

that drive the film's unique narrative voice.

The Gino Hahnemann aesthetic complicates the need to be seen. Its mixture of homosexual themes and homages to humanism's heroes exceeds the need for "self-assertion" (*Selbst-Behauptung*) that has been theorized to describe the GDR's experimental arts scene as apolitical, anarchic, and disinterested in the state.²⁴⁷ The range of screening contexts where Hahnemann's films appeared underscores their expansive political potential. He screened his films across the GDR, both in unofficial galleries and private spaces, as well as part of small-scale, but nevertheless state-sanctioned programs (i.e., *filma morgana* at the Dresden Arts Academy in 1987). In 1985 and 1986, a gay rights working group in Dresden included his films (described as "surreal, political, and erotic"²⁴⁸) as part of its public programs.²⁴⁹ In 1985, Hahnemann's work was one of the first experimental films from the GDR to be screened in West Germany. His inclusion in the third Interfilm Festival held in West Berlin may have been mediated via Cornelia Schleime, who also appeared in the program. In the GDR, their friendship bore a number of collaborations and exchanges that exceeded anticipated contact zones. As she recalls, "I got into the gay scene through him; he got into the arts scene through me, and we showed films to both groups. That's how we really mixed the gay folks and the artists, and later the

²⁴⁷ Thomas, "Selbst-Behauptung," 11 – 42.

²⁴⁸ See: Ulrich Zieger "Info Brief," 1985, Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Gino-Hahnemann-Archiv, no. 280.

²⁴⁹ Note, as with all civil rights groups in the GDR, as evident in its name the "*Kirchlicher Arbeitskreis Homosexualität Dresden*" (church working group for homosexuals in Dresden) organized itself within the church. For more information on the ostensible political immunity that churches (largely evangelical) had in the GDR, see Mary Fulbrook, "Render unto Caesar? The Pivotal Role of the Protestant Churches," *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949 – 1989* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 87 – 128.

musicians. That definitely motivated other people. It all got going pretty quickly.”²⁵⁰ In their amorphous, subjective relation to German culture, Hahnemann’s films addressed a third layer of society, where local identification met the limits of state ideology. In his use of canonical figures—like Hölderlin—and in his explorations of heritage backdrops from the 18th and 19th century—like castles and romantic landscapes—the filmmaker reveals a personal fascination with Germany that actually resembles that of East German cultural officials who yearned to establish socialism as a culturally and historically relevant development. And yet, Hahnemann could not—would not—be the devoted subject that the East German state envisioned.

Cultural emissaries: *Kulturerbe* as socialist production

Marxist-Leninist cultural theory advises that socialist realism be defined as “the heir to all progressive art of all periods of world history.”²⁵¹ It was significant for socialist culture to define itself historically. As Boris Groys writes, “the attitude of the Bolshevik leaders toward bourgeois heritage and world culture in general can be summarized as follows: take from this heritage that which is ‘best’ and ‘useful to the proletariat’ and use it in the socialist revolution and the construction of the new world.”²⁵² As a matter of practicality, approved historical examples provided models, “a framework” as Groys writes, for artists that “indicated some formal criteria that a Socialist Realist [sic!] artwork should satisfy in order to be both Socialist and

²⁵⁰ Schleime, “Immer wenn das Leben,” 66.

²⁵¹ Groys, *Total Art of Stalinism*, 46.

²⁵² *ibid.*, 38.

Realist,” or—as the official cultural program held: “realistic in form and Socialist in content.”²⁵³ Establishing a socialist *Kulturerbe* (cultural heritage) also served to legitimize the contemporary by defining it as an outcome, or an eventuality, of a wide array of cultural moments: from the Greek myths to Shakespeare, the Italian Renaissance to French, Russian, and German realism of the 19th century.

The stakes were high, as the East German state’s *Dictionary of Cultural Politics* makes clear: “The evaluation of cultural heritage begins from the standpoint of its practical application across social groups (class, nationality, etc.), whole generations, and new socioeconomic formations.”²⁵⁴ From these metrics, entire epochs could be construed as anti-revolutionary and thus completely discarded. Such was the fate of modernism, and the historical avant-garde in all its iterations. Only artwork that could demonstrate a participation in the “progressive development of humanity” made the grade.²⁵⁵ Cultural authorities summoned Lenin’s ideological construct of “two cultures in one” to explain the simultaneous presence of a proletarian-aligned culture and an oppressive one.²⁵⁶ In this way, they made the adoption of art from any historical period both logical and beneficial. This paradigm also allowed cultural authorities to define socialist culture ideologically against other forms of culture. In this way whatever was not progressive or reflective of the

²⁵³ Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), 144. The expectation for a realistic form and a socialist content, as Groys writes, likewise underscores its speculative, future-building nature: “The goal was to give to the image of the future world, where all the facts would be the facts of Socialist life, a kind of photographic quality, which would make this image visually credible. After all, Socialist Realism [sic!] had to be realist only in form and not in content (152)”.

²⁵⁴ Harald Bühl, Dieter Heinze, Hans Koch, and Fred Staufenbiel, “Kulturerbe,” *Kulturpolitisches Wörterbuch* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1970), 298.

²⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 299.

²⁵⁶ V. I. Lenin, “Critical Remarks on the National Question [1913]” cited in Groys, *Total Art of Stalinism*, 46, ft. 12.

interests of the people could be deemed reactionary and exploitative. It was also necessary for each country to implement cultural programs that were—as Lenin’s thought advised—socialist in content, but national in form.²⁵⁷ In the GDR, the state’s *Kulturerbe* culminated in a mix of late 18th and 19th century German culture, which it defined as a local contribution to the international socialist cultural legacy. Whereas formally, the selections of, for example Goethe over Hölderlin, are hard to parse, and may seem anachronistic or even contradictory to a western observer, all choices were united in their fulfillment of the high ideological qualities of populism and progressive outlooks, and in so far as they represented a supportive relationship to historically oppressed classes. In East Germany, a selective mode of looking backward served the dual purpose of at once connecting the GDR to the cultural norms of the Soviet Union, and also differentiating East German culture from its West German neighbor, where a revival of modernism in the post-WWII era was fully savored.

Nevertheless, the rules of cultural acceptability were inconsistent. Far more relativistic than it was orthodox, the interpretive paradigm employed by cultural authorities sometimes admitted former foes into the canon of acceptable German cultural heroes. In the late 1970s, after several decades of strategic marginalization the state revived the Romantic tradition, and began celebrating figures like Caspar David Friedrich.²⁵⁸ Equally a sign of ideological inconsistency as of socialist realism’s claim to being an adaptive aesthetic, at the beginning of the decade

²⁵⁷ This adage summarizes Lenin’s “Critical Remarks on the National Question.”

²⁵⁸ Tannert, “Von Vortönern und Erdferkeln,” 30.

romanticism had been officially defined as an imperialistic, non-realistic, and decadent artistic method that had laid the groundwork for late capitalism.²⁵⁹ A more severe criticism could not be levied by state socialism's aesthetic mandate.²⁶⁰ This move was part of a broader historical reorientation, which also included Martin Luther, Frederick the Great, and even Otto von Bismarck in an attempt to counter dissatisfaction over a lack of freedom with a renewed, and historically-minded (i.e., German) construction of a national East German identity. The re-introduction of romanticism into official East German culture may thus be historicized as an impact of the second period of the GDR, when, under the post-1971 leadership of Erich Honecker citizens were given tacit permission to pursue individual interests, including the hobby of home filmmaking. Nevertheless, the expectation that socialist culture continue be a reflection of collective interests remained. Indeed, Jens Gieseke has demonstrated that the Stasi's introduction of greater interpersonal forms of observation (i.e., "Zersetzung") from the mid-1970s onwards reflected a new strategy for the state to control the East German public, while it still maintained a ruse of civil liberties.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ Bühl, et al, "Realismus," 447.

²⁶⁰ In the 1970s, official East German literature also saw a turn toward romanticism. See, for example Gerhard Wolf's *Der arme Hölderlin (Poor Hölderlin, 1972)*, and Christa Wolf's *Kein Ort. Nirgends (No Place on Earth, 1979)*. Patricia Herminhouse historicizes this "rediscovery" of romanticism as a facet of the late GDR's general turn toward the individual. In this period, romanticism required a redefinition of the genre, which had been severely corrupted in the hands of the "blood and soil" nationalism of the Third Reich. Patricia Herminhouse, "Die Wiederentdeckung der Romantik: zur Funktion der Dichterfiguren in der neueren DDR-Literatur," in *DDR-Roman und Literaturgesellschaft*, eds. Jos Hoogeveen and Gerd Labrousse (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1981), 221.

²⁶¹ Jens Gieseke, *The History of the Stasi. East Germany's Secret Police, 1945 – 1990* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014), 147. See also Wolfgang Engler's discussion of the increase in Stasi surveillance under Erich Honecker (1971 – 1989): Wolfgang Engler, *Die Ostdeutschen. Kunde von einem verlorenen Land* (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002), 289.

Gino Hahnemann's films may be read as a response to the state's cultural inconsistency, itself a form of moody repression. He said as much: "I did not feel physically, but culturally constrained in the GDR, also with regard to film. I finally said to myself: just make your own cinema."²⁶² This cinema—which he would later call "Gino Kino"—is at once personal, even more autobiographical, while at the same time also more universal than Schleime's. Nearly all of his thirty-one GDR-era films²⁶³ reveal an investment into aesthetics, representation, form, and historical legacy. Hahnemann was particularly fascinated with German precedent. The figures he emulates, cites, and to whom he pays homage are culled from a canon of especially Thuringian cultural emissaries—Goethe, Schiller, Luther, Hölderlin, etc. Hahnemann's interests may be explained in part autobiographically. An orphan raised by a family of intellectuals in the town of Jena, Hahnemann turned to cultural history as a replacement for the absence of a personal history. His journal and film treatments suggest as much; his partner—Matteo Fischer—also confirmed that a longing for identity motivated Hahnemann's lifelong pursuits into German culture.²⁶⁴ Nevertheless, his films investigate aesthetics and the representation of an aesthetic inquiry more completely than they do autobiography. His is the other side of

²⁶² Hahnemann cited in Löser, "Das Phänomen des Schmalfilmbooms," 84.

²⁶³ Hahnemann's film equipment was stolen in 1989. This perhaps explains a turn to BetaSP in this year. Three of the GDR films listed in *Strategien der Verweigerung* (Löser, 2011) were recorded on video: *Nachtbus* (*Night Bus*) (1989), *Berlin-Berlin* (1989), and *Jong* (1990). These were produced as part of the visual design for the play by Jürgen Lemke, *ICH BIN SCHWUL: Männerbiografien in der DDR* (*I AM GAY: Biographies of Men in the GDR*), which premiered at the *Theater im Palast* (Theater in the Palace of the Republic, East Berlin) on January 14, 1990. The Gino Hahnemann archive at the Akademie der Künste (Berlin) indicates that he made (or planned to make) a dozen videos, which were to be installed in the exhibition space in the Palace of the Republic. See: "KONZEPTION zu einem vor der Veranstaltung „männerbiografien in der ddr: ich bin schwul“ laufenden Videoprogramm," Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Gino-Hahnemann-Archiv, no. 211.

²⁶⁴ Matthias Fischer, personal interview, November 28, 2016.

humanism—the non-socialist heterogeneous one, which credits individual experience and especially a Hegelian mode of disinterested observation of reality as the highest order of truth. As Groys explains, in Stalinist Russia, those who embraced historical forms of art as reflections of individualism were either intentionally opposed to the state or were marginalized by the state for their views. He writes: “The turn of the opposition and fellow-travelers to the classics was motivated by an aspiration to defend the traditional role of the autonomous artist who maintained an aesthetic distance to reality and was therefore capable of independently observing and recording it.”²⁶⁵ Needless to say, Hahnemann did not define his aesthetic as a form of opposition, but as a mode of release. Nevertheless, his work indeed represents the desire Groys describes to exceed and replace the state’s interpretive paradigms. Art was a pursuit in and of itself, not an instrument of history. Art that was contemplative, a representation of a gnostic and mysterious force that could, in this example, give an orphan a sense of community, was thus both antithetical to and in keeping with the state’s prescriptive vision of culture. In its return to culture as a mode of inhabiting and understanding the world—rather than of creating it—Hahnemann’s work is thus anti-institutional,²⁶⁶ an avant-avant-garde.

In what follows, I have chosen only to work through a selection of what I am terming Hahnemann’s “history films,” which represent about half of his GDR oeuvre

²⁶⁵ Groys, *Total Art of Stalinism*, 38.

²⁶⁶ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

that is still available today (eleven of twenty-four films).²⁶⁷ My interpretation skirts Hahnemann's interest in beauty and the perfected form, which were for him exemplary in the youthful and athletic male body or classical sculpture and architecture. These preoccupations nevertheless intersect his interpretations of the writers and makers he contemplates in the history films. I have elected to exclude a few works that deal explicitly with homosexuality, like his first project *Zurück aufs Eis* (*Get Back on the Ice*, 1982), as well as those that are more abstract and lyrical, like *September, September* (1986). The history films easily traverse these other two categories, blurring social lines, while also challenging state socialist orthodoxy. In fact, Hahnemann is credited with normalizing homosexuality. He neither hid nor spectacularized this part of his identity, either from normative culture—which shared the western world's prejudices against queerness—or from a quite masculine (and misogynistic) experimental artistic scene. In the mid-1980s, Hahnemann professed no experience of prejudice: “Well, for me there are no problems, either as a gay man or as a filmmaker. I have been making Super-8 films for a while. And I can show these without hassle. And my life as a homosexual is also totally normal; I have no problems living like this.”²⁶⁸ He is gay and fascinated by German culture. He is an experimental filmmaker and a devout humanist. His films yearn for something that

²⁶⁷ I have omitted a handful of films that I have either not seen personally or which leave no trace (aside from a title or a screening) in the literature or in the Gino Hahnemann Archive at the Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin.

²⁶⁸ cited in Löser, *Strategien der Verweigerung*, 309. Original citation: *Poesie des Untergrunds – Prenzlauer Berg kontrovers*, dir. Matthias Aberle, 2009. Löser says that Hahnemann made these remarks to a Swedish camera team in 1986. He may be referring to a film titled *Berlin DDR Hintergrund* released in 1985 and directed by Björn Cederberg and Fredrik von Krusenstjerna. As of March 2017, I have been unable to acquire a copy of the short documentary, which I saw screened at the *Zeughauskino* in Berlin in November 2014.

the state could not provide, but which it promised. His reinterpretations of the *Kulturerbe* are thus disinterested in official socialist ideology, but nevertheless share its preoccupations. In fact, his cultural vocabulary is itself anachronistic, drawn from cultural models that cross the 18th, 19th, and even 20th centuries. He does not settle on any one cultural form, and storied tensions between generations of artists do not worry him. Indeed, he seems to try and reconnect them, as well as to pull apart traditional cultural heroes so as to complicate their claims to authority.

The fairy king kills their darlings

“Germany? But where is it located?
I cannot find this country.”

Friedrich Schiller and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Xenien*, 1796

Goethe’s Weimar garden house—a pilgrimage site since the late 19th century—glimmers in the over-saturated muddy colors of low quality Super-8 film. A series of still shots interspersed with abstract drawings by the East German painter Andreas Hegewald picture the baroque building through the seasons. A wistful, synthetic soundtrack plays in the background, recalling the universe. A monotone voice breaks these whizzes and pops: “The Germans read Goethe. These learned dilettantes do not free themselves from their servile existence. I have decided not to be a better German.” For his twenty-four-minute *Goethe Project* (also titled *Die Täuschung verträgt die Realität nicht / Illusion Cannot Bear Reality*, 1989), Hahnemann reinterprets Goethe’s most famous poem “*Erlkönig*” (“Erlking,” lit. Fairy King). In the 1782 original, the fairy king mysteriously kills a child as he rides home



[Figure 2.6. Gino Hahnemann. *Die Täuschung verträgt die Realität nicht (Illusion Cannot Bear Reality)*, *The Goethe Project*, 1989. 24min, Super-8 Film. Image courtesy of Matthias Fischer. © Gino Hahnemann.]

on horseback with his father through a dank wood. In Hahnemann's refashioned version, Goethe is decadent and narcissistic. His costume and elegant horse are 18th century perfection, but he appears arrogant. Goethe's longest exchange is with the boy he will eventually kill. He wears a red Nike sweatshirt when he first appears on the poet's balcony. [Figure 2.6] The boy speaks and gestures excitedly toward a small color television frozen on the home screen for the Nintendo Ghostbusters game. The western consumer goods are strange, but contemporize the poet's own dandy decadence. After slaying the boy off camera, Goethe rides with his corpse to a meadow where he leaves it covered with an orange satin cloth. The murder ultimately inspires his famous verse.

The story proceeds in a series of asynchronous images: The boy comes back to life as a man who runs through the field naked, with the orange cloth flying behind

him. Red paint drips down a tree. Hegewald makes his art. Goethe hosts a group of men in his home, draws Schiller's house, visits a horseshoer, and walks through the quiet Weimar streets. The naked man poses like the *Erlkönig* statue in Jena. The soundtrack interrupts the rhythm of images at random. The narrator oscillates between meta-observation on the film form—"By turning it into a series of stories, cinema made the whole world unreal"—and reflections on the significance of Goethe. The West German writer Hans Henny Jahnn is cited confronting the sincerity of the German fascination with Goethe: "He embodies all the possibilities of the German, the good and the bad—and that is his formidable danger." On screen, Goethe appears composing a list of cultural greats: Nietzsche, Frederick the Great, Ibsen... He checks them off, one-by-one—competitors mind their place. In the final shot, alone in his apartment, Goethe lifts a chair, turns it to the wall and sits to face it. Did, as Jahnn concludes, "the German catastrophe [begin] with Goethe?"

* * *

The GDR's official *Dictionary of Cultural Politics* awards Goethe special status within its definition of realism. He is characterized as exhibiting a "realism with profound historicity" as well as a "qualitative realism designed in the greatest humanistic image of man."²⁶⁹ In the Marxist-Leninist cultural framework, Goethe became a proto-socialist hero artist, whose historical and social sensibilities had paved the way for socialist culture. Famous lines, such as the following from *Faust*, were selectively interpreted as pleas to communal and equitable living: "How each to

²⁶⁹ Bühl, et al, "Realismus," 447.

the whole its selfhood gives / One in another works and lives!” Such interpretations, which defined Goethe’s visionary humanism as an antecedent to socialist humanism, enabled East Germany to claim the Weimar writer and statesman as one of their own. A socialist Goethe was, after all, no longer a West German Goethe. In fact, the coinciding of the GDR’s official establishment year, 1949, with Goethe’s 200th Birthday was touted as an auspicious coincidence for the nation’s defining moment.²⁷⁰ Of course, the fact that the Federal Republic of Germany was also established in this year was strategically ignored by the East German government. Cultural officials called Goethe the “redeemer-god of the sinful German cultural heritage.”²⁷¹ Here was the quintessential figure for the anti-fascist Germany’s *Kulturerbe*.

Hahnemann’s *Goethe Project* represents a conflicted relationship to this “redeemer-god”. The film balances critique with fascination—sketching an origin story that condemns the writer, but also demonstrates his apparent immunity from critique within East German culture. Hahnemann is equivocal. Goethe is an elegant horseman and generous host, but he is also a murderer and a blowhard. The queerness that Hahnemann infuses in the film is secondary to a grappling with the figure of Goethe. This is the filmmaker’s autobiographical backdrop, his *mis-en-scène*. The erotic dance scene of the killed boy reincarnated as a muscular Adonis, the dandies who play cards in Goethe’s house, the film’s effeminate narrator—these are drawn

²⁷⁰ Patricia Herminghouse, “Die Wiederentdeckung,” 219. Friedrich Schiller was the closest equal to Goethe. Hahnemann addresses him in his film by visualizing Goethe drawing Schiller’s house.

²⁷¹ Claudia Knetsch, “Betrachtungen zur Rezeption Goethes und Schillers in der SBZ/DDR (1949 – 59),” *Uni-Journal Jena* (April 2000), Accessed November 10, 2016, <http://www2.uni-jena.de/journal/uniapr00/ddr.htm>

from Hahnemann's everyday, where out homosexuality was a norm and a social conduit.²⁷² In his film Hahnemann grapples with Goethe as another inexorable part of his identity: "I have decided not to be a better German." He continues, "for all eternity" whenever he enters the "Goethe-pharmacy of this country looking for something to treat my wounds," he will always think of the lessons of film: Illusion cannot bear reality. The Goethe cult has elevated the man and his letters to curative status with monumental consequences for the post-Nazi German people. As Jahnn observes from West Germany: "There is no thought, that he did not once have. Everyone can rely on him, but no one really calls on his greatness."²⁷³ That enormity, as Jahnn proceeds to describe it, is Goethe's mortality, his earthliness. Hahnemann returns Goethe to earth by characterizing him as vain and impervious to critique. He kills a boy and uses this as inspiration to write a poem; he destroys the names of the canonized: Ibsen, Kleist, Mann, Nietzsche, Hölderlin. Hahnemann's interpretation seems to diagnose a national affliction, namely, a dependency based on a surface understanding of a man and his letters. The East German state had turned him into a tool for ideology. Hahnemann identifies the small-mindedness of *Kulturerbe*. He critiques it, but resigns himself to it. After all this, he cannot be a better German.

By selecting historically significant local cultural emissaries that exceeded—even contested—the East German definition of culture, Hahnemann demonstrates his fascination with Germany and German-ness (*Deutschtum*) beyond ideology. This interest approaches the sense of longing that Schiller and Goethe identify in their

²⁷² Hahnemann often enlisted friends from his gay circle to perform in his films.

²⁷³ Cited in Gino Hahnemann, *Exogene Zerrinerung* (Berlin: Gerhard Wolf Janus Press, 1994), 114.

aphoristic poem, *Xenien*: “Germany? But where is it located? I cannot find this country.” It likewise reflects an almost ironic connection to the East German government, which in its obsession over the cultural future of the socialist state betrayed a lack of confidence in its own legitimacy. For it was the state’s efforts to force a cultural backbone upon the East German population that reinstated the very elite forms of governance it claimed to resist: the hierarchies, the lack of mobility, even a quasi petit-bourgeois cultural sensibility. In fact, Hahnemann seems to answer this paradox in films that embrace tradition, but infuse it with an alternative perspective. The paradox is plain. The East German government’s wish to emphasize a pre-capitalistic and proto-proletarian moment in its own cultural history may have not missed the mark after all. Rather, it paved the way to its own insignificance by not keeping pace with a changing society.

Filmic architecture: Hahnemann rescripts the East German habitus

What is it that Hahnemann wishes to summon in his viewers? A desire for the past, a reverence for cultural precedent, an appreciation for the multiple kinds of subjectivities who may attach themselves to local history? A signal achievement of Hahnemann’s works may be the consistency in which they reshape the habitus, that is to say the everyday culture, of the GDR. The mixture of historical reference, homosexual elements, musical and visual anachronisms redirect their viewers towards a realism that Hahnemann deems more authentic. One final filmic example that revises the history of space, specifically, helps to draw this conclusion to the fore.

A series of buildings set in a grand park, shot from multiple angles cycle through a fifteen-minute color film. This is the Charlottenhof Manor, a grand estate tucked within the Sanssouci Palace grounds in Potsdam. The soundtrack alternates between synthesized New Age music and a voice explaining the history of the place. Special attention is paid to Frederick William IV of Prussia who commissioned the architectural ensemble that is this film's namesake: *Römische Bäder (Roman Baths)*. Karl Friedrich Schinkel, a beloved neoclassical and neogothic architect active in the late 18th to mid-19th centuries, designed the space in the model of ancient Italian villas. "The Charlottenhof was a Christmas gift from King Frederick William III to his son King Frederick William IV in 1825." Details accumulate like a filmstrip for tourists or schoolkids. A monotone voice recounts the building process: "In 1827 there was also a plan to make a pumping station for the Charlottenhof's Italian style fountains on the east side of the castle. Hence, in 1828 one was erected for the main garden house..." The dullness of the film is almost farcical.

A break comes unexpectedly. A naked man bends over a pond unmoving. The film next captures a series of sculptures, mostly the round curve of buttocks and calves. The dry narration drones on. The naked man returns with greater regularity. The camera alternates between scanning the musculature of the statues and that of the naked man. The camera scans across seasons: snow blankets trees in one shot, ducks glide across a pond in another, fountains burst upward. The film ends dreamily, its history incomplete. Final moments linger on the man as he walks naked out of the palace pond. The music swells and abruptly ends.

* * *

Shot in 1982, *Roman Baths* was one of Hahnemann's first Super-8 films. With clear correspondence to filmmaker biography, its fascination with architecture and its incongruous ending may be construed as a miniature self-portrait—the gay architect turned filmmaker introduces his residual expertise. Hahnemann's reflections reveal a kind of bombastic identification with the Charlottenhof architects: "From a planned 'commentary on the architecture of my colleagues' emerged an essayistic fiction about an example of romantic classicism."²⁷⁴ Further in the *Roman Baths* film treatment, his notes reveal deeper investments in charting a relationship between cinema and architecture. Naming a desire to translate the multiple dimensionality of architecture and the built environment into cinematic form, he writes: "Both my film and architecture have no right side. You need to look from every side, from the inside and the outside. Painterly effects [populate] the landscape: within the park of the Charlottenhof Manor, just like within this (amateur) film."²⁷⁵

Hahnemann echoes Sergei Eisenstein—whom he may indeed have read—who wrote that "at the basis of the composition of an architectural ensemble is the same 'dance' which is at the basis of film montage."²⁷⁶ That dance is the movement of the viewer, who makes sense of cinematic space by taking in what Giuliana Bruno terms

²⁷⁴ Gino Hahnemann, "RÖMISCHE BÄDER," 1, Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Gino-Hahnemann-Archiv, no. 22.

²⁷⁵ *ibid.*

²⁷⁶ Sergei Eisenstein cited in Giuliana Bruno, "Geography of the Moving Image" in *Atlas of Emotion. Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (Verso: New York, 2002), 59. Original citation: "Piranesi, or the Fluidity of Forms [1947 / 1964]," *Oppositions*, no. 11 (Winter 1997): 98.

“spectatorial movements.”²⁷⁷ Bruno’s reading of Eisenstein leads her to define film as “geographic,”²⁷⁸ in so far as it leads its spectators along an imaginary path: “a spectatorial voyage [inherited] from the architectural field, for the person who wanders through a building or a site also absorbs and connects visual spaces.”²⁷⁹ Hahnemann’s film, which invites his viewer to “site-see”²⁸⁰ the Charlottenhof palace at the accelerated speed that film permits, literalizes Bruno’s metaphor of a multi-sited cinema as a kind of architectural space. Of course, his film is a binary document. The bodies Hahnemann inserts into the landscape—what he calls his “painterly effects”—direct his spectator to a specific narrative about architecture and the use of romantic space.

Bruno concedes that filmic frames are “directional arrows,” leading to “mappings of practiced plots,” which are verifiable, but remain open and contestable. Hahnemann’s film draws attention to the historical valence of the palace grounds. He is, after all interested in the heritage his state provides. Nevertheless, he restages the plot. In the late 1970s, Sanssouci Palace became a site of a renewed (and state-sanctioned) interest in Prussian history.²⁸¹ A revisionist view—nearly coinciding with

²⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 56.

²⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 55.

²⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 56.

²⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 55.

²⁸¹ King Frederick II (aka Frederick the Great), who had been a reviled figure under the GDR’s first party chairman Walter Ulbricht, received a revised materialist / Marxist historicization in 1979 in the blockbuster book by the East German historian Ingrid Mittenzwei (*Friedrich II. von Preußen. Eine Biographie*). In a recent article by Christoph Dieckmann, Mittenzwei reflects that Prussian history was a part of collective memory that could not be repressed. Her book gave East Germans permission to explore these familial and national roots. (Christoph Dieckmann, “Der König der DDR,” *ZEIT Geschichte*, no. 4 (22 November 2011), Accessed November 12, 2016. <http://www.zeit.de/zeit-geschichte/2011/04/Friedrich-der-Grosse-DDR>)

West German Peter Weiss' Pergamon Alter analysis²⁸²— redefined the castle as a monument to the great achievements of the 18th century working class, and King Frederick the Great as a congenial employer.²⁸³ In fact, the GDR's second party chairman Erich Honecker had a special affection for Frederick the Great, which he imparted to the East German public by reinstalling the king's statue on East Berlin's main thoroughfare, *Unter den Linden*, in November 1980. The king, as well as his favorite architect Schinkel, were thus enshrined as parts of the GDR's revised *Kulturerbe*. Recall that Schleime also filmed *Den of Cherubs* publicly at the palace. Her film does not indulge the fantasy of Sanssouci, but rather documents its vanishing. For her Sanssouci is the GDR's metaphorical and literal tomb. Hahnemann, on the other hand, plays with this space, makes it his own space of fantasy. His film retools the propaganda of the architectural ensemble of the GDR to map new possibilities—both detours and escape routes. Still, as a film that is as carefree as it is strange, *Roman Baths* represents the simplicity of indulging in form: the directions in which it traffics point to beauty, nice looking things, and the passing of time.

Expanded cinema: Reality on Super-8

“He represented therefore relationships, means, and influences...
He was only afraid of perfection,
which could be neither a beginning nor an end-point.
The goal: to reach the source!”

²⁸² *The Aesthetics of Resistance*, 1975.

²⁸³ Dieckmann, “Der König der DDR.”

In his prophetic 1970 text *Expanded Cinema*, Gene Youngblood exhorts his generation: “We see the whole earth and thus we see the illusion that has characterized life upon it. We cannot accept the truths and values of a world in which we no longer live.”²⁸⁵ East Germany’s experimental artists became its own “generation of desperadoes”²⁸⁶ as they plodded through the state’s ideological muck. Ultimately, the East German Super-8 films constituted a reshaped reality that remained attached to the absurdist drama of the GDR. Youngblood’s American post-1968 context yields differences to a 1980s GDR in the extreme. Nevertheless, his desire to redefine reality through the moving image—to live truth by simulating it—describes the motivations that drove the makers of East Germany’s experimental film. In fact, it is a description in double. On the one hand, the GDR was by its own definition a simulation.²⁸⁷ The state’s ontology adhered to a future-in-the-making. Rhetoric took shape in the visual, and the arts were esteemed as socialism’s greatest instrument. At the same time, experimental artists envisioned a world outside of the nation’s prescribed idealism. They lived that reality as an expansion in film. For Schleime, no other medium could translate the furious catalog of images that ran through her head. Film was also a way for her to talk back to the state—to send it messages that contested its feedback loop by looking back. Hahnemann directed his

²⁸⁴ Gino Hahnemann, “Auslieferung der Unschuld an die Erfahrung (February 8, 1984),” Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Gino-Hahnemann-Archiv, no. 22.

²⁸⁵ Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, 47.

²⁸⁶ *ibid.*

²⁸⁷ On how East Berlin’s poets responded to this irreality, see Dominic Boyer, “Foucault in the Bush: The Social Life of Post-Structuralist Theory in East Berlin’s Prenzlauer Berg,” *Ethnos (Estocolmo)* 66.2 (2001): 207 – 236.

messages outward, too. However, his focus was not confrontational or representational, like Schleime's, but syncretic—a fusing of multiple realities that the state had sought to set apart. Youngblood quips: “A culture is dead when its myths have been exposed.”²⁸⁸ Hahnemann's unorthodox treatment of cultural emissaries crafts a reality that is also East Germany's mortal prophecy.

Youngblood's expanded cinema is positive, that is to say, additive and constructive—a form for reinstating authenticity through tangible effects. Synesthetic, that is to say “an art of relations,”²⁸⁹ there is then an inside and an outside to expanded cinema—the object itself and the object as it is observed and perceived. The directional arrows arrive from multiple sensorial inputs. Youngblood found the abstract film alchemy of Stan Brakhage's *Dog Star Man* series (1961 – 1964) and Carolee Schneemann's *Fuses* (1965) to be particularly exemplary of synesthetic cinema's “extra-objective”²⁹⁰ reality. These films, were, nevertheless complete as shown. Certainly, time would scratch, melt, and destroy image and sound tracks. Of course—as Peggy Phelan and Erika Fischer-Lichte have both observed with regard to performance—there is something precious and unrepeatable about the space of the screening.²⁹¹ Yet, the 1960s avant-garde cinema was not performance art; it was epic and unhinged, but nevertheless fairly self-contained. In contrast, the experimental film of East Germany (its avant-garde cinema) was uniquely performative—completed in the space of the screening by live sound, the positioning of projectors,

²⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 78.

²⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 82.

²⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 81.

²⁹¹ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked. The Politics of Performance* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996); Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004).

even as a space of bringing people together to make space, to share habitus, to redefine the boundaries of cultural and life practice in East Germany. The definition of expanded cinema thus requires some elaboration to accommodate the material conditions of a GDR screening scenario.

At the risk of over-privileging the position of the researcher, the live or performed quality of East Germany's Super-8 film comes retrospectively to the fore in the archive.²⁹² Indeed, it is the overwhelmingly obvious limitations of the digitized copies of these films (the only format readily available) that underscores them as objects, which served multiple, even collective, purposes in and for their time. For example, in his *Goethe Project* film treatment, Hahnemann lists the soundtrack as an accordion-version of Erik Satie's "Gymnopédie 3." The DVD recording he released in 2006 features the electro-acoustic composer Eckhard Rödger. Its recorded voiceover by Uwe Hübner pans from left to right, resulting in a somewhat jarring listening experience with a contemporary, that is to say research, set-up of laptop and ear buds. There is something missing here. The same could be said of Schleime's films, which, aside from *Den of Cherubs*, feature unique compositions by herself or her punk band. In fact, with rare exception,²⁹³ the soundtracks to GDR Super-8 in archival versions seem canned or, at worst, indifferently attached to the images.

²⁹² I am indebted to Amelia Jones who has given all scholars of performance and other live forms of art permission to honor the "life" of the archived object. See, for example, Amelia Jones, "'Presence' in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation," *Art Journal* vol. 56, no. 4, Performance Art: (Some) Theory and (Selected) Practice at the End of this Century (Winter 1997): 11 – 18.

²⁹³ Here, I am thinking of Lutz Dammeck's *Hommage à la Sarras* (1981), which features an animated and exciting soundtrack. The comparatively high quality of the film may also be attributed to the high quality production of the Dammeck DVD, *Lutz Dammeck: Filme und Mediencollage 1975 – 1986* (2008), released by the Film Museum in Potsdam, and edited in collaboration with the Goethe Institute.

Material conditions in the 1980s made synchronized sound impossible. People improvised. Films were designed to fit abstract scores played off a tape or performed live. Often a recited, sometimes improvisational text that did not describe or narrate the image would accompany a film. Countless reminisce on the film space as something impossible to duplicate—these were performances,²⁹⁴ and they were Happenings where risks fell in the camp of literal, rather than virtual rule breaking. Cassettes, live music, or readings accompanied the films in situ. Just what was played is, as the case of Hahnemann's *Goethe Project* indicates, today not always easy to glean.²⁹⁵ The mood of the room, the filmmaker's current taste, or the screening set-up yielded spontaneous decision-making. Certainly the GDR's improv jazz scene, a highlight of the mid- to late-1970s and still significant into the mid-1980s, contributed to the spontaneous aesthetic of the Super-8 film screening. Indeed, screenings also facilitated live action. For example, Jörg Herold's 1989 film *Baader in Leipzig* featured the writer, musician, and performance artist "Matthias" BAADER Holst parodying state propaganda as he spoke over the images on screen.²⁹⁶ Holst's spoken word performances rendered no two screenings alike. Likewise, many extant films must be interpreted as both complete objects and as forms of documentation: as in the media collages that Lutz Dammbeck made with the dancer Fine Kwiatkowski, Christine Schlegel's *Pergamotten* (*Bergamots*, 1983), *Strukturen* (*Structures*, 1985 and 1987) and *Wandlungen* (*Transformations*, 1989) films also made with

²⁹⁴ Löser, *Strategien der Verweigerung*, 82.

²⁹⁵ Löser, "Das Phänomen des Schmalfilmbooms," 92.

²⁹⁶ Frank Eckart, "Zwischen 'Stummfilm' und 'Schwarz/Weiß' " in *Gegenbilder*, 119.



[Figure 2.7. Gino Hahnemann sets up projectors at a film screening in Jena, East Germany, ca. 1986. Photographer unknown. Image courtesy of Christoph Tannert. © Ursus Press.]

Kwiatkowski, or—even more concretely—the films of the Auto-Perforation Artist performances (i.e., *Herz Horn Haut Schrein*, Via Lewandowsky, 1987).

Adaptive screening strategies also responded to ad hoc screening sites. Cafes and bars, living rooms and interior courtyards, gallery spaces and churches, art school clubs and state cultural centers—each setting imposed its own kinds of material, and sometimes ideological, demands on the films. A picture of Gino Hahnemann at a 1986 screening in Jena illustrates the lengths to which artists stretched unfavorable conditions. [Figure 2.7] Here, in what appears to be a double-projector set up, he fixes his eyes upon a screen, jerry-rigging a way to make the two projectors to run to his liking. Projection equipment was notoriously temperamental. An inability to reproduce films rendered the quality of the projected material itself suspect. A broken

reel meant a new edit of the one and only copy. Film was then less a precious object than a living agent.

The material conditions that defined the form of experimental film in the GDR also defined the reality that these films sought to deconstruct, retool, and transcend. That reality is exceeded and consistently cited in the screening space. The observers observed themselves. Sometimes that looking back was literal: Often the actors on screen comprised the film's public. For others, the connection to an alternative way of seeing or being seen in the landscape of the GDR was more abstract. More than meta-cognitive, that is to say syncretic and self-reflective, the GDR's expanded cinema was multi-sensorial, marking the screening space as another site to claim and experiment with material independence and autonomous practice. As multi-media events, the films were core components of an inter-disciplinary context, where live music and performance completed the Super-8 object. It was perhaps that complexity of form, interwoven with multiple personages, that made experimental film one of East Germany's most restless alternatives to state culture.

And yet, if the Super-8 film scene's improvisational aesthetic may be explained as a product of necessity, just how intentionally did this work function as a manifestation of togetherness—that is to say, as an expanded cinema that aimed at something outside of the frame? “Nobody” as Schleime reflects, wanted to formalize the Super-8 scene—“everything else was already so over-organized in the East.”²⁹⁷

²⁹⁷ Schleime, “DEFA 50 – Die Sechste,” 157.

“What we did,” she continues, “was just help each other as much as possible.”²⁹⁸ It is then perhaps the necessity to help make room for alternative modes of expression that outdid state power first and foremost. Official bureaucracy’s overzealous efforts to control cultural output—to unify state socialism in curated feelings of togetherness—rendered its power empty, suspended, replaceable, unfixed.

²⁹⁸ *ibid.*

Chapter Three.
Crossing Media, Forging Community – Experimental and Collective Practice

Saturday, June 1, 1985. 6PM. Klubhaus Coswig. 29 Ernst Thälmann

Street: Hundreds have made the short trip from Dresden into the neighboring township of Coswig to attend the opening night of the two-day “Intermedia I” festival. [Figure 3.1] Punks don their leather and metal chains. Jazz tramps wear the uniform of their ilk: a collarless blue-and-white striped long-sleeved *Fleischerhemd* (butcher’s shirt) and jeans. Artists, filmmakers, and musicians mingle and await their moment to perform or showcase their work. Dozens of paintings scrawled onto the uneven surface of roman blinds hang from the clubhouse’s open plan balcony.

[Figure 3.2] Festivalgoers lean on the bannister looking down at the revelers who commune below. The building is grand, a private guesthouse built in a classical style in 1900 that has served as Coswig’s cultural center since 1978. Fine crown molding and an elegant coved ceiling contrast the bold and expressive paintings and raucous party attendees.

A cordoned off area at the front of the main hall is a makeshift stage. A large sheet of white paper scrawled with a list of names—STALIN, SIEGFRIED, TARZAN, HERAKLES, etc.—forms a backdrop.²⁹⁹ Suddenly all of the lights go

²⁹⁹ This description is based on photo documentation from the Intermedia I festival, the artist’s concept, and a short film clip of the May 27, 1985 performance of the *Herakles* Mediecollage that took place at the Internationale Musikfestspiele in Dresden. Documentation of a 1984 performance, available on the artist Lutz Dammebeck’s website devoted to his *Herakles* series has a very different stage set, including sculptural elements, soundscape, and performance trajectory. Lutz Dammebeck, “Video Herakles (1984),” Adobe Flash video, 10:26, <http://www.herakleskonzept.de/material/index.php/video-herakles.html>. For the artist’s concept, see: “Ablauf Cowsig (letzte Fassung),” Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Lutz-Dammebeck-Archiv, no. 14/2.



[Figure 3.1. Karin Wieckhorst, untitled documentation of the Intermedia I festival, *Klubhaus Coswig*, Coswig, June 1 – 2, 1985. Image courtesy of the artist. © Karin Wieckhorst.]



[Figure 3.2. Harald Hauswald, untitled documentation of the Intermedia I festival, *Klubhaus Coswig*, Coswig, June 1 – 2, 1985. Image courtesy of OSTKREUZ – Agentur der Fotografen GmbH. © Harald Hauswald.]

black. A light behind the stage flickers on. A body stands backlit behind the paper screen and begins to move and contort as the sounds of the free jazz band *Musikbrigade* (Music Brigade)³⁰⁰ swell to a cacophony of noise. The performer breaks through the white screen. She tears it apart in swift jerking movements. [Figure 3.3] This is Fine Kwiatkowski, a rail thin dancer with shaved head whose ability to contort and bend her body into unimaginable positions is emphasized by her performer's uniform: a skin-tight bodysuit. The crowd looks on as she moves with and against the music. A film projection casts a series of abstract drawings onto her small jerking frame. As quickly as they swell to a frantic visual frenzy, the images stop. The stage is dark once again. The next several minutes³⁰¹ proceed at an equally unpredictable pace. Slides of images of artworks by the Nazi-era sculptor Arno Breker, family photos, and soundless clips of films produced by and for the Nazis appear as a recitation of the Grimm Brother's fairy tale, "*Das eigenwillige Kind*" ("The Willful Child") fills the room. A sound collage featuring excerpts from GDR author Heiner Müller's short-form text "*Herakles 2 oder die Hydra*" ("Heracles 2 or The Hydra") punctuates phases of the performance: "For a long time, he thought he was going through the forest in the stunningly warm wind, which seemed to be blowing from all sides and moving the trees like snakes..." The agitated strumming of Lothar Fiedler on his guitar and Kwiatkowski's contortions and theatrical facial expressions remain constant. [Figure 3.4] Each part operates together to produce what

³⁰⁰ Lothar Fiedler, Hans-Jürgen Noack, and Gottfried Rössler

³⁰¹ I could not find a specific length for this performance of the 1985 *HERAKLES*, but a video of a 1984 performance (ostensibly its own independent 4-D work) archived on the *Herakles Konzept* website is listed at 10'26".



[Figure 3.3. Harald Hauswald, Lutz Dammbeck with Fine Kwiatkowski, *HERAKLES Mediencollage (Heracles Media Collage)*, Intermedia I festival, *Klubhaus Coswig*, Coswig, June 1, 1985. Performance. Image courtesy of OSTKREUZ – Agentur der Fotografen GmbH. © Harald Hauswald.]



[Figure 3.4. Harald Hauswald, Lutz Dammbeck with Fine Kwiatkowski, *HERAKLES Mediencollage (Heracles Media Collage)*, Intermedia I festival, *Klubhaus Coswig*, Coswig, June 1, 1985. Performance. Image courtesy of OSTKREUZ – Agentur der Fotografen GmbH. © Harald Hauswald.]

Lutz Dammbeck—the artist who conceived this work—calls a “*Mediencollage*” (media collage). This piece, the *HERAKLES Mediencollage*, is part of his long-term *Herakles Konzept (Heracles Concept)*, produced from 1979³⁰²-2005, and performed several times all over the GDR in that period. Here, at the Intermedia I festival, Dammbeck’s work—a kind of lyrical montage—is an auspicious opening to a two-day event that will at once demonstrate the vast promise of the GDR’s experimental culture, as well as temporarily seal its fate as a movement unwanted, marginalized, and punished by state authority. The performance concludes with Kwiatkowski in her plastic pyramid, writhing and straining to be free.

* * *

Much can be said about the symbolic power of Dammbeck’s *HERAKLES* media collage. Replete with references to the legacies of Nazism, both cultural and familial, the work may be understood as a portrait of a generation of Germans raised in “anti-fascist” East Germany, yet not immune to the residual collective guilt rampant in the personal, familial, and cultural ties to the Third Reich that lay beneath the surface of the state’s prescribed identity.³⁰³ It is important to emphasize the complexity of Dammbeck’s practice, which cannot be described in depth in this text. The connections he draws across the East German and Nazi histories came in the face

³⁰² Dammbeck formally adopted the name *Herakles Konzept* in 1984 for the first performance of a media collage at the *Klubhaus Nationale Front* in Leipzig on June 24 of that year. The idea to make a Heracles inspired film originated in 1979.

³⁰³ For more on East Germany’s desire to divide itself from its WWII-era past, as well as to differentiate itself from West Germany, see Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory. The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1997). Seth Howes, a Germanist, is also currently working on a manuscript entitled *Moving Images at the Margins: Experimental Film between Media in Late Socialist East Germany*, which includes a chapter dedicated to Lutz Dammbeck.

of the GDR's claim to a total redefinition of a new communist, that is to say global, culture on German soil are certainly pertinent to the ways the state would come to define its national collective, a core thematic of this chapter. That history, though latent, will not be explored in this chapter. As part of the larger *Herakles Konzept*, the work stakes even larger claims by visualizing more generally the modern nation-state, as well as the tensions between reality and memory that complicated East Germany's national identity. As art historian Matthias Flügge writes:

Lutz Dambeck's *HERAKLES KONZEPT* can be understood as a kind of Gesamtkunstwerk, concerned with the *human condition* of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with the chasms of utopia and counter-utopia, with the combination of aesthetics, art, and politics, with their latent goals and even more so with their strategies of concealment. The principle theme is the commissioning and shaping of people and their motivations in modern social systems. Or, even more concisely: The shaping of the individual in the interests of present power.³⁰⁴

The historical and symbolic significance of *HERAKLES* in its 1985 Coswig iteration is important within a trajectory of Dambeck's formidable career as an artist and a filmmaker. He is, in fact, one of the few East German artists who has achieved some national, and even international, attention and remains relevant to German contemporary art today.

Equal to the meaning of this work and its impact on its intended audience is the way in which the artist plays with multiple media. This chapter focuses on that materiality. It credits Dambeck's Intermedia I *HERAKLES* performance as a signature example of the multi-media and collaborative artworks that characterized

³⁰⁴ Emphasis in the original; Matthias Flügge, "Von der Erfindung zum Dokument – das HERAKLES KONZEPT von Lutz Dambeck," Accessed January 15, 2017, <http://www.herakleskonzept.de/material/index.php/herakles-konzept-95.html>.

the experimental art scene of the 1980s. Simultaneous to a blending of media was a tendency for artists and their supporters to use art as an excuse and a reason to gather, organize, and ultimately create sustainable alternatives to state culture. To that end, the 1980s artistic ethos was both media-bending and collectively oriented. Together these characteristics challenged official state policy's desire to categorize and craft its public through culture. Indeed, the impulse to compartmentalize artistic practice is the twin of the impulse to delineate the ideal socialist subject. The state used art to create the socialist subject at the level of the body, at the level of cultural heritage, and—as this chapter will demonstrate—at the level of the collective. What cultural authorities had not anticipated, however, was the ways in which experimental artists would devise novel uses of media in concert with each other. Ultimately, as this chapter argues, one of the greatest threats of the multi-media art forms of the 1980s were their reliance on collectivity without any relation to the state.

This chapter begins with an exploration of how a gathering of multi-media artworks reflected the core of experimental practice in a late GDR. It then turns to the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX* (Women Artists Group Exterra XX), an artist collective, to draw an affinity between multi-media and collective practice.³⁰⁵ In a state committed to the instrumentalization of art as a means to unify and produce a collective public, these examples of collective gathering and practice were

³⁰⁵ The group would use a number of different names. From “Undine” to “Atlantis” to “Exterra XX” these names were seemingly randomly selected. Their final group name, adopted in 1989, “Exterra XX” is often used in the literature to describe the group in its entirety. In an e-mail from February 27, 2017, Gabi Stötzer has suggested that I combine the original name *Künstlerinnengruppe* and *Exterra XX*. Although the name *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX* is fairly cumbersome, I believe that this name is the most historically accurate.

unsanctionable. Maybe not just because they were artists using art as a vehicle for togetherness, but because they were mixing artistic forms.

In official culture, the collective described a group identification rendered by individuals bound together by the shared social, ideological, and economic vision of Communism. In other words, cultural activity was communal, but nevertheless fairly atomized—even competitive. In experimental culture, individuation also formed a core of the collective. Nevertheless, in this formation artists worked together to achieve nebulous creative goals advanced by a heterogeneous array of attitudes, perspectives, and desires. This chapter demonstrates how the premises of the state’s and experimental culture’s definitions of the collective were inherently entangled. It argues that substantial aspects of official culture’s insistence on community-based creativity actually inspired experimental practice, but did so in the inverse. More explicitly, artists working along East Germany’s cultural margins drew from and advanced the policies of state culture beyond its own inflexible framework. My discussion begins with an explosive event that took place over a weekend in June 1985 at a state cultural center to demonstrate the importance of interdisciplinary practice in the GDR, as well as the efforts people made to integrate experimental culture into state culture. Within this discussion, the term “intermedia” will be interrogated both in terms of its implied roots in Dick Higgins and the global Fluxus movement, and in terms of its historical/contextual significance as a confrontation of the GDR’s strict medium-based cultural vision. I analyze the Intermedia I festival as a collective project, both in terms of the artworks, music, and performances presented

there, and in terms of how it was organized laterally across official and unofficial levels of culture. The second part of the chapter then moves into a focused discussion about what collectivism meant for the GDR's experimental artists. By looking specifically at the artist, filmmaker, and writer Gabriele (Gabi) Kachold³⁰⁶ and the work she did with a group of women artists and community members in the Thuringian town of Erfurt, it is possible to see latent issues of feminism and political action, while more generally exploring the significance of group work to the experimental scene of a late GDR.

Programming an alternative

While the Intermedia I festival is widely regarded as one of the most significant artistic summits to take place in the late GDR, little has been written with regard to how it precisely defined its cultural moment, let alone its relationship to cultural convention. This is particularly surprising in light of the great amount of attention that Christoph Tannert, the festival co-organizer and a prolific figure in the experimental scene, has given to the ways in which the event's artists and musicians dispensed with convention. The following quotation is particularly emblematic:

On both evenings, the intermedia concept defined itself in the first place as an affront against the existing, rigid artistic structures. Many of the featured artists made things that no one could have expected from them. They gave in to realms where they would ordinarily not have felt at home. They played and collaborated with artists working in different artistic media...Far removed from the institutionalized public sphere, they built enclaves that enabled

³⁰⁶ Today, she refers to herself by her maiden name, Stötzer. This text uses the name Kachold, but all citations (unless published under "Kachold" or "Kachold-Stötzer") use her maiden name.

young artists to self-discover and bond together as a small circle of supporters who were ready to live this new identity together.³⁰⁷

Tannert's reflections on the event reveal at once a clear curatorial foresight as well as the event's unanticipated impacts on community building. In what follows, I will demonstrate how both not only rattled state culture, but revealed a foundational weakness of state power.

As the Intermedia I's inaugural event, the *HERAKLES* media collage set a tone for a weekend that featured more than eighty artists and musicians who presented artwork or performed live for an audience of up to eight hundred onlookers, including visitors from West Germany.³⁰⁸ As Tannert reflects, "Dammbeck's media collage got to the point, drawing attention to the urgent need to satisfy the hopes for

³⁰⁷ Christoph Tannert, "'Intermedia I' in Coswig 1985" in *Ohne uns! Kunst & alternative Kultur in Dresden vor und nach '89*, eds. Frank Eckhardt and Paul Kaiser, 313 – 314 (Dresden: Efau-Verlag, 2009), Exhibition catalog.

³⁰⁸ The attendance figure is taken from a Stasi report, which estimates that 800 people attended the first night and 400 people attended the second night of the festival (BStU, MfS, BV Berlin AKG, Nr. 2008: 2). The forty artists who painted the roman blinds included: Paul Böckelmann, Dietrich Brüning, Lutz Dammbeck, Klaus Elle, Tobias Ellmann, Steffen Fischer, Lutz Fleischer, Michael Freudenberg, Hubertus Giebe, Klaus Hähner-Springmühl, Angela Hampel, Andreas Hegewald, Johannes Heisig, Michael Hengst, Veit Hofmann, Christiane Just, Petra Kasten, Katrin Krause, Michael Kunert, Michael Brendel, Andreas Küchler, Dieter Ladewig, Walter Libuda, Reinhard Sandner, Wolfram A. Scheffler, Hans Scheuerecker, Christine Schlegel, Annette Schröter, Erasmus Schröter, Hans-Joachim Schulze, Frank Seidel, Wolfgang Smy, Jörg Sonntag, Matthias Stein, Gudrun Trendafilov, Claus Weidensdorfer, Trak Wendisch, Klaus Werner, Michael Wirkner, and Dietmar Zaubitzer. The official program lists the following artists, musicians, and performers divided by group: HERAKLES Mediacollage: (NB: Lutz Dammbeck, the artist, did not perform), Fine Kwiatkowski, Hans-Jürgen Noack, Lothar Fiedler, Gottfried Rößler, and Dietrich Oltmanns; KLICK & AUS: Sala Seil, Evolinum, Tohm die Roes, Pjotr Schwert, and ToRo Klick; Pfff...: Hans-Joachim Schulze, Frank Zappe, and Jürgen Gutjahr; MAL KLEID: Kerstin Roßbänder and Michael Freudenberg; HARD POP: Stephan Hachtmann, Armin Bautz, Ralf Lepsch, and others; RENNBAHNBAND (with O.T.Z.E.): Andreas Hegewald, Lutz Peter Naumann, Claudia Böttner, Klaus Werner, and others, plus Jörg Sonntag, Christiane Just, Bodo Münzner, and Michael Hengst; DANCE AND PROJECTION: Christine Schlegel, Fine Kwiatkowski, Gabi Kachold, Stefan Schilling, Matthias Schneider, and Jens Tuckindorf; KARTOFFELSCHÄLMASCHINE: Klaus Hähner-Springmühl, Gitte Springmühl, and Frank Raßbach; MUSIKBRIGADE: Hanne Wandtke, Hans-Jürgen Noack, Lothar Fiedler, and Gottfried Rössler; O.T.Z.E.: Tom Trietschel, Rene Bestvater, Uwe J., and Aldo Scheck. See: Barbara Büscher, "Intermedia DDR 1985 – Ereignis und Netzwerk," *media archive performance*, no. 2 (2010): 14 – 15, Accessed January 12, 2017, <http://www.performap.de/map2/geschichte/intermedia-ddr>.

changing the conditions [both artistic and social] in the GDR.”³⁰⁹ Opening this chapter with Lutz Dambeck’s *HERAKLES* not only echoes the important first night of Intermedia I. It also signals the importance of Dambeck to this event, to Tannert, and to a younger generation of artists who made up the majority of people in attendance. To that end, beginning with Dambeck also permits some entry into the often-contradictory operations and expectations of state culture that the Intermedia I festival summons. Like the event itself, Dambeck may be understood as a cross-over figure, operating between both the confines of state culture and its experimental margins. A trained graphic designer,³¹⁰ he worked from 1974 to 1981 in the animation department at the state’s national cinema (*Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft*, DEFA). After a number of successes with the studio,³¹¹ Dambeck envisioned a cinematic project that looked at national history and united mainstream cinema with animation. This was to be the film *HERAKLES*. Citing its irrelevance to mass audiences, DEFA officials rejected his film concept twice: first in 1981 and again in 1984.³¹² The rejections inspired in Dambeck an even greater commitment to producing an alternative art form—the media collage—which challenged not only cinematic convention, but united dance, theater, improvisation, installation, and sound into a single live experience. Despite abandoning his position within the state culture industry, Dambeck continued to occupy both the realms of

³⁰⁹ Christoph Tannert, “ ‘Intermedia I’ in Coswig 1985,” 318.

³¹⁰ He completed his studies at the *Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst* (Academy of Visual Arts) in Leipzig, with a specialization in book design, between 1967 and 1972.

³¹¹ Including the animations *Der Mond* (*The Moon*, 6”, 1975), *Der Schneider von Ulm* (*The Tailor from Ulm*, 14”, 1979), and *Einmart* (15”, 1981).

³¹² Lutz Dambeck, “Vorlauf: Der Film *HERAKLES* (1979-1984),” Accessed January 15, 2017, <http://www.herakleskonzept.de/material/index.php/vorlauf-6.html>

official and unofficial culture. Since June 1984, two works in the *Herakles Konzept* series (*La Sarraz, Herakles*) had appeared four times on official state stages, including the prestigious Bauhaus Theater in Dessau. The *HERAKLES* performance at Intermedia I was already regarded as a masterwork by East Germany's experimental artists who held it up as an exemplary case for the possibilities and potentialities of experimental art practice in the GDR. In choosing to open their festival with this piece, Tannert and his co-organizer Micha Kapinos sent a clear message to their audience, as well as to the cultural functionaries that had granted the permission for the unconventional event to take place: Multi-media practice represented the ethos of the time, and formed both a mode of practice and a locus point for collaboration and mass gathering.

In addition to the forty roman blinds strung across the ballroom's balconies, Intermedia I featured nine other acts. Each combined an improvisational and collaborative aesthetic with multiple central media. For example, opening the second night of the festival were the Dresden painters Andreas Hegewald, Klaus Werner, and Dietmar Zaubitzer, who picked up instruments to form their free jazz group, the *Rennbahnband* (Racecourse Band). As the group played, three additional artists painted a circa ten square meter (approx. 100 square foot) canvas. Later, the painter Hans-Joachim Schulze, a prolific organizer who founded the Leipzig-based artist collective Gruppe 37,2 (Group 37.2) in 1979, appeared on stage with two others as the noise band Pfff..., and the photographer, sculptor, painter, and musician Klaus Hähner-Springmühl joined his partner, Gitte Springmühl, and Frank Raßbach to

perform saxophone in their legendary improvisation group *Kartoffelschälmaschine* (Potatopeeler machine). These three examples especially blurred the lines between music and performance art.

The Intermedia I group actions—which may be understood as a kind of translation of expression into multiple, simultaneous forms—were indebted to important and well-known precedents that defined East Germany’s history of experimental art. For example, the *Lücke* (gap) group—an allegiance of artists in Dresden that formed in the early seventies around the autodidact painter A.R. Penck—had experimented with fusing music and performance to painting. Note, the *Lücke* moniker signifies a link to the Dresden Expressionist group, *Die Brücke* (The Bridge). This kind of historical reference to Germany’s avant-garde was fairly common and crossed generations. A connection to pre-Nazi era aesthetic concerns and experimentation was a latent, though not necessarily prescriptive, preoccupation among the GDR’s artists well into the late 1980s. Indeed, Tannert contends that the cross-disciplinary practices of the country’s experimental artists reflected a desire to produce a “traditional connection” to Germany’s avant-garde cultural tradition—a marked contrast to the state’s official vision of suitable German (let alone East German) tradition as described in the previous chapter of this dissertation.³¹³ In addition to the implied historical lineages of his *Lücke* group, Penck’s painter-band *Y-H-F*, which included Helge Leiberg and Michael Freudenberg, is considered a model for later groups featured at Intermedia I. In fact, *Y-H-F*’s reported modus operandi

³¹³ Christoph Tannert, personal interview, January 26, 2015.

“collective art means maximal communication”³¹⁴ could describe the aspirational feelings of the weekend in general.

The festival likewise devoted time to a fashion show and a film program. For the cinematic works, organizers ceded the stage to the improvisational mode of screening that had come to characterize public showcases of Super-8. A kind of “expanded cinema,” to borrow from Gene Youngblood and the previous chapter’s closing discussion on the event-space of the film screening, East German experimental film took form—even came alive—before a public audience.³¹⁵ The painter and filmmaker Christine Schlegel particularly seized on the opportunity to unite her already improvisational and gestural filmmaking method and concept with live performance. Having worked for some time with Fine Kwiatkowski (a darling of the scene), Schlegel invited the dancer to move organically between screen and projector in Coswig. Gliding before Schlegel’s film *Strukturen* (*Structures*, 1985), Fine united herself at once with her own image on screen while also distancing herself from this representation. The Schlegel/Kwiatkowski performance was a highlight of the festival. Gabi Kachold, who also screened two films at Intermedia I, would return home to Erfurt, inspired in particular to continue her own explorations into the borderlines of gender and sexuality in her solo and collaborative practices.³¹⁶ And though they were not included in the festival programming, it bears mentioning that the films of Gino Hahnemann had some years earlier likewise provoked in

³¹⁴ Christoph Tannert, “‘Intermedia I’ in Coswig 1985,” 317.

³¹⁵ Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (New York: P. Dutton & Co, Inc., 1970).

³¹⁶ Gabriele Stötzer, e-mail message to author, February 27, 2017.

Kachold an interest in redefining the binaries of masculine and feminine.³¹⁷ Of course, Intermedia I was the first time that body-based performance had been showcased so prominently in the GDR. This is not to suggest that sexuality or even that body-based practice was a particular thematic of the festival, but rather to indicate one of several cross-currents between artistic practices that it inspired. Indeed, the effects of Intermedia I on a wider practice—which have yet to be explored in scholarship—might help explain a surge in cross-disciplinary explorations in film, music, and dance or performance, or even, more simply, in alternative uses of official spaces for experimental art in the late GDR period. Indeed, the fluidity, the expressivity, and the lawlessness of the myriad artistic practices and visions put so prominently on display—many for the first time—marked an important pivot point in the cultural practices of a large number of East Germany’s experimental artists.

Organized chaos and spontaneous collectivity

“Coswig was chaotic. But the chaos had a method. Not to be grasped, movement, fast, permanently distant, that is to say autonomous from the plane of time... This was not hype, not cult. This was systematic self-destruction.”
Christoph Tannert, 2013³¹⁸

Tannert’s visceral image of self-destruction recalls the tendency among experimental artists in the GDR to figuratively or literally attack their own bodies, as

³¹⁷ *ibid.*

³¹⁸ Christoph Tannert, “Coswig 1985” in *Wir wollen immer artig sein... Punk, New Wave, HipHop und Independent-Szene in der DDR 1980-1990*, eds. Ronald Galenza and Heinz Havemeister (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2013), 415.

well as to thematize that kind of destruction in their artworks. The first chapter of this dissertation considers at length the symbolism of this auto-destruction. For the purposes of this chapter's conceptual link to state culture and the collective, the image of self-destruction describes the ways that artists worked across media, and in so doing contested the state's stratified definition of appropriate socialist culture.

In her analysis of the event, media scholar Barbara Büscher uses the metaphor of the rhizome to interpret Intermedia I as a kind of network that had the power to build its own institutional power: "In such a network—which no apparent institution could or wanted to cultivate—the transitory events, meetings, and exhibitions of the un- or semi-official sphere became nodes that not only intensified artistic exchange, but allowed artistic activities to be seen."³¹⁹ Important for the purposes of linking multi-media and collective practice are Büscher's gestures to the significance of the variegated and unanticipated alliances forged in the space of Intermedia I. The festival is considered to be a rare example of a large-scale union, or at least cohabitation, across at least two fairly distinct milieus of the GDR's experimental scenes: namely, punks and artists.³²⁰ This countered a tendency, which the art historians Paul Kaiser and Claudia Petzold identify, for the scene to be fairly

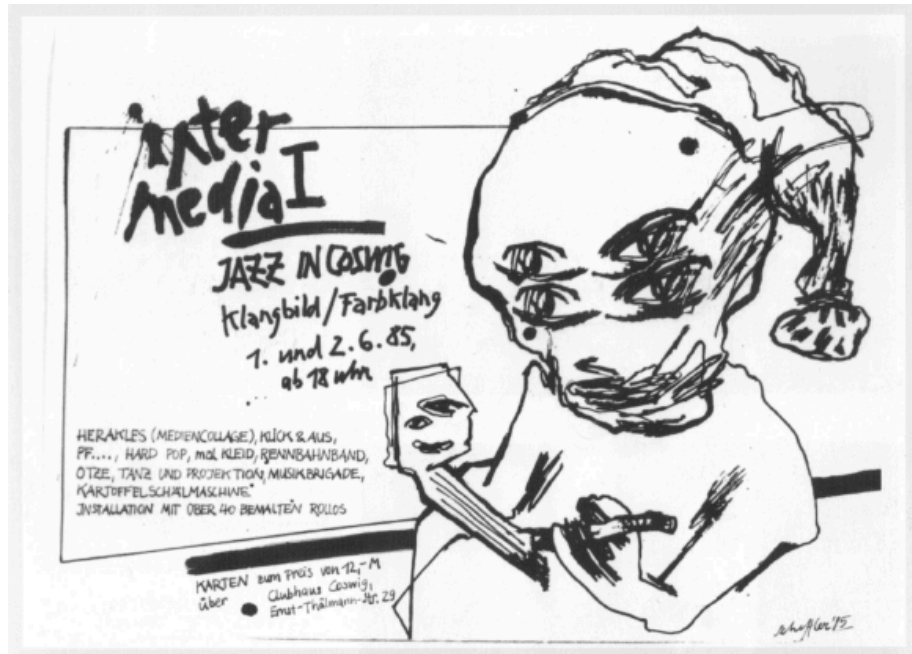
³¹⁹ Büscher invokes the Deleuze and Guattari social rhizome in her analysis. Barbara Büscher, "Intermedia DDR 1985 – Ereignis und Netzwerk," 3.

³²⁰ The division between punks and artists was certainly not absolute. The painter and filmmaker Cornelia Schleime, for example, played in the punk band *Zwitschermaschine*, and Gabi Kachold had a great deal of contact with punks in Erfurt. Artists and punks also cohabitated church-sponsored events, including shows at the Zionskirche in East Berlin/Mitte in the 1980s. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence as well as Stasi reports indicate that a propensity for violence and anarchy among punks made it risky to seek out cohabitation in artistic spaces that were already under threat by the state.

stratified.³²¹ While this notion is itself debatable—the painter and filmmaker Cornelia Schleime was certainly in a punk band, and the writer Sascha Anderson famously spied on both the literary and artistic experimental scenes—it nevertheless emphasizes the significant work of the event to bring together hundreds of people invested in various forms of experimental cultural practice. Bringing together people working in parallel, if not always intersecting veins of experimental practice, served to further underscore the conceptual links between musicians and visual artists, performers and filmmakers, painters and sculptors, that were key to the ontology of independent and experimental cultural practice in a 1980s GDR.

In fact, the Intermedia I festival was officially billed as a jazz festival, and a number of bands appeared in the mix. Their music—which tended more towards noise or punk than jazz—married experimentation with performative elements much in the way that the festival’s artworks and performances did. [Figure 3.5] The event subtitle *Klangbild / Farbklang* (Noisepicture / Colornoise) could describe equally Dambeck’s media collage, a Neo-Expressionist painting scrawled on a roman blind, or the festival’s fluid musical performers, who ebbed along the wavelengths of jazz improvisation, punk spontaneity, and a noisy clatter of sound. Forging a more tangible link between music and art (especially performance) was particularly significant to Tannert. Just one year earlier, he had published a text titled “Intermedia. Attempts at Collective Production of Art,” in which he considered the significance of

³²¹ Paul Kaiser and Claudia Petzold, *Boheme und Diktatur in der DDR* (Berlin: Fannei & Walz, 1997), 148.



[Figure 3.5. Wolfram Adalbert Scheffler, Intermedia I invitation, 1985. Lutz Dambeck with Fine Kwiatkowski, *HERAKLES Mediencollage (Heracles Media Collage)*, Intermedia I festival, *Klubhaus Coswig*, Coswig, June 1, 1985. Performance. Image courtesy of the artist. © Wolfram Adalbert Scheffler]

multi-media practice to young East German musicians.³²² Appearing in the state-run journal *Musik und Gesellschaft (Music and Society)*, Tannert’s analysis argues against rigid uses of media and in favor of the process rather than the product of art making. Identifying constriction as creative fuel, he draws an important analogy to the conditions of cultural practice in the East German state: “Creativity does not arise from the aesthetic delimitation of a critically regarded musical current, but rather from an unsatisfactory cultural situation.”³²³ Although solicited by the editors of the journal and written while working as a secretary in the central management of the Union of Fine Artists, Tannert’s analysis was ultimately deemed too controversial.

³²² Christoph Tannert, “Intermedia. Versuche kollektiver Kunstproduktion,” *Musik und Gesellschaft*, no. 34 (1984): 349 – 353.

³²³ *ibid.*, 349.

Authorities used his *Musik und Gesellschaft* text as grounds to dismiss him from his fixed position in the VBK. He was nevertheless allowed to continue to work as a freelance art historian with full union accreditation. Tannert continued to publish in the official arts journal, *Bildende Kunst*. He considers this a strategic move on the part of editor-in-chief Peter Michel who both needed Tannert to get a sense of the young artistic scene, and who used his texts as a means to test the limits of permissibility: “This was a form of cultural diplomacy—a way of looking toward the future.”³²⁴ Such long-term strategizing may also explain why Tannert was allowed to organize the Intermedia I festival in a state cultural institution just one year after being dismissed from his position with the VBK. Permission to organize and publish likewise reveal a foundational ambivalence of state principle in the face of the realities of creative practice in a late GDR. In fact, although Tannert is reticent to say that Intermedia I caused any real institutional changes, it nevertheless influenced the opinion of its targeted audience. Attendees came away with “other attitudes” about artistic possibility, including a wavering need to ask for state permission to explore alternative art forms in public forums.³²⁵ The Intermedia I festival was an opportunity for Tannert to showcase the cross-disciplinary tendencies that the state’s “art history was unwilling to acknowledge.”³²⁶ Within a few years of the festival many of the VBK’s art historians began publishing on multi-media practice and other forms of

³²⁴ Christoph Tannert, personal interview, January 26, 2015.

³²⁵ Christoph Tannert, personal interview, January 26, 2015.

³²⁶ Christoph Tannert, personal interview, January 26, 2015.

experimental art.³²⁷ By the late 1980s the union was having official discussions about incorporating new media practices into its mix. These efforts, led by Tannert and Eugen Blume, culminated in the *Permanente Kunstkonferenz* (Permanent Art Conference), a VBK-sponsored event that occupied many of Berlin's most important official cultural spaces for more than one month in the summer of 1989. The road to this kind of visibility for experimental culture was rocky, but fairly speedy—a result, as I will argue in this chapter, of inconsistent policy, and more importantly, an increasingly courageous (and demanding) artistic public.

An unanticipated backlash

Although by 1985 experimental events were not altogether clandestine, the high profile of Intermedia I was quite special—deemed a sign of times to come. In fact, more festivals were meant to follow in its path, hence the Roman numeral “I” in Intermedia I.³²⁸ Nevertheless, the event precipitated an unanticipated backlash. Two months after Intermedia I, club director Wolfgang Zimmerman was fired from his position at the *Klubhaus Coswig*. Others, including the artist and musician Hans-Joachim Schulze, were arrested for their involvement. These repercussions likewise precipitated Kapinos' emigration to West Berlin, and no doubt contributed to the emigration of other Intermedia I artists—including Lutz Dammbeck, Christine

³²⁷ See, for example, Barbara Barsch, “‘Ist das noch Kunst?’ Zu einigen Aspekten intermedialer Arbeit junger Künstler der DDR,” *Bildende Kunst* (September 1989): 31 – 34.

³²⁸ Christoph Tannert, personal interview, November 3, 2014.

Schlegel, and Lothar Fiedler—in 1986.³²⁹ All three of these artists left the GDR legally with official exit papers, joining a “wave of emigration” (*Ausreisewelle*), largely precipitated by the state’s own revised emigration policies.³³⁰ With a high point around 1985, the state’s relaxation of its exit policies effectively drained the country of a lot of its less desirable citizens, especially artists, writers, and musicians. When artists as public as Dambeck, Schlegel, or Fiedler were in their explorations of an alternative form of creative production applied for an exit permit, they were likely to receive it.

The state’s reaction to Intermedia I was particularly confounding as it contradicted precedents for bringing experimental practice to public spaces at the *Klubhaus Coswig* and beyond. Under Zimmerman’s direction, the club already had an improv jazz series that had inspired the choice to bring Intermedia I there. Like the national stages where Dambeck’s media collages had appeared, the Dresden region had seen similar cross-disciplinary acts just a few years earlier at the 1979 Dresden Music Festival. That year a special program, titled *Interferenzen* (Interferences) included musicians accompanied by dancers who performed before projected images and films. The official program’s description of the event presages the words Tannert would write five years later in his intermedia article: “Music is a series of supporting layers: The entirety of a piece is comprised simultaneously of a fabric of numerous

³²⁹ See, for example Lutz Dambeck’s comment that “At the end of 1985 everything in Leipzig had fizzled out; it was all over.” He put in exit papers, which were granted in September 1986. Lutz Dambeck, “Vorlauf. Die Medientollagen (1984 – 1988),” Accessed January 12, 2017. <http://www.herakleskonzept.de/material/index.php/vorlauf.html>.

³³⁰ Between 1980 and 1985, roughly 400 artists and art historians left the GDR. Schmidt, *Ausgebürgert*, 65 – 72.

and varying constellations: The optical responds to music or in the reverse; Dance responds to music or to the optical; Music responds to dance; Musicians respond to each other or to the soundtrack, and so on... The process between media is the process between the authors, and ought to become a (theatrical) process for the audience.”³³¹ Even with the setback that Tannert had faced in 1984, this tradition of experimental programming in the region, as well as the accommodation of the cultural center’s director, suggests that Intermedia I was planned well within the expectations of directions that state culture was seemingly willing to head. Moreover, as the *Klubhaus Coswig* director, Zimmerman occupied a fairly independent position of luxury with little oversight by cultural administrators and a track record for hosting unconventional events. Most importantly, he had obtained the requisite official permission to host the festival.

Here the site of the event introduces important inconsistencies in the administration of state culture. The state’s vision of creating a culturally (and hence politically) active collective culture manifested in the establishment of regional cultural centers and clubs, like the *Klubhaus Coswig*. The work of these clubs was to serve the state’s mandate to bring socialist culture to the masses. High expectations did not necessarily lead to a precise or unwavering administration of clubs. In fact, quite the opposite was true. In her 2009 study on local and state culture, Esther von Richthofen demonstrates how East German citizens and local cultural functionaries

³³¹ Program flyer “workshop I. Interferenzen,” Dresden, Kulturpalast, May 23, 1979, reprinted in Matthias Herrmann, “Zweite Realität. Avancierte Musik in Dresdner Institutionen zwischen 1950 und 1989” in *Ohne uns!*, 140.

enjoyed an important degree of autonomy and agency in the shaping of state culture.³³² Through case studies drawn from clubs and cultural centers in the city of Potsdam, Richthofen argues that administrators never strictly followed the country's codes of cultural policy, even at the GDR's ostensible ideological high point in the late fifties and early sixties. To the contrary, she outlines how as early as the 1960s the East German public's preference for "lowbrow, entertaining, and 'hobby' activities... forced [the party leadership] to react... and to consider broadening the cultural model to address a greater variety of cultural interests."³³³ Whereas I would argue against Richthofen's contention that when Erich Honecker took office in 1971, the party's "educationalist outlook" on state culture was summarily abandoned, her argument that the state's cultural theory shifted around this time to a greater populism clearly can be substantiated.³³⁴ Richthofen argues that the intention of this broadening was to consolidate more people into state-sanctioned cultural clubs and activities—a move, which as Paul Kaiser has demonstrated likewise coincided with an increase in state control over and surveillance of citizen behavior.³³⁵ This resulting expansion led to two unintended outcomes. First, an increasingly responsive state led to a more demanding public. Second, the growing cultural bureaucracy became quickly financially unsustainable. Oversight was severely cut, particularly in the wake of the

³³² See, also, Alexei Yurchak's discussion of mass organizations and their autonomy from state politics in *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*.

³³³ Esther von Richthofen, *Bringing Culture to the Masses. Control, Compromise, and Participation in the GDR* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009), 149.

³³⁴ *ibid.*, 179.

³³⁵ Paul Kaiser, *Boheme in der DDR. Kunst und Gegenkultur im Staatssozialismus* (Dresden: Dresdner Institut für Kulturstudien, 2016), 74.

1979 oil crisis, which functionally crippled the GDR's already tepid economy.³³⁶ Simultaneous to these changes was a marked increase in personal investment in the direction of cultural centers and other arms of cultural bureaucracy.³³⁷ Rogue cultural administration thus became a norm, especially in smaller-scale places. Indeed, in important ways, because the concentration of cultural bureaucrats was less pronounced in small towns than in big ones, people could take greater risks in places like Coswig than they could in places like Berlin. There are of course exceptions (i.e., the *Galerie Arkade* in East Berlin or the *Galerie Nord* in Dresden), the tendency nevertheless is fairly consistent. By the time someone like Wolfgang Zimmerman was in charge of the club in Coswig, it was common for people in his position to work independently, to respond to local need, and to worry little about potential state pushback. And, even though his choice to host an event like Intermedia I certainly required some courage on his part, by this time—as the case of Christoph Tannert, a VBK-art historian certainly demonstrates—the risks associated with going out on a limb had long since attenuated.

A brief look at the Stasi record offers some insight into the motivations of—or pressures on—cultural officials who retroactively punished the supporters and protagonists of Intermedia I. The official secret police report, dated June 19, 1985, leads with a concern about the lack of information that had been provided to cultural authorities with regard to the event: “Both of the organizers left the director of the *Klubhaus Coswig* and the regional organs of the state to the fullest extent in the dark,

³³⁶ Richthofen, *Bringing Culture to the Masses*, 193.

³³⁷ *ibid.*, 54 & 75.

that is to say they deceived them with regard to which groups of people were to participate or be denied participation in the event as well as to what concrete content was being planned for the program.”³³⁸ Zimmerman’s track record of planning experimental music clearly contradicts this claim. The Stasi’s reasoning suggests that the secret police were either not aware of or failed to recognize the significance of the jazz improv events—as well as their attendant publics—that Zimmerman had been bringing to the Coswig club since the late seventies. The report continues to betray a worry over the public in attendance, and with punks, in particular. Photo documentation likewise dwells on onlookers disproportionately, leaving artwork or performances scarcely documented. More precisely, out of the 38 photographs that appear in the Stasi dossier, 13 picture the festival events and 25 focus on the public. [Figures 3.6 and 3.7] Sometimes amusing commentary accompanies shots of people, as for example one image of legs that includes the text: “There was nothing unusual about standing on tables on the night of June first.” The body of the report is much more incisive, as in the following excerpt: “Expert evaluation of the entire event has concluded that, owing to their nominal artistic quality and to the presentation of artistic experiments of increasingly socially unacceptable proportions, the individual programs were lacking in impact and appeal.”³³⁹ The Stasi’s recourse to an idea of cultural “appeal” reflects the contextual specificity of state socialism. Perhaps the reporting spies and officers did not themselves find the work appealing, but that claim is certainly not universal. Nevertheless, its ability to mandate acceptable and

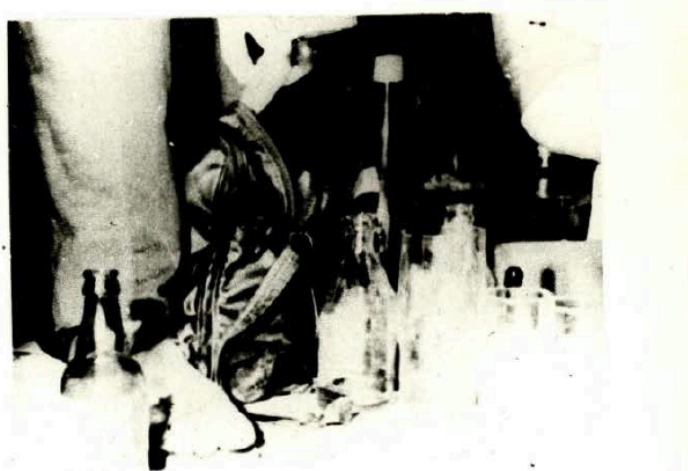
³³⁸ BStU, MfS, BV Leipzig Abt. XX, Nr. 0271/08: 3.

³³⁹ *ibid.*, 7.



Punker

[Figure 3.6. “Punks.” Photo courtesy of the Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik via the Stasi Records Act (StUG) § 32. File number: MfS, BV Leipzig Abt. XX 0271/08.]



Stehen auf den Tischen war am 1. 6. nichts außergewöhnliches

[Figure 3.7. “There was nothing unusual about standing on tables on the night of June first.” Photo courtesy of the Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik via the Stasi Records Act (StUG) § 32. File number: MfS, BV Leipzig Abt. XX 0271/08.]

unacceptable culture was a central component of the East German government's power. In his³⁴⁰ report, the Stasi officer recommends that the event be given the fullest consideration by state authorities and that disciplinary actions be taken against all responsible parties. He specifically recommends that the groups *Klick und Aus* and *Pfff...* receive an official prohibition from performing in public. The report concludes with instruction that the Dresden branch of the Union of Fine Artists redefine its “cultural political concerns” for the *Klubhaus Coswig*.³⁴¹

This interlude into state security reveals the interworkings of state power and prejudice. First, the Stasi's report was clearly actionable, and gave shady (and perhaps embarrassed) cultural authorities who had not paid attention to the event in its lead-up an excuse to reassert their authority. Second, its preoccupation with the festival public suggests a short-sightedness and a desperation to use intimidation to correct the infraction. But, there was no turning back after *Intermedia I*, which in spite of its failure to immediately normalize multi-media practices at the level of state cultural institutions, nevertheless, according to Tannert, changed the expectations and desires of its public.³⁴² Indeed a quick gloss of the shifts that happened in official culture—including the recognition of multi-media and cross-disciplinary practices in the journal *Bildende Kunst*, as well as 1989's *Permanente Kunstkonferenz*—indicate

³⁴⁰ I use the pronoun “his” without qualification and not as a shorthand. Leadership positions were overwhelmingly held by men, not just in the Stasi, but across professions in the GDR. On men in the Stasi, see: Gabriele Stötzer, 2014, “Das künstliche Frauenbild der Stasi konzentriert auf Stasi-Aktivitäten in der Thüringer Provinz in den 80iger Jahren.” Presentation, Tübingen, Germany. See also: G. E. Edwards, *GDR Society and Social Institutions* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), 81, table 2.15, “Women in the professions, as percentage” and 101, table 2.24, “Percentage of men and women in the Peoples [sic!] Chamber.”

³⁴¹ BStU, MfS, BV Leipzig Abt. XX 0271/08: 8.

³⁴² Christoph Tannert, personal interview, January 26, 2015.

the measurable impact that this kind of art ultimately had on official culture. The state ultimately had no choice but to accept this new art form.

Parsing the term “intermedia”: Implications, histories, and regional significance

The tensions between state and unofficial culture were already manifest in the festival’s title. As the sanctions against Tannert just one year before Intermedia I reveal, cultural authorities were suspicious of multi-media and cross-disciplinary practice. From Tannert’s perspective, it was not only the transgression of medium but also the emphasis he had placed on process over the final work itself, which sparked the most controversy in his *Musik und Gesellschaft* text.³⁴³ To dwell in the process of art making was to reinforce the unknown of art. This attitude represented a fundamental contradiction to the GDR’s cultural policy, which demanded that art be both clear in content and in form. This is not to say that state bureaucrats did not understand the value of change and progress in art—at least to a point. Certainly by the mid-1980s the propagandistic function of art and artists had long since developed some nuance at the state level. Nevertheless, the backlash against Intermedia I reveals a persistent distance between state expectation and the needs of East Germany’s artist public. Finally, part of Tannert’s interest in programming the multi-media event at such a public space responded to important shifts in cultural policy that were taking place across the Eastern Bloc, but, which had yet to impact East Germany.³⁴⁴ In countries like Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, new artistic forms like

³⁴³ Christoph Tannert, personal interview, November 3, 2014.

³⁴⁴ Christoph Tannert, e-mail message to author, February 19, 2017.

performance art had emerged alongside social changes—in some cases, the governments of these countries even promoted these practices.³⁴⁵ Whereas comparisons across Eastern Bloc cultural policy can lead to hasty, ill-informed conclusions about the contextual interworkings of history, economics, and relationships to the Soviet Union, the exposure that people like Tannert had to these different circumstances in seemingly parallel conditions of cultural practice led them to desire more for the GDR.

Modeling the necessity for a cultural policy in East Germany nevertheless required a contestation of a well-established culture entrenched in ideology and a selective view of history. The GDR's official *Dictionary of Cultural Politics*—a foundational theoretical text—includes within its definition of “Types, Kinds, and Genres of Art” a schematic observation about sense and perception drawn from an early Karl Marx: “To the *eye* an object comes to be other than it is to the *ear*, and the object of the eye *is* another object than it is to the ear.”³⁴⁶ The quotation follows introductory comments by the dictionary's authors regarding the necessity for a rigid classification system for art: “Concrete artworks always belong to specific types, kinds, that is to say genres of art, which possess their own artistic modes of expression and specific creative possibilities.”³⁴⁷ Implicit in the dictionary's use of the Marx citation and this framework is a belief that humans are naturally inclined to classify the world. Marx said as much, though he went much further. In the *Economic*

³⁴⁵ For more on this, see Klara Kemp-Welch, *Antipolitics in Central European Art: Reticence as Dissidence under Post-Totalitarian Rule, 1956-1989* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014).

³⁴⁶ Emphasis in the original; Harald Bühl, Dieter Heinze, Hans Koch, and Fred Staufenbiel, “Arten, Gattungen und Genres der Kunst,” *Kulturpolitisches Wörterbuch* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1970), 35.

³⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 34.

and Philosophical Manuscripts, from which his eye/ear distinction was gleaned, he writes, “The peculiarity of each essential power is precisely its *peculiar essence*, and therefore also the peculiar mode of its objectification, of its *objectively actual living being*. Thus man is affirmed in the objective world not only in the act of thinking, but with *all his senses*.”³⁴⁸ These words reveal an early Hegel-inspired philosopher Marx seeking to establish the unique capacity of man to both inhabit and control the world. Yet, the authors of the dictionary either ignore or misunderstand this nuance. They reduce Marx’s subtle observations about sensory perception and subjectivity to a demonstration of the “differences in classification between the types, kinds, and genres of art, as well as the basic possibilities of artistic design.”³⁴⁹ It is in fact ironic that their rigid stance toward medium and form mirrored that of high modernism—its veritable aesthetic enemy.³⁵⁰

The remainder of the dictionary entry continues a strained argument for the necessity of classifying art forms. At times, it seems to contradict the claim of differentiated art forms altogether, calling them products of dialectics and historical processes—a characterization that renders genre or medium implicitly fluid and fundamentally unnatural.³⁵¹ Indeed, the dictionary’s team of authors allow that the hierarchy of medium is contingent, a matter of taste and style rather than inherent value. They conclude that Communism will neutralize all cultural hierarchies,

³⁴⁸ Emphasis in the original; Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Martin Milligan, trans. & ed. (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc.: 2007), 108.

³⁴⁹ Bühl et al, “Arten, Gattungen und Genres der Kunst,” 35.

³⁵⁰ See, for example, Clement Greenberg, “Towards a Newer Laocoon,” *The Partisan Review*, vol. 7, no. 4 (July – August 1940): 296 – 310.

³⁵¹ Bühl et al, “Arten, Gattungen und Genres der Kunst,” 37.

asserting that equalizing all kinds, types, and genres of art was a “particularly pressing task of cultural politics.”³⁵² Nevertheless, a later definition on artistic experiments holds that artwork that tests convention is unacceptable unless it is “directed toward the fundamental purpose of socialist cultural politics.”³⁵³ Clearly, the direction of art and artistic autonomy remained a preoccupation of the state.

Summarizing the state’s official stance toward medium accomplishes a number of tasks. First, it reveals the uncertainty of the state’s cultural authority. If art forms are inherently malleable and meant to change, then why suppress or try to guide these shifts? To that end, the authors’ insistence on achieving equity for all art media, as well as their explicit acknowledgement that new forms of art will—and should—emerge as a product of history, contradicts the ways in which cultural policy was actually implemented and enforced. Tannert and Kapinos organized their event around a theme of inter (read: multi) mediality. This, as has been shown, came both on the heels of Tannert’s dismissal from a state-funded cultural post and precipitated a series of punishments. These are both clear signs of the state’s disinclination for the developments in art that it actually predicted, and deemed necessary, in its thought.

The use of the word “intermedia” must thus be taken on its own terms within the GDR’s cultural context. This suggests that the implied references to Fluxus and Dick Higgins must be evaluated secondarily. There are, of course, important parallels between Tannert’s application of the term to describe multi-media, cross-disciplinary, and largely performative works and Higgins’ original definition. When he writes, “I

³⁵² *ibid.*, 38.

³⁵³ Bühl et al, “Experiment, künstlerisches,” 139.

would like to suggest that the use of intermedia is more or less universal throughout the fine arts, since continuity rather than categorization is the hallmark of our new mentality,” Higgins identifies a fluidity across media that certainly applies to the vision of East Germany’s experimental artists.³⁵⁴ Writing in the early—and arguably most ideologically polarized—period of the Cold War, Higgins represents the Fluxus artists’ desire for authentic and spontaneous experiences that could combat the era’s political coopting of culture. In important ways, that vision also parallels the experience of East Germany’s experimental artists at this time. For most people, exposure to Fluxus or other art movements from the West was not only insubstantial—that is to say, superficial; it was also largely immaterial. Of course, sometimes artists from the West crossed into East Germany on day passes. In June 1983, the Fluxus artist and pioneer of the *décollage* technique Wolf Vostell visited the collective studio/workshop known as “rg,” which was located in East Berlin and led by the conceptual and performance artist Erhard Monden.³⁵⁵ Holding court, as it were, Vostell “explained the world” to a legion of East German artists who were introduced, many for the first time, to the artist’s media-bending practices.³⁵⁶ In actuality, curator and scene protagonist Eugen Blume describes Vostell’s first audience as overwhelmingly skeptical of this eccentric artist from the West. A list of East Berlin-based performances and artistic actions that he and Christoph Tannert

³⁵⁴ Richard C. Higgins, “Intermedia (1965),” *Horizons. The Poetics and Theory of the Intermedia*. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), 22.

³⁵⁵ “Rg” stands for both “*rot-grün*” (red-green) and *Raumgemeinschaft* (lit. space collective).

³⁵⁶ Eugen Blume, “Laborismus gegen Kapitalismus und Kommunismus im Dunkeln: Joseph Beuys” in *Wahnzimmer: Klopffzeichen. Kunst und Kultur der 80er Jahre in Deutschland*, eds. Eugen Blume, Hubertus Gaßner, Eckhart Gillen and Hans-Werner Schmidt (Leipzig: Faber & Faber Verlag, 2002), 49, Exhibition catalog.

would later produce as part of the *Permanente Kunstkonferenz* in fact includes Vostell's 1983 trip to the GDR, describing it obliquely as a *Gesprächsperformance* (lecture-performance).³⁵⁷ The term oddly portents an important mode of performance art in the 21st century, but was—as Blume's memory suggests—not necessarily a laudatory description. Indeed, though he was the first of a few important West German artists who would come to the East, his legend had not preceded him. More important—not only in 1983, but throughout the 1980s—was Joseph Beuys, who had been officially permitted to visit East Germany just once, in 1981 via the Federal Republic of Germany's diplomatic office in the GDR's capital city.³⁵⁸ Border guards prevented a second crossing in 1984, this time directly into East Germany. Monden had invited Beuys to participate in a joint performance with himself and Eugen Blume. After East German security refused Beuys entry the project, titled *Sender Receiver*, had to take place remotely—ultimately becoming a kind of diplomatic, if imaginary, wire across East and West. Through his involvement in Fluxus, as well as his socially-engaged and capitalist-critical practice, Beuys was without question the most important contemporary artist for East Germans. Artists were especially attached to his motto "*Jeder Mensch Ein Künstler*" (Every Person, An Artist), which plainly contested the state's hierarchical relationship to cultural practice, while, ironically, also meeting its own vision for a society defined by creative and collective action.

³⁵⁷ Eugen Blume & Christoph Tannert, "Dokumentation zur Aktionskunst in Berlin-DDR," February 1989, Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Verband-Bildender-Künstler-Archiv, Zentral-Vorstand, no. 1086.

³⁵⁸ Eugen Blume, "Laborismus gegen Kapitalismus und Kommunismus im Dunkeln," 49.

Aside from these rare contacts, seeing artwork—let alone artists—from the West first hand was, with very rare exception, completely impossible. Severe restrictions on imports and information likewise limited access to books or documentation. As a VBK-art historian, and all-around clever consumer of culture, Tannert had procured two important catalogues on Fluxus via contacts in the West, and was certainly aware of the movement in Eastern Europe.³⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the relationship between his adoption of the term “intermedia” and the American (as well as Eastern European³⁶⁰) Fluxus artists of the 1960s and 1970s appears to have been somewhat perfunctory—less attached to the work of the artists themselves or the significance of intermedia practice to a global movement, as it was to the implications that such a term could mean within the GDR itself. In this case what matters most, then, is the leverage that the use of a term like intermedia yielded in a cultural context hostile to art inspired by the unanticipated.

More convincing than connections that the nomenclature may suggest to western experimental art are the conceptual—if still subliminal—links to contemporary Eastern Bloc artistic practice. East Germany’s “intermediality” mirrors performance theorist and artist Bojana Cvejić’s description of Yugoslavian experimental art in the seventies and eighties as intentionally “unburdened” by aesthetic categories, and made by artists “indifferent to the imperative to bran[d]

³⁵⁹ Christoph Tannert, e-mail message to author, February 19, 2017. These catalogs were: Hanns Sohm, ed., *Happening und Fluxus* (Köln: Kölnischer Kunstverein, 1970) and *Fluxus: Aspekte eines Phänomens* (Wuppertal: Kunst- und Museumsverein, 1982).

³⁶⁰ For more on this, see: Petra Stegmann, ed., *Fluxus East: Fluxus-Netzwerke in Mitteleuropa / Fluxus Networks in Central Eastern Europe*, (Berlin: Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2007), Exhibition catalog.

themselves through the genealogy of medium-specificity or style.”³⁶¹ She writes, “These practices are de-linked from western art traditions in that they are aesthetically ‘unburdened’: they neglect formalist, craft-oriented and aestheticizing aspects of a work in favor of context, structure, minor stories, non-presence, etc.”³⁶² Here, Cvejić is specifically looking for a way to recuperate this artwork from western art history. In her view, art historians from the West have been ill-advised in their tendency to interpret Eastern Bloc art practices in their own aesthetic terms, leading them to “misrecogniz[e] them by dismissing them as eclectic, nonspecific, nondescript or old-fashioned.”³⁶³ She suggests that the art of the Eastern Bloc should be read “parallel” to the West. “Parallelism,” she writes “reveals the difference in the use of art, not in aesthetic categories of form and style.”³⁶⁴ This framework of seeing art as an instrument, rather than a dialectic, defines Eastern Bloc experimental artists as engaging in a process of problem-solving or problem-posing, which draws from all available artistic modes to articulate, resolve, or simply work through an idea.³⁶⁵

While Cvejić seeks a meeting point that might reunite the art histories of East and West, Bojana Kunst’s interpretation of experimental practice in the late Cold War East offers further insight into its historical, that is to say, contextual significance.³⁶⁶ Thinking historically helps to explain how different the stakes were for artists

³⁶¹ Bojana Cvejić, “Introductory Note” in *Parallel Slalom: A Lexicon of Non-aligned Poetics*, eds. Bojana Cvejić and Goran Sergej Pristaš (Belgrade: Walking Theory, 2013), 12.

³⁶² Bojana Cvejić, “Problems that Aesthetically ‘Unburden’ Us” in *Parallel Slalom*, 324.

³⁶³ *ibid.*

³⁶⁴ Bojana Cvejić, “A Parallel Slalom from BADco: In Search of a Poetics of Problems,” *Representations*, no. 136 (Fall 2016): 23.

³⁶⁵ Cvejić, “Problems that Aesthetically ‘Unburden’ Us,” 325.

³⁶⁶ Bojana Kunst, “Politics of Affectation and Uneasiness,” in *Parallel Slalom*, 341 – 352.

working across media in Eastern Bloc states. Kunst draws her examples from the realms of theater, dance, and performance to relate experimental practice specifically to institutionalized forms of state culture. She describes how artists yearning for “radical authenticity” embraced without irony the very claims to representation that western histories of performance art (and conceptual or post-modern practice, more generally) tended to disavow in the post-WWII era.³⁶⁷ Performance in the East thus represented a defensive or alternative politics set “in relation to the total model of socialist society, which constantly performed itself as the most authentic and at the same time, the most utopian (fictitious) of all.”³⁶⁸ As a defensive tactic experimental and mass-media practices were thus strategies—or uses, *pace* Cvejić—that could confront the state’s idealism. This included the manifestations of that vision within its prescriptions for culture, artificial divisions of medium, and claims to artistic and ideological harmony.

Within this Eastern Bloc ethos (and at the risk of grossly oversimplifying regional variations in state versus experimental culture) emerges the ideological significance of Intermedia I’s explicit conceptual vision to bolster and showcase multi-media practice in a public forum. This likewise helps to clarify the unanticipated reaction of cultural authorities against the Intermedia I festival two months after it had come and gone. The sense of order and ordering the world through a specific mode and practice of art is not simply a reflection of state socialist cultural policy. It is another arm of the desire to control and police the actions of the public.

³⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 342.

³⁶⁸ *ibid.*

There is, then, a clear relation between medium and control, and even more completely, between the desire to categorize and the production of a specific kind of socialist public, that is to say, the collective.

The collective: An unrealizable vision

The *Dictionary of Cultural Politics* defines the collective in fairly generic terms—“a community of equal, individually distinct personalities that, according to their own conviction, unite consciously and voluntarily around a common vision for the social order.”³⁶⁹ Particularly crucial to the East German state’s vision for the collective was its emphasis on facilitating social activities that cohered its public on local and national scales. Cultural policy and political rhetoric defined the so-called “socialist image of man” significantly in the guise of a person’s relationship to “creative and productive physical and spiritual activity” and to the “quest for education and cultural and artistic expression.”³⁷⁰ That attention to “physical and spiritual activity” further gestures towards the importance of cultivating a “spiritual and cultural life,” which strives to “develop the societal and individual consciousness of the working class.”³⁷¹ As a building block to societal consciousness, a spiritual and cultural life was likewise protected by the state constitution, which guaranteed equal access to both education and culture. In important ways that equity was indeed achieved in terms of culture, as evident in the examples of cultural centers, which by

³⁶⁹ Bühl et al, “Kollektiv,” 269.

³⁷⁰ Bühl et al, “Menschenbild, sozialistisches,” 358.

³⁷¹ Bühl et al, “geistig-kulturelles Leben,” 172.

the 1980s were being increasingly incorporated into new housing complexes, or—as in the case of the *Klubhaus Coswig*—were strategically situated along public transportation routes. State institutions sought to, as the definition for “Community Consciousness” states, actualize the belief that “the culture of the socialist society contributes definitively to the development of socialist consciousness.”³⁷²

In theory, the attention—not to mention the money—that the state paid to building a collective around national and regional culture is admirable. Nevertheless, the vision of a nation unified around collective culture was in actuality an impossible, and even an outdated, task. Impossible, because cultural policy actually begot its own undoing by placing so much emphasis on empowering individuals to be (in a manner of speaking) the change they wanted to see in the world. I will turn to this point shortly. The idea of a collective was outdated insofar as important historical precedent demonstrated the inevitable failure of the visionary projects of national culture, not least of which on the German territory itself!³⁷³ Just as Boris Groys has brilliantly articulated in terms of the Soviet Union in *The Total Art of Stalinism*,³⁷⁴ the sociologist Karl-Siegbert Rehberg has argued that the East German state’s recourse to modernist, and specifically avant-gardist, ways of conceptualizing art’s role in building a better society was inherently fraught: “Paradoxically—even precisely within an avant-garde social and artistic project—every avant-garde function was

³⁷² Bühl et al, “Bewußtsein, gesellschaftliches,” 69.

³⁷³ Here, I am thinking of Germany’s long 19th and 20th centuries, from the ways that nation-state building corrupted the emancipatory philosophy of romanticism in both the period that surrounded Germany’s official 1871 founding, as well as, of course, in National Socialism’s racist aesthetic policies.

³⁷⁴ Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

contested. The artists were supposed to accept their role as servants of the state, and were not to think of themselves as the masterminds or progenitors of a new world order.”³⁷⁵ As Richthofen’s research on cultural clubs, as well as recent research by people like Paul Kaiser demonstrate,³⁷⁶ the tensions between state demands and the practice of artists plagued the GDR from inception. These were no mindless cultural workers. Moreover, it was in fact the merit that the state paid to defining the individual as a creative member of society that ultimately destabilized a national collective.

In describing the GDR’s endemic societal fracture, Günter Gaus famously introduced a theory of the *Nischengesellschaft* (niche culture), in which he argues that, while they still performed the duties of the state (i.e., participating in work brigades or attending May Day parades), average citizens nevertheless did not define themselves in relation to national culture.³⁷⁷ In other words, by the 1980s the collective was by and large a visual farce. Kaiser has recently added to this characterization the claim that, because the GDR was by the end essentially all “niche,” normative culture was, in fact, heterogeneous. The public was not only aware of but also identified with that heterogeneity.³⁷⁸ The requisite performance of collective culture was thus disconnected from the real concerns of a person’s daily

³⁷⁵ Karl-Siegbert Rehberg, “Die verdrängte Abstraktion. Feind-Bilder im Kampfkonzept des ‘Sozialistischen Realismus’ in *Abstraktion im Sozialismus. Feindsetzungen und Freiräume im Kunstsystem der DDR*, eds. Karl-Siegbert Rehberg and Paul Kaiser (Weimar: Verlag und Datenback für Geisteswissenschaften, 2003), 18.

³⁷⁶ Kaiser, *Boheme in der DDR*.

³⁷⁷ Günter Gaus, *Wo Deutschland liegt: Eine Ortsbestimmung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1983), 156 – 233.

³⁷⁸ Kaiser, *Boheme in der DDR*, 51.

life: a burden and a distraction. In fact, it may have been the state's insistence on ignoring reality, and continuing to push its recursive, mundane, and heavy-handed agenda, which undid its vision of the collective. As sociologist Wolfgang Engler writes: "Even with all of its mass organizations the rulers never achieved what they had in other ways achieved, at least in part: activating the society for its purposes. Where organization society (*Organisationsgesellschaft*)³⁷⁹ failed, the collective society jumped in."³⁸⁰ By pitting organization society against collective society, Engler underscores the discrepancy between the state's view of itself and the lived reality of its public.³⁸¹ The pairing also suggests a level of citizen agency, particularly the people's power to cohere independently en masse—whether that meant forming a sophisticated barter system for car maintenance or a collaborative creative practice.³⁸² While perhaps these niche societies might be construed as reflections of collective socialist society, wherein mutual reliance was a key to national identity, it nevertheless also points to the government's inability to fulfill the needs of its public on ever increasing scales of complexity driven both by consumer need and the need

³⁷⁹ Engler is citing a use of the term "*Organisationsgesellschaft*" first applied by the sociologist Detlef Pollack to describe the GDR. See, for example: Detlef Pollack, "Das Ende einer Organisationsgesellschaft: systemtheoretische Überlegungen zum gesellschaftlichen Umbruch in der DDR," *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 19.4 (1990): 292 – 307.

³⁸⁰ Wolfgang Engler, *Die Ostdeutschen. Kunde von einem verlorenen Land* (Berlin, Aufbau-Verlag, 2002), 281.

³⁸¹ Elsewhere in his text, Engler writes that the comfort of a stable life subsidized by the state had also led to a more independent public. "Precisely because social life was secure, people could experiment in their personal lives with insecurity, with unusual thoughts, with more open, more spontaneous ways of life" (61). I find this argument a bit hyperbolic, and unsubstantiated in the text. While I agree that most East Germans disassociated themselves from state culture, I do not believe that most took the kinds of risks that Engler implies. Nevertheless, I agree with Engler that the financial security of the state contributed considerably to the production of experimental art. My evidence is both anecdotal and based on the cost of living, as well as the benefits artists received if they were candidates or members of the Union of Fine Artists.

³⁸² Engler writes on the significance of people working together in his text. See, especially: "Eine arbeiterliche Gesellschaft" in *Die Ostdeutschen*, 173 – 208.

for individuation. This large-scale view of culture demonstrates the context within which experimental artists in a 1980s East Germany emerged. Though certainly their work was more rebellious than the average citizen's retreat to the church, the bar, the choral club, or the garden house, artists nevertheless represented a place along a spectrum of society that tended towards independence and autonomy. Indeed, although the work of the October Revolution of 1989, which ultimately led to the dismantling of the Berlin Wall on November 9 of that year, cannot be interrogated in the space of this study, East Germany's civil rights movement demonstrates the significance of the kind of autonomous collective society that Engler describes. And, although artists were primarily not invested in this powerful movement led in large part by bluecollar workers, some did apply the collective experience of art making to political ends. A unique, but nevertheless crucial example of this union is the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX* of Erfurt.

Slow time and small talk: A collaborative ethos in the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX*

Dramatic orchestral music opens *Frauenträume (Dreams of Women)*, a twenty-six minute color Super-8 film made up of six vignettes. A rocking chair bookends the film. In the opening sequence, a woman sits on a sidewalk in an urban landscape, gently moving back and forth. She is backlit with her back turned to camera. Cut to a clip of three women dressed in black, first shot from below looking forebodingly into the camera; then from above as they writhe in large motions of

incantation, as if conjuring spirits—in this case, the dreams of women. [Figure 3.8]

The first dream begins: Gabriele Göbel appears painted gold. She is bare breasted; her hands are cupped gently at her naval; she sits before a tree. Richard Wagner’s “Tristan and Isolde” plays as the camera examines her now prone body at very close angles. It gazes at her gilded nipple, the tight folds of her belly button, the comparatively sharp angle of her shoulder. An unfortunate piece of lint briefly dances in and out of the camera frame from the upper left corner. It is at once a reminder of the film’s amateur production, while also a kind of accidental conceptual addition that accentuates the ethereal, no-place reality imagined in the six dreams on screen.

Dream number two begins. Verena Kyselka scrambles up a stone staircase. The music shifts randomly from monk choral music to a tinny set of strings, and finally a synthesized atmospheric soundtrack. The woman moves across a steeply sloped set of stone and scoots herself up a grassy hill lined with a strip of black plastic sheeting. She is suddenly in a park and then on a rooftop. In both places she simulates sex with a silver phallic monument. At ten minutes, Monika Andres appears. Doused in a stark red light, she walks through a hallway when suddenly a disembodied arm reaches out and presses a hot iron against her left cheek. She appears with friends and opens her shirt. Her left and right shoulders are covered in blood, and she has a third breast. Her three friends, who have come to her aid, alternate between dancing and fake punching each other. A woman singing sweetly in an Eastern language fills the soundtrack. Dream number four begins with Erik Satie’s “Gymnopedie no. 2,” which plays as Monique Förster, wearing a long black shift



[Figure 3.8. Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX (Monika Andres, Elke Carl, Monique Förster, Gabriele Göbel, Ina Heyner, Gabriele Kachold (Stötzer), Verena Kyselka, Ingrid Plöttner and Sylvia Richter), *Frauenträume (Dreams of Women)*, 1984. 26min, Super-8 Film. Image courtesy of Gabriele Stötzer. © Gabriele Stötzer, et al.]



[Figure 3.9. Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX (Monika Andres, Elke Carl, Monique Förster, Gabriele Göbel, Ina Heyner, Gabriele Kachold (Stötzer), Verena Kyselka, Ingrid Plöttner and Sylvia Richter), *Frauenträume (Dreams of Women)*, 1984. 26min, Super-8 Film. Image courtesy of Gabriele Stötzer. © Gabriele Stötzer, et al.]



[Figure 3.10. Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX (Monika Andres, Elke Carl, Monique Förster, Gabriele Göbel, Ina Heyner, Gabriele Kachold (Stötzer), Verena Kyselka, Ingrid Plöttner and Sylvia Richter), *Frauenträume (Dreams of Women)*, 1984. 26min, Super-8 Film. Image courtesy of Gabriele Stötzer. © Gabriele Stötzer, et al.]

carries a black bundle of plastic through a park. She dumps it indiscriminately, and at one point wraps herself in it like a stylish black toga. Later, she appears to eat the material. In the next dream, Ingrid Plöttner, dressed in a dashiki, moves her arms and legs joyfully in gestures of flying. [Figure 3.9] She lies on a white sheet and gently swims through the air. She appears on a rooftop and extends herself upward and outward. Elke Carl's dream, the last, represents the film's least dramatic and most pensive moments. She appears walking wistfully through a park, balancing along a water's edge, stepping along small wooden planks, dropping sheets of material from her left and right hand into the air below before wrapping herself in them.

The film's concluding minutes bring several sequences together. Joyful wordless pop and sax-heavy jazz set a whimsical tone. The clips are at once unions of

the various dreams and insights into the working process of the film's production. A closing sequence shows the *Dreams of Women* protagonists. They rock in the wicker chair and face the camera, talking and smiling, as if taking a bow. [Figure 3.10]

* * *

Dreams of Women was the first group film made by the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX*. From its 1984 founding into the early 1990s, the casual and inclusive allegiance of women living and working in the southwestern town of Erfurt made films, music, and paintings, sewed, sold, and presented clothes at fashion shows and street fairs, and organized exhibitions and performances. At first, they met in private apartments—a loose solidarity network organized around like frustration with gender inequality and a desire for more creativity. The artistic inclinations of several, as well as the social nature of many of their creative hobbies—from weaving to sewing—eventually inspired collaborative projects. At least four of their films, all shot on soundless color Super-8, were conceived of and produced as a team: *Frauenträume*, 26", 1986; *Komik – Komisch (Comic – Comical)*, 25", 1988; *Veitstanz / Feixtanz (Saint Vitus Dance / Smirk Dance)*, 25", 1988; *Signale (Signals)*, 25", 1989. They met every two weeks, sometimes to plan collaborative artworks, sometimes just to spend time together in a space that was their own. A few called themselves artists; others enjoyed the creative outlet the group provided.

In recounting the process of making *Dreams of Women*, Gabi Kachold describes both the candidness of her collaborators, as well as their need for

reconciliation and unity: “When the women were fighting, we would make a film.”³⁸³ She explains that collaborative work cohered the group of upwards of twenty-five women, many who had joined the circle out of frustration with the status of women in GDR society, as well as its impact on their views of themselves and of other women.³⁸⁴ This included people working through complicated relationships with their mothers, as well as those seeking a forum to articulate and confront the rampant misogyny of East Germany.³⁸⁵ The group included one man, Frank Zieris, who was also Verena Kyselka’s boyfriend. Zieris, responsible for some of the music and technical work during the group’s performances and fashion and object shows, turned out to have been spying on them, working as an *Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter* (unofficial collaborator) for the Stasi.³⁸⁶ At the risk of downplaying the betrayal of a friend and collaborator—an all-too-common complaint of the GDR’s experimental artists—it is, nevertheless, significant that Kachold, an aggressive target of the Stasi, understood the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX* as a protective shield against the state. In

³⁸³ Gabriele Stötzer, personal interview, May 3, 2015.

³⁸⁴ A 2014 exhibition catalogue about Erfurt’s subculture lists the following members: Angelika Andres, Monika Andres, Eve Bach, Claudia Bogenhardt, Tely Büchner, Monique Förster, Gabriele Göbel, Anke Hendrich, Ina Heyer, Angelika Hummel, Elisabeth Kaufhold, Dorothea Krug, Verena Kyselka, Ines Lesch, Bettina Neumann, Ingrid Plöttner, Karina Popp, Birgit Quehl, Jutta Rauchfuß, Anita Ritter, Marlies Schmidt, Susanne Schmidt, Gabriele Stötzer, Susanne Trockenbrodt, Harriet Wollert, as well as one man, Frank Zieris, who turned out to be an IM. I have drawn this list from the following source: Claus Löser, “Die Geister Berühren. Undergroundfilme von Erfurter Frauen” in *Zwischen Ausstieg und Aktion. Die Erfurter Subkultur der 1960er, 1970er und 1980er Jahre*, Tely Büchner & Susanne Knorr, eds. (Bielefeld & Berlin: Kerberg Verlag, 2014), 105, ft. 7. Löser also lists Dirk Schütz as a second man in the group. Gabi Stötzer stipulates that Zieris was the only man in the group. (Gabriele Stötzer, e-mail message to author, February 27, 2017)

³⁸⁵ Gabriele Stötzer, personal interview, May 4, 2015.

³⁸⁶ Gabriele Stötzer, “Überwachung von Kunst und Kultur. Der lange Arm der Staatssicherheit” in *Zwischen Ausstieg und Aktion*, 159. Note: Stötzer names this IM (IM Udo) as “the only man who appeared as a musician and a performer with the *Women Artists’ Group*.” Other people, including a man named Peter Krause (alias IM Breaky), were also sent as Stasi spies. (Gabriele Stötzer, e-mail message to author, February 27, 2017)

particular, it was the group's public solidarity that became its greatest tactic: "For me the most important ruse was always to be in public view, to make everything public, to not remain alone. Because, the tactic of the Stasi was to disintegrate groups, to isolate people, to make them feel insecure, to drive them into seclusion."³⁸⁷ If practicalities brought them together, for Kachold it was the time they spent making their group projects that made all the difference. In point of fact, she allows, "the more we made, the better we got along."³⁸⁸

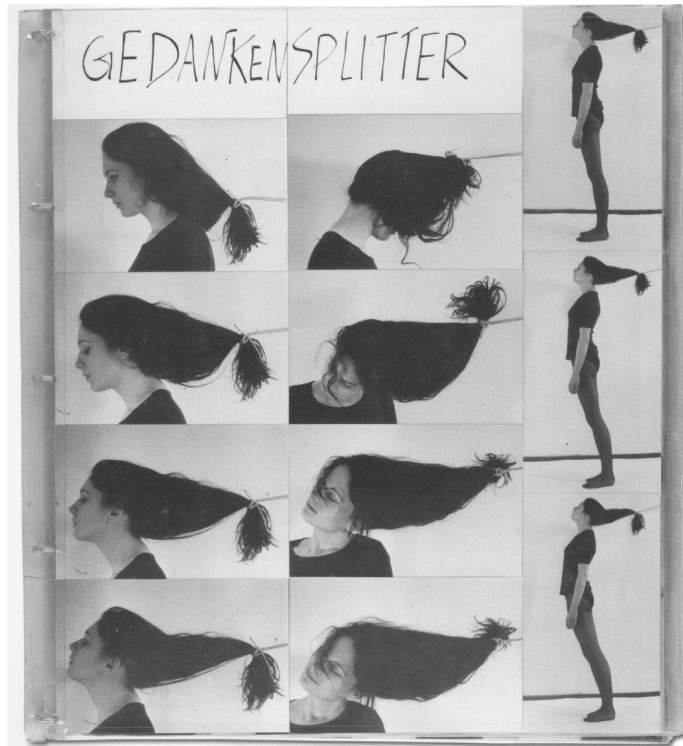
Kachold names "small talk" in particular as a significant element of the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX*'s togetherness work.³⁸⁹ Making things—from planning a film to sewing clothes for sale at a weekend market, both in collaboration or simply side-by-side—eased the inevitable tension that grew out of a group of people drawn together by their shared intensity and passion for life, change, self-expression, and so on.³⁹⁰ The process of working together as a collective was thus as important—if not more important than—any resulting products the group created. Of course the women could skill-share, as well. Kachold's interest in photography filmmaking enabled the kinds of free-from vignettes that would later become group Super-8 projects. Several woman brought handiwork skills that came in useful to produce and continuously develop elaborate fashion and art objects.

³⁸⁷ Gabriele Stötzer cited in Claus Löser, *Strategien der Verweigerung. Untersuchungen zum politisch-ästhetischen Gestus unangepasster filmischer Artikulationen in der Spätphase der DDR* (Berlin: DEFA-Stiftung, 2011), 292.

³⁸⁸ Gabriele Stötzer, personal interview, May 3, 2015.

³⁸⁹ Gabriele Stötzer, personal interview, May 3, 2015.

³⁹⁰ For more on the process of collaboration and its impacts on group cohesion, see: Gabriele Stötzer, "Frauenträume ändern das Leben in der geschlossenen Gesellschaft," *Horch und Guck*, no. 65 (March 2009): 28 – 31.



[Figure 3.11. Gabriele Kachold (Stötzer), *Gedankensplitter (Slivers of Thoughts)*, 1984. Black-and-white A4 photographs and India ink on board. Image courtesy of Gabriele Stötzer. © Gabriele Stötzer.]

At the same time that group work was a clear objective of the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX*, so too was the individuation of each member. Kachold, for example, maintained an active writing, weaving, ceramics, and photography practice, which clearly informed her group work. In fact, the process of making her exquisite photo books was highly collaborative, and required the trust of sitters to perform and let loose much in the same way that made the group films and public performances so successful.³⁹¹ [Figure 3.11] Though not all who appeared in

³⁹¹ It is really a shame that I cannot dwell more on Stötzer's photo books, which are extraordinary not only in their creativity, but in the range of subjects they represent. From punks to trans to the elderly, the people imaged in her photo books and photographic series reflect a broader range of East German culture than most any other experimental artwork at the time. Gundula Schluze, discussed in the first

her photographs were members of the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX*, some of the projects became sketches or raw material for future collective projects, as for example Kachold's photo book *Gedankensplitter (Slivers of Thoughts, 1984)*, which informed the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX*'s 1989 film *Signals*. Group affinity also translated to solidarity for and with individual artists. When in 1989 Verena Kyselka and Monika Andres had a two-person show in the state-run *Galerie Nord* (Gallery North) in Leipzig, members from the women's group organized their first live public performance. The coming together in a project like the film *Dreams of Women* may thus be understood as an omnibus editing strategy—wherein the film itself is more an anthology of discrete elements than a coherent group project. It was, nevertheless, that blending of individual and group identity, which formed the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX*'s core strength. As Kachold reflects, “We were poor and bartered with ourselves. Woman for woman, flesh for flesh, object for object. I was always grateful when someone would do something with me in this medieval town.”³⁹²

The success of the group is clearly indebted to Kachold's own innovative vision for autonomous culture, as well as to her commitment to advancing the cause of female solidarity. Before the group formed in 1984, she had already been a central node of creative and collaborative production in the region. Work with women, in particular, had begun in 1982 when she first led efforts to illegally turn a condemned

chapter of this dissertation, was also exceptional in her selection of subjects. Her status within and outside of state culture likewise challenges stereotypes about East Germany's “outsider” or “dissident” artists and their social concerns.

³⁹² Gabriele Stötzer, *erfurter roulette* (Munich: Peter Kirchheim Verlag, 1995), 18.

house in Erfurt into a creative workshop.³⁹³ Kachold's public-facing group projects likewise reflect a dramatic history of state confrontation. Beginning in 1980, she directed Erfurt's popular independent arts space, the *Galerie im Flur* (Gallery in the Corridor). Her unwillingness to hide the gallery's activities led first to the city's desire to incorporate it into its own programming, and finally—in the face of her defiance—to its closure by the Stasi in 1981.³⁹⁴

Kachold originally honed her refusal to compromise in the face of state intimidation during a year-long prison sentence at the GDR's women's prison, Hoheneck, in 1976. While still a university student and following the lead of major cultural figures in East Germany, she and her friend Thomas Werner gathered a few dozen signatures to protest the singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann's expatriation. Whereas most high-profile cultural actors suffered relatively little for their actions, average citizens like Kachold were met with the full arm of the law.³⁹⁵ Of course, many, including the actor Manfred Krug of *Spur der Steine* (*Trace of Stones*, Frank Beyer, 1966) fame, faced what essentially amounted to professional blacklisting for refusing to withdraw their signatures from the petition, these punishments were fairly

³⁹³ Gabi and her friends used the house at *Pergamentergasse* 41 from about 1982 onwards. The house became a communal workshop and a meeting place. After 1989, several women in the collective including Kachold, purchased the house and turned it into an official arts space called the *Kunsthaus Erfurt* (Art House of Erfurt). Monique Förster, who appears in *Dreams of Women*, still directs the space.

³⁹⁴ For more on this history, see Yvonne Fiedler, "Die Galerie im Flur in Erfurt" in *Kunst im Korridor. Private Galerien in der DDR zwischen Autonomie und Illegalität* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2013), 106 – 135.

³⁹⁵ More than one hundred people from the cultural scene, including prominent members of the Writers' Union (*Schriftstellerverband*), signed a letter protesting Biermann's expatriation. Klaus Schroeder writes that while high-profile figures like Jurek Becker were expelled from the SED party, and others, like Volker Braun, faced stern (but ultimately ineffectual) warnings, "lower-profile signatories" received the brunt of the fallout from this collective action, and faced imprisonment. Klaus Schroeder, "The SED's Fear of the Big Bad Wolf" in *Ende vom Lied*, 245.

chronic, rather than acute—that is to say, less immediately impactful on the physical well-being of those targeted. Kachold was charged with *Staatsverleumdung* (defamation of the state) under §220 in the GDR’s penal code, and was sentenced to one year in prison. During her incarceration, Kachold experienced extreme physical and emotional abuse, including a forced surgery to treat a misdiagnosed ectopic pregnancy. (As it turned out, she had kidney stones.) More impressive for her than this physical injustice, however, was witnessing the mistreatment of women who had been thrown into prison for being “asocial.”³⁹⁶ Given no rehabilitation, their future was assured only by their willingness to conform. Watching the state sell its political prisoners to the West for tens of thousands of Marks—an option she had also been offered, but refused—likewise broke any remaining illusions Kachold had about the government’s investment in its own ideology, let alone its citizenry.³⁹⁷ The incarcerated, she concluded, were all political prisoners in some sense—victims of a farcical legal system and a social order that targeted and stigmatized difference. That understanding also shifted her attention from political to cultural actions after her release. She went into prison an activist and came out an artist—committed to the belief that the best way to outdo (or undo) the state was to organize creative and collective projects.

³⁹⁶ The so-called “*Assi-Paragraph*” (Asocial Paragraph), §249 in the GDR’s penal code, punished all able-bodied and jobless citizens with upwards of two years imprisonment. In this case, the law could also be thrown against people exhibiting non-conformist behavior. A good visual example of how citizens deemed asocial could be treated is in the character of Stella in Christian Petzold’s *Barbara* (2012). The pregnant youth, sick with meningitis, flees from a youth labor camp (*Jugendwerkhof Torgau*) twice—brought back to the camp in between—until escaping the GDR by crossing the North Sea.

³⁹⁷ Gabriele Stötzer, personal interview, May 3, 2015.

Kachold is perhaps one of the most seemingly likely candidates to have applied for (and to have received) an exit visa during the GDR's *Ausreisewelle* of the 1980s. If prison had not been enough, she was actively observed by the Stasi, though does not profess to have experienced any psychic worry or physical harm as a result. Her lack of concern for the perceived threats of state power was actually fairly typical of East Germany's experimental artists in the eighties. There was always an option to apply for an exit visa; many did, but others like Kachold stayed in the GDR, committed to an idea of forging a better country from the grassroots, and especially, through creative production.

A skeptical, but pragmatic Kachold carefully steered both her own practice and that of her fellow artists toward a sustainable vision. Part of that sustenance, as with *Intermedia I*, lay in working flexibly across artistic media. This was also the case for several other collectives that arose at the time, including the aforementioned Leipzig-based *Gruppe 37,2*, as well as the SUM Theater, a Dresden-based performance collective, which was active from 1982 to 1984. SUM members included the painter and filmmaker Christine Schlegel and the dancer Fine Kwiatkowski, as well as the musician, writer, and samizdat publisher Lothar Fiedler, and the filmmaker Helge Leiberg. Their name, which translates to the Latin "I am," may be interpreted as a reference to the autonomy of the artist, as well as the group's identification with the creative process. Importantly, as Schlegel recalls, SUM only

performed for an audience a few times.³⁹⁸ “It was more about trying to work something out, like Artaud,” she reflects, summoning the memory of one of Europe’s most significant avant-garde dramatists.³⁹⁹ Schlegel’s appearance at Intermedia I with her film and the dancer Kwiatkowski was one of the few times she presented her performance practice in public. In contrast to the SUM Theater, the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX* seemed to yearn for greater exposure. Its collective grew fairly spontaneously. Kachold would meet women on the street or at events and invite them to join their circle. The ambition of the group reflected that spontaneity. Although big projects—especially as the years progressed—required coordinated effort, the fundamental mission remained the exchange of ideas, “a safe space and a protection against outside forces.”⁴⁰⁰

Bojana Kunst’s theory of “radical authenticity” helps to explain a temporal mode employed by the Eastern Bloc’s experimental artists to resist their government’s attempts to totalize society.⁴⁰¹ In what may be considered a tandem resistance to the institutionalization of the body—a theme discussed in detail in the first chapter of this dissertation—artists likewise actively worked to be unproductive. In the same way that others have theorized “laziness” in the positive sense—from

³⁹⁸ For more on SUM, see: Christine Schlegel, “Ich bin SUM Theater Dresden,” YouTube video, 14:28, posted by Harald Schluttig, March 4, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmN8lMmzLwA>.

³⁹⁹ Christine Schlegel, personal interview, June 29, 2015.

⁴⁰⁰ Gabriele Stötzer cited in Claus Löser, “Super-8 als soziale Plastik. Die Schmalfilme Gabriele Stötzers im Kontext der unabhängigen DDR-Filmszene” in *Gabriele Stötzer. Schwingungskurve Leben*, eds. Ulrike Bestgen, Wolfgang Holler and Gabriele Stötzer-Kachold (Weimar: Klassik Stiftung Weimar, 2013), 57, Exhibition catalog. (Original citation: Monique Förster, ed., *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX* (Erfurt: Kunsthhaus Erfurt, 2001), 21)

⁴⁰¹ Bojana Kunst, “Delay” in *Parallel Slalom*, 352 – 353.

Charles Baudelaire⁴⁰² to the renowned Croatian conceptual artist Mladen Stilinović⁴⁰³—Kunst proposes delay as a resistance strategy: “Delay in the sense of taking time, delaying productivity, delaying effect. Delay as a continuous resistance to accumulation.”⁴⁰⁴ Here Kunst is speaking both historically and in the contemporary, offering a pathway for artists in Central and Eastern Europe today to claim their outsider status as an alternative to capital accumulation and the market forces that drive the art world and polarize its artists. Her concept of delay likewise describes the prioritization of the working process over a finished artistic product: “Delay is a specific working attitude, which doesn’t subjugate the working processes to the acceleration of time.”⁴⁰⁵ Within a collaborative environment, it is then the work that happens between outcomes—the slow time and small talk—that matters the most.

Added then to the creative autonomy of working against a system purportedly driven by its culture was another layer of economic autonomy that even further enabled artistic independence. Briefly, in the case of women in the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX*, many made money ad hoc by selling clothing, prints, or an annual group calendar at local markets. This was indeed legal practice. Kachold, for example, had a *Preisgenehmigung* (permission to sell), which enabled her to earn up to two thousand East German Marks per year on her hand-made

⁴⁰² Charles Baudelaire, *Le Spleen de Paris (Paris Spleen)*, 1869.

⁴⁰³ Mladen Stilinović, “In Praise of Laziness” in *Parallel Slalom*, 335 – 340.

⁴⁰⁴ Kunst, “Delay,” 352.

⁴⁰⁵ *ibid.*

clothing.⁴⁰⁶ Others picked up day labor, earning both money and official security against any state sanctions against “asocial” behavior. For artists in the Union of Fine Artists, life was even less precarious. A monthly allowance, also during the two- to three-year candidate status, plus free studio space made it very easy to live outside the system, while still living within the law. It is puzzling that someone like Kachold, who had been a political prisoner and whom the Stasi monitored over years of very invasive—and certainly expensive—surveillance operations that ultimately amounted to nothing, could receive official permissions to work freelance. Was this all a part of the state’s fantasy that all citizens, regardless of their history, could be somehow artificially shunted into the collective mass? Was Kachold actually doing the state a service simply by doing work that went on the books? Maybe the artists were actually serving the state as a sign of “freedom.”

Women’s Day: Feminism and the state. Feminism and the collective

June 10 – 12, 1988. Augustinerkloster, Erfurt. Several hundred women and their allies gather in Saint Augustine’s Monastery to celebrate the *Frauenforum* (Women’s Forum). Organized by Heino Falcke, a theologian and the provost of the evangelical church in the region of Saxony, the three-day event has brought together activist groups, artists, and progressive preachers to represent some of the most pressing issues facing women in the GDR. One group present is advocating for the right to stay at home with children—a controversial subject in a country whose status

⁴⁰⁶ Gabriele Stötzer, personal interview, May 4, 2015.

quo defined a woman's emancipation by her status in the workforce.⁴⁰⁷ Another group contests the newly passed national law that laid the groundwork for compulsory military service for women ages 18 – 50.⁴⁰⁸ Lesbian groups likewise make a formidable public appearance, representing the GDR's burgeoning grassroots gay rights movement.⁴⁰⁹



[Figure 3.12. Monika Andres, Invitation to the fashion show at the Frauenforum, June 11, 1988. Ormig-Print. Image courtesy of the artist. © Monika Andres.]

Creative projects break the debates, sermons, and discussions. A highpoint comes on the afternoon of the second day when a fashion show put on by eighteen women in the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX* begins at 4 o'clock. [Figure 3.12] A

⁴⁰⁷ Certainly, rhetoric of gender equality only thinly veiled the economic needs of a country dependent on a predictable and active labor force.

⁴⁰⁸ Marlies Menge, "Wo schöne Träume verboten werden," *Die Zeit* (April 2, 1982), Accessed January 27, 2017. <http://www.zeit.de/1982/14/wo-schoene-traeume-verboten-werden/komplettansicht?print>.

⁴⁰⁹ A more complete list of themes addressed in the Frauenforum was reprinted in an article that appeared in a regional newspaper. The list reads: abortion, genetic technologies, feminist theology, the peace movement, women in rural areas, lesbians, developmentally disabled children, rights of future generations, rape, women in professions, sexism in language, and contraception. Christine Lässig, "Frauen stellten ihre eigenen Fragen," *Thüringer Tagesblatt*, Nr. 142 (June 17, 1988).



[Figure 3.13. Verena Kyselka, *Flamenco Series*, Fashion show at the *Frauenforum* (Women's Forum), Erfurt, June 11, 1988. Photographer unknown. Image courtesy of Gabriele Stötzer.]



[Figure 3.14. Gabriele Kachold (Stötzer), *Black-and-White Series*, Fashion show at the *Frauenforum* (Women's Forum), Erfurt, June 11, 1988. Photographer unknown. Image courtesy of Gabriele Stötzer.]



[Figure 3.15. Monika Andres, *Newspaper dress*, Fashion show at the *Frauenforum* (Women's Forum), Erfurt, June 11, 1988. Photographer unknown. Image courtesy of Gabriele Stötzer.]



[Figure 3.16. Untitled group painting by Monika Andres, Gabriele Kachold (Stötzer) and Verena Kyselka at the *Frauenforum* (Women's Forum), Erfurt, 1988. Photo by Gabriele Kachold (Stötzer). Image courtesy of Gabriele Stötzer.]

multi-generational crowd gathers in the outdoor space of the cloister. The women have been meeting for weeks to sew clothing and plan the event. Eleven take about three minutes each to put their fashions on display. A jazz group made up of women from the town of Gießen plays along. Verena Kyselka and her models step out to don the modular series of Flamenco-inspired fashions she has constructed with red and green blocks of fabric. [Figure 3.13] Gabi Kachold presents a line of boxy black-and-white clothing, whose fabric she has painstakingly woven on her loom with scrap materials. [Figure 3.14] Fashion-forward looks by professional tailors disgruntled by the state's centrally-controlled industry appear between avant-garde experiments, like Monika Andres' raincoat-like looks constructed of red and clear plastic sheeting and newspapers. [Figure 3.15] The mood is lively, fun, and dynamic. Three paintings collaboratively made by Kyselka, Kachold, and Andres form a backdrop to the weekend's closing discussion. [Figure 3.16] Plans are laid, alliances forged.

* * *

The Women's Forum was the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX*'s first major public appearance. It also marks a clear turning point for the collective. The fashion put on display (and more) would soon reappear in 1988's *Comic – Comical*, the group's second omnibus film. In this case, the women parade the clothing one-by-one in short vignettes. They appear in different parts of the city—in front of a newsstand, at a park, on a rooftop, in an interior courtyard. A recording of the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX*'s off-shoot noise group *eog* (*erweiterter Orgasmus*,

lit. extended orgasm, established 1986),⁴¹⁰ made up of Ina Heyner, Gabi Kachold, and Verena Kyselka offers a dissonant soundtrack on bongo, violin, and improvised percussion. Future projects also took a more public-facing turn as the group's *modus operandi* of strength in numbers and "escape into the public" took on a greater meaning.⁴¹¹

In addition to impacting their creative practice, the Women's Forum expanded and politicized the group. Gay rights activists joined their ranks, appearing in the final group film *Signals* (1989). *Signals* visualizes the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX*'s simultaneous creative and political turn. More bodies appear nude, often in hand-made clothing or wearing objects that seem to represent the externalization of internal conflict. The choreography of movements of each woman—who still appear almost exclusively alone on camera—is more sophisticated, and often trucks in images of violence or aggression. Actions are also more assertively public. Kachold walks through the city streets wearing her beast-like mask; she leaps around the central cathedral steps—a place where only a few years before she had been nearly arrested for photographing a punk on a large wooden cross. [Figure 3.17] Several women occupy a public bridge. They walk across it in synchrony. They lay down a piece of white paper drawn with the outline of a body, like a murder victim chalked out on the ground. They pretend to joust. One sets up an installation and speaks assertively to a mannequin's head painted red. [Figure 3.18] The improvisational noise of *eog* comes

⁴¹⁰ The group's name also makes reference to the "erweiterte Oberschule der DDR" (advanced secondary school of the GDR), which went by the acronym EOS. Ines Geipel, "Der Preis war hoch," *EMMA* (November 1, 2009), Accessed January 27, 2017. <http://www.emma.de/artikel/ueberlebende-der-preis-war-hoch-264201>,

⁴¹¹ Gabriele Stötzer, personal interview, May 3, 2015.



[Figure 3.17. Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX (Angelika Andres, Monika Andres, Claudia Bogenhard, Gabriele Göbel, Michaela Hopf, Gabriele Kachold (Stötzer), Verena Kyselka, Ingrid Plöttner and Harriet Wollert), *Signale (Signals)*, 1989. 25min, Super-8 Film. Image courtesy of Gabriele Stötzer. © Gabriele Stötzer, et al.]



[Figure 3.18. Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX (Angelika Andres, Monika Andres, Claudia Bogenhard, Gabriele Göbel, Michaela Hopf, Gabriele Kachold (Stötzer), Verena Kyselka, Ingrid Plöttner and Harriet Wollert), *Signale (Signals)*, 1989. 25min, Super-8 Film. Image courtesy of Gabriele Stötzer. © Gabriele Stötzer, et al.]

through in its full range in *Signals*, contrasting the smoothness of the film's edits. Conceptual flows emerge from its montage, and differ substantially from the earlier divisive editing style of *Dreams of Women*. In its form, the work is more coherently collaborative. Its message is also more concise—somewhere between confrontation and deep disinterest in the audience they know they have captured for nearly a half-hour of performance-cum-fashion-show-cum-city-romp on Super-8.

Around the time that they made *Signals* several of the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX* group members began to help coordinate the activist group *Frauen für Veränderung (Women for Change)*. Their biggest action—a kind of group performance of democracy—took place at the end of 1989. On December 4—not one month after the fall of the Berlin wall—five women (Sabine Fabian, Kerstin Schön, as well as the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX* group members Claudia Bogenhardt, Tely Büchner, and Gabi Kachold) stormed the Stasi headquarters in the center of Erfurt. They not only effectively stopped the full-scale destruction of secret police files by the Stasi in their region, but also set off a chain of similar actions across the GDR, while also bringing the state's invasive practices to an international stage. The impact of this action cannot be overstated. The objective of the so-called Velvet Revolution, which dismantled the wall, had not necessarily been to delegitimize or take down the state, but to improve it. Showing with such clarity the lengths a now vulnerable East German government would go to cover up its own past severely damaged its authority, and laid bare its unwillingness to reform or cede power in the name of civil rights. The core presence of artists at the Stasi building occupation in

Erfurt also represents an exception to the typical make-up of citizens engaged in direct political action at this time. Indeed, some lament the lack of artistic participation in the GDR's 1989 revolution on both the state and unofficial levels.⁴¹² Others discredit this critique, suggesting it misinterprets the political activity of experimental artists who consistently confronted the state by pointing out its hypocrisies and limitations.⁴¹³

The point here is not to debate the political merits of artistic action or inaction. Indeed, lest it be forgotten, many art historians of the Eastern Bloc have attached themselves to the concept of decisive "antipolitical politics," a concept first advanced by the Czech poet, performance artist, and future politician, Václav Havel.⁴¹⁴ The idea essentially holds that by divesting themselves from state politics, artists helped to redefine what politics could mean in the Eastern Bloc at the grassroots level. More of this discussion will be taken up in the following chapter's review of the East German public sphere. Here, introducing one kind of collective political activity that emerged

⁴¹² See, for example, the state artist Wolfgang Mattheuer's scathing, if laconic, critique of artists for a lack of participation in the civil rights movement that brought down the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989. Wolfgang Mattheuer, "Fragen an Politiker, Künstler und Kunstkritiker zum 9. November 1989" in *Kunst in der DDR*, Eckhart Gillen & Rainer Haarmann, eds., (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1990), 48.

⁴¹³ In the same series of responses printed in *Kunst in der DDR* (1990), the photo historian and curator Gabriele Muschter allows as how experimental artists had been contesting the state for years, in particular through works that thematized the everyday. Gabriele Muschter, "Fragen an Politiker," 42 – 43.

⁴¹⁴ Václav Havel, "Politics and Conscience (1984, trans. 1985)," Accessed March 30, 2016, http://www.univforum.org/sites/default/files/HAVEL_Politics%20Conscience_ENG.pdf, 6. Examples of scholars working through this, or a similar framework, include: Klara Kemp-Welch, *Antipolitics in Central European Art* and Andrea Bátorová, "Interview with Katalin Cseh and Adam Czirak about the Second Public Sphere in the Former Eastern Bloc," ARTMargins [online], October 23, 2014. Accessed November 30, 2016. <http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/interviews-sp-837925570/754-interview-with-katalin-cseh-and-adam-czirak-about-the-second-public-sphere-in-the-former-eastern-bloc>.

out of collective creative activity offers at once a compelling history, while also demonstrating the potential power of alternative group work on GDR society.

To draw out the political (or antipolitical) direction of experimental collective practice in the GDR, it is valuable to look more closely at the politics of the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX*, which were far from simple. Indeed, they do not conform to western definitions of “identity politics,” which might seem to be most significant in East Germany’s oppressive context where difference was criminalized. It is worth debating whether a latent feminism inspired the work of the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX*. Kachold is considered to be the only outspoken feminist of the group. In fact, many women—both in the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX* and across the GDR’s experimental art scene—detached themselves from feminism, which they considered to be a divisive identification and associated with state rhetoric. Of course, they had very limited access to feminist literatures that complicated an “us versus them” understanding of women’s rights. In fact, it was that very binary, which the state claimed to have eradicated in its gender politics. For many, the purported gender “equality” of the East German state came to define an institutionalized form of feminism. The numbers seem to bear out that equality. Official demographics from 1982 indicate that women constituted 49.3% and 49.6% of the population in universities and colleges of higher education and in the workforce, respectively.⁴¹⁵ However, in terms of leadership in professions and

⁴¹⁵ Edwards, *GDR Society and Social Institutions*, 68, table 2.7, “Percentage of women in universities and colleges of higher education in 1982” and 77, table 2.11, “Female population and female employees (in 1000s).”

government, even though women made up more than half of all doctors and dentists, and nearly 70% of pharmacists, by 1982 women still represented a minority at 30.8% of the national legislature, the *Volkskammer* (People's Chamber).⁴¹⁶ These figures demonstrate a crucial ambivalence toward a woman's relationship to the state, and reveal a continued imbalance between the roles and duties of women in East German society. To take a more nuanced example, in her analysis of popular publications from the GDR, Irene Dölling has argued that photographs that picture women in the workplace reveal not only that a hierarchy of gender continued to subordinate women to men, but that the working woman was considered a kind of deformation of the "gentler" sex. She writes, "Although the photographs convey that holding a profession was a normal part of women's everyday experience, they also give the impression that work did not really tap into her 'womanliness'."⁴¹⁷ Overall, Dölling concludes that official representations of working women still represented their public labor as secondary to their domestic roles. Women were thus served an inconsistent message by a state, which claimed to have actualized gender equality by citing statistics such as those named above. While some scholars interpret a 90% rate of eligible women in education or the work force,⁴¹⁸ these figures mislead in that they do not account for discrepancies in leadership positions, let alone the disproportionate

⁴¹⁶ Edwards, *GDR Society and Social Institutions*, 81, table 2.15, "Women in the professions, as percentage" and 101, table 2.24, "Percentage of men and women in the Peoples Chamber."

⁴¹⁷ Irene Dölling, "Frauen- und Männerbilder. Eine Analyse von Fotos in DDR-Zeitschriften," *Feministische Studien*, 8.1 (1990): 40.

⁴¹⁸ Marilyn Rueschemeyer, "Women in East Germany: From State Socialism to Capitalist Welfare State" in *Democratic Reform and the Position of Women in Transitional Economies*, ed. Valentine M. Moghadam (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 78.

amount of unpaid labor women with families conducted in the home.⁴¹⁹ In an open letter published in October 1989, the *Women for Change* in fact identified these contradictions as precipitating a literal drain on the country: “The [current] mass emigration is a clear expression of the persisting contradictions of our society.”⁴²⁰ Their letter stresses that inequality impacted all areas of society. To that end, they presented their union of women for change as an alliance with the growing civil rights, environmental, and anti-nuclear movements of the time, and not simply as a matter of gender-based politics.

A similar attention to social equality is evident in the creative activity of the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX*. Important to the women was the creation of a space where they could work and talk about their artwork and intellectual interests seriously.⁴²¹ Many wanted to get away from their identification as mothers. For example Harriett Wollert, whose child custody was threatened by the state, sought out a coalition of support.⁴²² At the same time that it set itself apart from an aggressive and unpredictable government, the group also confronted the hostility and misogyny of the experimental art scene, which—as Kachold recalls—“treated women like

⁴¹⁹ According to Myra Marx Ferree, some important policy changes were developed from the seventies onward in the hopes of resolving this disparity. These included greater access to childcare, contraception, and the legalization of first-trimester abortion. Nevertheless, the social attitude about women as primary caregivers remained largely unchanged, and remained a serious point of contention. See: Myra Marx Ferree, “The Rise and Fall of ‘Mommy Politics’: Feminism and Unification in (East) Germany,” *Feminist Studies* 19.1 (Spring 1993): 93 – 94.

⁴²⁰ Frauen für Veränderungen Bürgerinneninitiative (Kerstin Schön, Mechthild Ziegenhagen, Michaela Hopf, Sabine Fabian, Gabi Kachold, Susanne Keßler, Barbara Weisshuhn, Verena Kyselka, Elisabeth Kaufhold, Almuth Falcke, Christiane Dietrich, Andrea Richter, Heidi Malz, Uta Schmidt, & Petra Streit), “Offener Brief,” October 2, 1989. (Gabriele Stötzer personal archive, Erfurt, Germany)

⁴²¹ Gabriele Stötzer, personal interview, May 3, 2015.

⁴²² Harriet Wollert, “Wer ist Gabriele Stötzer? Ein Versuch” in *Schwingungskurve Leben*, 62.

mattresses.”⁴²³ The collective thus served a dual purpose for its members: It allowed them to differentiate themselves from the state as well as to draw more attention to the creative capacities of women as equal to those of men.

A united front: Collective practice in East Germany

As with the previous discussion of the term “intermedia,” the term “collective” used here to describe group-based projects and initiatives in a late GDR requires some contextualization. Of course, collective art practice had been a mainstay of European modernism, not least in Germany. From the Secessionist movement of the late 19th century, in which artists combatted the confines of the national academy, to the Bridge or Blue Rider artists, who skill-shared across media to produce a mass of similarly minded, yet aesthetically distinct artworks, to the post-WWI materialization of performance, photographic montage, and overtly politicized sculpture in Dada, historical examples of collective art practice were abundant in the 1980s—even for East Germans whose access to such work was considerably limited.⁴²⁴ The post-WWII collectives of the West such as the Situationist International, Fluxus, or Arte Povera were likewise clearly indebted to the institutional and media critiques of these and other predecessors. Distinct, however, is the clear political imperative and economic critique latent in collective practice in the Cold War West, which was less significant in the Cold War East. For example,

⁴²³ Gabriele Stötzer, personal interview, May 3, 2015.

⁴²⁴ Here, an important exception is the Bauhaus (1919 – 1933), a utopian and visionary project and arts academy that united the fine arts, design, dance, performance, and architecture. Bauhaus received a renewed profile as part of East Germany’s socialist cultural heritage in the mid-1970s, with the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Bauhaus in Dessau celebrated on a national scale in 1975.

movements like Fluxus were deeply invested in anti-capitalist, anti-market strategies that sought to redefine a post-WWII globally-oriented art. American groups, like the Art Workers Coalition targeted museums and institutions that ignored, or were implicated in, global humanitarian crises like the War in Vietnam.⁴²⁵ The examples of politicized collective practice in the Cold War West are also numerous. In East Germany, however, the conditions of cultural production were quite different. In fact, in important ways, the situation mirrored more closely the complaints of French realists demanding aesthetic innovation in the national art exhibitions of the late 19th century than the more politically-motivated work of East Germany's western contemporaries. The emergence of collectives in a context where the institutional enemy was, by its own definition, a collective challenge traditional conceptualizations of the collective based in histories of modernism or postmodernism. As compared with their contemporaries in the capitalist West, East German artists sought formal or aesthetic rupture rather than political or economic change. Shared across collective projects in East and West is a critique of the social conditions of production, but here the relationship of the political system to cultural production vastly differs. Whereas in capitalism the alienating effects of finance impact autonomous cultural production at various degrees of abstraction, in state socialism, the impacts of the social order were decidedly direct. Mass culture was not just a threat to art, as it was in the West, but in fact defined art in the East German context. Taking these fundamental differences between the emergence of a western and an Eastern Bloc post-WWII

⁴²⁵ Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam War Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

collective into account helps to reveal the use-value of collective practices to an individual artist in a context of overt and direct cultural oppression.

In their 2007 edited volume on collectivism after WWII, Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette advocate for the necessity of periodizing these art practices as a means of tracing their significance to contemporary practice.⁴²⁶ It is here that this chapter stakes its wider institutional claim in the field of art history. As a core part of their analysis, Stimson and Sholette seek to establish a turn to collective practice in the post-WWII West as a means by which artists could combine modernism's ambitions for art that advanced unity and equality with postmodernism's political assertiveness and anti-idealism. The authors wish to critically interrogate collectivism as a reflection of people's desire to develop new modes of civic participation through the arts in the wake of European fascism and the Eastern Bloc's infamously corrupted forms of national culture. In other words, collectivism after modernism reveals a dramatic shift in the ways that people understood or related to group culture. Not communist, but also not not communist, artists in a late Cold War period returned to the pre-WWII vision of collective creative power in a renewed hope for grassroots and socially-oriented, rather than market and commodity-driven, forms of culture. Certainly, since their book was first published, the world has witnessed a boom in politically motivated collective practices—from Occupy to Liberate Tate. In the so-

⁴²⁶ Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette, eds., *Collectivism after Modernism. The Art of Social Imagination after 1945* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

called “new East”⁴²⁷ a rise of collectives like Chto Delat, Pussy Riot, and Slavs & Tatars likewise suggests that some artists in post-socialist states are turning to visionary and group modes of art practice to enact democracy and counteract the nationalist populism infecting the region.

But, while it demonstrates that collective work remains important across regions, this East/West parallel does not clarify the different paths that collectivism followed in the Cold War. Thus, we should consider in what ways collective practice in East Germany complicates the conventional historical trajectory of a Cold War-era art that underlays Stimson and Sholette’s volume. The authors characterize a break in collective practice from WWII onward as ideological: “The old modernist collectivism was indissolubly linked with a bigger ism, a bigger ideal that had failed—Communism—and it had little choice but to distance itself.”⁴²⁸ It is safe to say that many artists on both sides of the Berlin Wall lost faith in the union of global ideology and aesthetics. Nevertheless, that bigger ism remained not only pertinent, but essential to Eastern Bloc culture. Stimson and Sholette continue: “This does not mean that modernist collectivism did not persist, of course, even without the old backing from Moscow and the like, nor does it mean there were not other, New Left, forms of political vitality that had their impact on the self-conception of art.”⁴²⁹ In other words, artists in the West had to distance themselves from collectivism in the post-WWII period because Communism, with its attendant forms of collective

⁴²⁷ This term was coined by The Calvert Journal. It defines the new East as “the post-Soviet world, the Balkans and the former socialist states of central and eastern Europe.” *The Calvert Journal*, Accessed January 29, 2017. <http://calvertjournal.com/>

⁴²⁸ Stimson & Sholette, *Collectivism after Modernism*, xii.

⁴²⁹ *ibid.*

culture, had received such a bad reputation. While the authors gesture here to the importance of collective cultural forms to Eastern Bloc state socialist culture, they nevertheless downplay its significance by defining collectivism as something emerging out of a historically-minded rejection, and then reconsideration, of modernist's "communist" tendencies. What is missing in their historicization is the reality of a collectivist present that defined the art of state socialism, and with which all artists—both state and experimental—had to contend. In fact, acknowledging this reality actually helps to cohere the two sides of the Cold War's metaphorical Iron Curtain. Just as Stimson and Sholette claim that it took several decades for western artists to return to collectivization after witnessing (or hearing of) the direction that "communist" forms of art could lead, East Germany's experimental artists of the 1980s came to working together with a similar degree of skepticism rooted to actual experience. In short, whereas collective practices emerged in the seventies and eighties West as a response to real and immediate need for political representation and social good, in East Germany, collectivism was both an outcome of autonomous citizen action and the state socialist political agenda, which had sought—but failed—to create a public cohered around national culture. In other words, experimental collective practice in the GDR both merged with and deviated from the desires of the state.

Certainly, when state collective culture is defined as a kind of armature of state power, its impacts come to seem singularly oppressive. Yet—from the work of multi-media artists on view at a state cultural center, to the ambiguous ideological

practices of those centers, to the ambivalence latent to state definitions of culture—the examples of this chapter have demonstrated that collectivism as a national artistic ethic influenced and inspired the autonomous collectivity that ultimately produced a group like the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX* of Erfurt. Whereas the official idea of a collective ultimately produced an atomized group of individuals bound to a rigid collective vision, artists produced collective belonging through collective practice. The turn to group activities was thus equally a critique of state aesthetic principles, which favored the division of media and the individualized but collectively-bound artist, as it was a way of confronting the state by deploying its own method of unity in culture, unity in the collective. This is not to disagree with Stimson and Sholette—whose volume offers a careful and geographically broad overview of a phenomenon of collective practice that touched more than just the Cold War’s western frontiers. Rather, looking to the East in a way inspired by Bojana Cvejić’s notion of parallelism introduces a greater complexity, which helps approximate the greater whole that a globally-oriented contemporary art history clearly desires.

The ramifications of an intermedial collectivity

What ultimately sutures the work of a collective like the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX* to a one-off event like Intermedia I is a mutual insistence on group work as a means to transcend, augment, and repurpose the possibilities of official state cultural policy. Even more explicitly, the multi-media practices represented in these two histories demonstrate the demand, even necessity, for bringing together a wide

array of artists, musicians, and supporters in order to produce a critical practice in the late GDR. Quite simply, no one single person could create the kinds of projects produced by the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX* or by the artists who put their work on display at the Intermedia I festival. In short, multi-media practices relied on collectivity, including its attendant reliance on distributive authorship and mutual reliance. These were practices invested in working together, wherein the principle of collective action could produce more dynamic outcomes. Perhaps—to return to Christoph Tannert’s own respect for the relationship between experimental practice and societal development in other Eastern Bloc countries—these collaborations could even retool East German culture.

Embedded within the dependence on collective labor that defined the multi-media practices of a late GDR is a fundamental irony. Namely, artists’ interest in working together, on strengthening creative bonds through side-by-side or mutually beneficial action, in fact actualized the East German state’s own credo for a society premised in collective culture. One of the threats of intermediality was thus its realization of the significance of the collective—not for something utopian, state-designated, or prescribed, but for the sake of building, from within, alternatives that could—and did—ultimately dismantle state authority.

Chapter Four. DIY Public Sphere – Independent Publications and Galleries as a Counter-Public

Two styrofoam egg cartons folded out, pressed flat, and adhered to stiff cardboard adorn the front and back covers of the ninth issue of the independent magazine *Anschlag* (attack/strike) released in 1987. [Figure 4.1] Designed by the bookbinder Wiebke Müller, the cover materializes the conditions of consumption that surrounded the production of the technically illegal publication. The simple two-tone design of the carton designates a dozen fresh eggs, although their grade-B quality suggests less than pristine ovum. Other than a few small friendly logos, including a rather cute hybrid chick-egg, the carton is plain and austere. Its use in the unlikely space of GDR samizdat⁴³⁰ makes an immediate reference to the country's centralized economic planning, as well as *Anschlag's* own work as a kind of self-conscious counterproduction. The eighty egg cartons required for the full run of the 1987 issue harken back to an unevenly satisfied consumer culture where an excess of one good often came at the expense of shelf variety. Their "EVP" price tags (4.08M on one

⁴³⁰ I use the term "samizdat," which literally translates to "self-published" in Russian, as a means of generalizing East German independent publications within the larger Eastern Bloc samizdat-culture of the late Cold War period. I follow the lead of other scholarship, including the Humboldt University-produced *Berliner Hefte zur Geschichte des literarischen Lebens*, which, in an issue with a key focus on East German artist publications, contextualizes these texts as "Eastern European 'Samizdat-culture'" (Ilona Schäkel, "ANSCHLAG, HERZATTACKE und andere SCHADENSfälle. Grundriß einer Typologie der originalgraphischen Zeitschriften aus der DDR," *Berliner Hefte zur Geschichte des literarischen Lebens* 4 (2001): 118). Nevertheless, I likewise adhere to David Bathrick's contention that samizdat must be understood principally as a historical phenomenon rooted to the particular cultural and political conditions of the late USSR (see: David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech. The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 59-61). In sum, to equate East German independent publications without qualification to USSR Samizdat would be as imprecise as comparing GDR publications to the American zine culture of the 1980s. Such comparisons are nevertheless materially and thematically generative in the aggregate. I am choosing to use the term "East German samizdat" as a gesture towards that aesthetic parity, and as a means of adding syntactical variety to my text.



[Figure 4.1. Wiebke Müller, cover design, *Anschlag*, no. 9 (1987), Leipzig. Image courtesy of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.]

cover; 4.68M on another) reveal the state’s promise to provide the public with subsidized—and fairly consistently priced—staple foods.⁴³¹ Two basic instructions underscore the planned economy’s parallel dependence on a culture of reuse: *RÜCKGABEVERPACKUNG* (returnable packaging) / *Vorsicht! Nicht verbrennen!* (Caution! Do not burn!). Neither returned—nor burned—but nevertheless rendered unusable, Müller’s smashed cartons have been made instead into a durable surface—a protective casing wrought from the recycled resources of a state intent on pre-

⁴³¹ Katherine Pence, “Eat, Drink & Smoke” in *Beyond the Wall. Art and Artifacts from the GDR / Jenseits der Mauer. Kunst und Alltagsgegenstände aus der DDR*. Justinian Jampol, Benedikt Taschen and Ina Pfitzner, eds. (Köln: Taschen, 2014), 28.

defining the consumer habits of its citizenry, from foodstuffs to culture. The excess of the 1,920 subpar eggs becomes in these covers of *Anschlag* a poignant analogy for state culture. For, though abundant and state-subsidized, the cultural byproducts meant to define and transform the GDR's public had long since expired.

Contained within this unusual packaging are 82 pages of original artist prints, carbon-copied typewritten texts, computer print-outs, and photographs. A core editorial team painstakingly gathered and bound each entry individually from reproductions of texts and images supplied by the artists themselves. This ad hoc method of assembly is as resourceful—and improvisational—as the bookbinder's use of packaging for the cover of the magazine's ninth issue. No single theme unifies the publication, in this or the other nine regular issues of *Anschlag*. This edition leads with a German translation of the Czech activist and writer Václav Havel's "Politics and Conscience." The text, which Havel wrote in 1984, helped to galvanize the civil rights movements that spread across the Eastern Bloc in the late Cold War period.⁴³² Because Havel was a *persona non grata* in the GDR, the reproduction of his text was a direct affront to the state's monopoly on print culture, and especially political discourse.

⁴³² Havel was without question a great activist, playwright, and writer whose critiques of status quo Communism cohered a citizenry and led to his election as the final President of Czechoslovakia in December 1989. Nevertheless, in the intervening years—including during his leadership as the first President of the Czech Republic (1993–2003)—many have come to look upon Havel with disfavor as a neocon who, as a writer for *The Guardian* opined, "showed little concern for the plight of ordinary people who lost out in the change towards a market economy" (Neil Clark, "Václav Havel: another side to the story," *The Guardian.com*, December 19, 2011. Accessed June 2, 2016. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/dec/19/vaclav-havel-another-side-to-story>) Nevertheless, as Klara Kemp-Welch's groundbreaking book *Antipolitics on Central European Art* (2014) clearly demonstrates, Havel's impact on a wide array of citizens across the Eastern Bloc, particularly artists, should neither be understated nor forgotten in light of the economic and political transitions in the region since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990.

In fact, each page of *Anschlag* may be understood as an enactment of citizen agency. Poets dismantle hegemonic culture through experiments with language. Essays on the intersections of aesthetics and politics challenge the state's scripted vision of socialist aesthetics. Each page asserts its own intentionality—a kind of equity of voice within the issue's discourse, itself a small sampling of the conversations taking place in the GDR's frustrated creative underbelly. Because, although the citizenry may have had enough eggs to eat, the cover reminds us that this was not nearly enough. But that is not all. The egg cartons are also a manifestation of the state's self-legitimation, which falls short in the everyday experience.

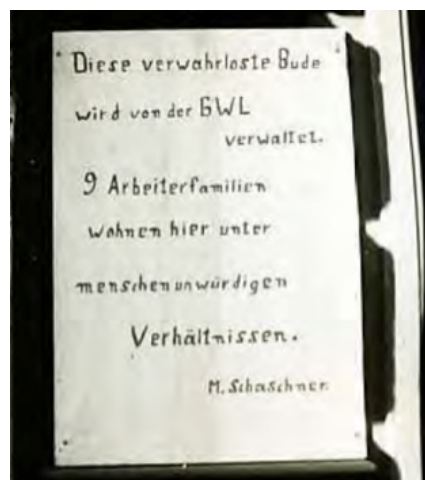
Here, a photo essay by Gudrun Vogel, which appears in the middle of the issue, emphasizes a seemingly conscious disavowal of real citizen needs at the hands of the state. [Figure 4.2] Consuming the left two-thirds of the single piece of A4 photographic paper is a picture of a five-story tenement building shot at a slight angle. To its right is a column of three photographs of equal size that gradually focus in on a large handwritten sign pasted to the building's front door: "This run down barrack is administered by the GWL⁴³³ [the state building administration for the city of Leipzig]. Nine working class families live here under inhumane conditions. M. Schaschner." [Figure 4.3] Beneath the column, Vogel provides a date and address in a working-class neighborhood of East Leipzig. Nowhere in the issue of *Anschlag* is the page commented upon; the artist also consciously distances herself from the image with a succinct signature: "Photo: G. Vogel." She documents, rather than produces,

⁴³³ *Gebäudewirtschaft Leipzig*

[Figures 4.2 and 4.3. Gudrun Vogel, *3.u.4.10.87 Leipzig, Anschlag*, no. 9 (1987).
Photo collage.]



[Figure 4.2.]



[Figure 4.3. Detail.]

an act of civil disobedience. Nevertheless, by then reproducing it in the pages of an East German samizdat, Vogel distributes that citizen unrest and uses it as an example of the hypocrisies of a state, which has clearly neglected the proletarian public it claims to serve. The inadequacy of centralized services, introduced in the materiality of the issue's egg carton cover, is finally underscored by the words of Jacob Böhme, a 17th century German mystic, which close the issue: "And whosoever is hungry let him eat, and whosoever thirsts let him drink; they may have it without money...Hallelujah. Amen." Bound between egg cartons wrought by the sumptuary policies of socialist production, the concluding message is ironic, a reminder that satisfaction requires more than a lifetime supply of eggs.

* * *

Anschlag's ninth issue, including its rather enigmatic form and content, is representative of a larger print phenomenon that emerged in the GDR in the 1980s. The magazine, produced between 1984 and 1989 in Leipzig, is likewise emblematic of the ways in which alternative cultures—from the artistic to the literary, and to a lesser extent, the more overtly political—comingled in the pages of East German samizdat. *Anschlag* is one of approximately thirty independent publications produced in the GDR between 1979 and 1990. These were all collaborative efforts, involving artists and creative writers, journalists and bookmakers, gallerists and art historians who organized prolific projects in a state marked by material privation, as well as political and creative censorship. Some publications recurred as many as eight times per year; many appeared as special editions organized around thematic concepts;

some focused primarily on textual works; others highlighted photography, graphic arts, even film. All violated the state's demand for universal control of print culture.⁴³⁴ The DIY-aesthetic of these publications reflect that subversion. From methods of duplication to quality of paper to distribution strategies, publishers were as resourceful as their contributors were inventive.

Simultaneous to the upsurge in alternative publications was a corresponding increase in independent gallery spaces.⁴³⁵ This chapter analyzes galleries and publications to demonstrate how they functioned together as remedies for an official state culture, which sought to restrict, marginalize, and exclude experimental and independent culture from taking hold in the GDR. Examining in particular the relationship between the Leipzig-based magazine *Anschlag* and the independent gallery EIGEN+ART (lit. OWN+ART),⁴³⁶ which was established by Gerd Harry "Judy" Lybke in 1983 in Leipzig, this chapter argues that both entities functioned

⁴³⁴ One of the most important laws that impeded—but ironically inspired the makeshift aesthetic of the GDR's unofficial publications—was the so-called *Druckgenehmigung* (printing permit), listed as the "Anordnung über das Genehmigungsverfahren für die Herstellung von Druck- und Vervielfältigungserzeugnissen" (Gesetzblatt der DDR, Jg. 1975, Teil I, Nr. 16 vom 17.04.1975, S. 307, § 1). See also the *Bildende Kunst* censorship law (*Honorarordnung*), dated 31.08.1971, especially as described by Helgard Sauer cited in Frank Eckart, "Nie überwundener Mangel an Farben...Über ein Kapitel der Kulturentwicklung in der DDR der achtziger Jahre" in *Eigenart und Eigensinn. Alternative Kulturszenen in der DDR (1980-1990)*, ed. Frank Eckart (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1993), 38. For an explanation of all laws used against private galleries, see: Yvonne Fiedler, *Kunst im Korridor. Private Galerien in der DDR zwischen Autonomie und Illegalität* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2013), 49-53.

⁴³⁵ Fiedler, *Kunst im Korridor*, 55, table 1.

⁴³⁶ The name EIGEN+ART is a coded descriptor. *Eigenartig* means unusual, curious, or strange. The word *eigen* is generally used to describe ownership, "*mein eigenes Buch*" (my own book), but can be used to also describe something as quirky or distinct "*ein ganz eigener Mensch*" (a very unusual fellow). The use of *Art* has a double-meaning. In German, the word usually describes manner or variety, rather than "art" (*Kunst*). Gerd Harry "Judy" Lybke named his gallery with the English meaning of "art" in mind, and believes that the average East German, including cultural functionaries or secret police, would not have understood its symbolic meaning as a space for one's own art. (Gerd Harry Lybke, personal interview, March 17, 2015). See also Lybke's description of the name as an idea or concept in: Karim Saab, "Gespräch mit Judy Lybke," *EIGEN+ART im Gespräch*, ed. Saab, Karim. (Karim Saab: Leipzig, 1988), n.p.

side-by-side, and sometimes in direct collaboration, to produce a multivalent and durable platform for the exhibition, dissemination, and discussion of the GDR's experimental arts scene. Focusing on these two case studies facilitates a deeper examination of the ways in which experimental art merged with and created a wider public, and thus allowed East Germans to redefine their own marginalization.

Anschlag produced ten regular issues, as well as two special issues, including *Foto-Anschlag* a quite ambitious box set of thirty-two original photographs with as many texts. Another special issue, which focused on EIGEN+ART, will be examined closely in the second half of this chapter. The gallery would play a supportive and at times symbiotic role in the production of the magazine. In addition to providing *Anschlag* with a conduit between writers and artists, the gallery offered it a physical space, both for its editorial meetings, which were open to the public, and as a point of distribution. In regular issues, *Anschlag* also reproduced essays by art historians written for EIGEN+ART exhibitions. Not so much a collaboration as a cohabitation, the *Anschlag* and EIGEN+ART intersection demonstrates the interdisciplinarity and breadth of community served by East Germany's independent publications.

In their authoritative exhibition catalogue *Boheme und Diktatur in der DDR* (*Bohemia and Dictatorship in the GDR*, 1997), the art historians Paul Kaiser and Claudia Petzold define East Germany's counterculture as a dynamic, ever-changing, multi-media enterprise. Moreover, they emphasize the scene's carefully networked infrastructure made up of publications, galleries, and an expansive series of events

(including readings, film screenings, and music and art performances).⁴³⁷ More recent studies, including *Die Addition der Differenzen (The Addition of Differences, 2009)*⁴³⁸ and *Wir wollen immer Artig sein (We Always Want to Be Polite, 2013)*⁴³⁹, as well as the exhibition catalogue *Klopfszeichen (Coded Language, lit. Knock Signals, 2002)*⁴⁴⁰ reveal how collaborations and experiments across media were a matter of course for the GDR's experimental artists in the 1980s.⁴⁴¹ These three historiographies demonstrate quite exhaustively the fact of cross-disciplinary art practices. This chapter adds to this discourse by demonstrating the necessity of that intersection as an antidote to the realities of state culture. More specifically, it argues that the interaction of publications and galleries produced an alternative public sphere. As sites constituted by experimentation, discussion, and exchange, these independent literatures and exhibition spaces were more than mere supplements to a restrictive culture; they were its functional replacements.

⁴³⁷ Paul Kaiser and Claudia Petzold, *Boheme und Diktatur. Gruppen, Konflikte, Quartiere. 1970-1989* (Berlin: Fannei & Walz, 1997), 73.

⁴³⁸ This text was edited by Ingeborg Quaas and Uwe Warnke. Warnke is the unflagging producer of *entwerter/oder*, the only East German samizdat still in production today.

⁴³⁹ This text was edited by Ronald Galenza and Heinz Havemeister, both GDR-era writers. Havemeister also edited the independent publication *Liane*.

⁴⁴⁰ The catalogue is divided into two portions that correspond to two simultaneous exhibitions. Eugen Blume, Hubertus Gaßner, Eckhart Gillen, and Hans-Werner Schmidt co-edited the volume on the *Wahnzimmer* exhibition. Bernd Lindner and Rainer Eckert co-edited the *Mauersprünge* exhibition.

⁴⁴¹ For a text centered around film, see Karin Fritzsche and Claus Löser, eds., *Gegenbilder. Filmische Subversion in der DDR 1976 – 1989* (Berlin: Janus Press, 1996). For artists discussed in this dissertation whose practices were interdisciplinary, see, for example, Constanze von Marlin, ed., *Ordnung durch Störung. Auto-Perforations-Artistik* (Nürnberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 2006); Cornelia Schleime, *In der Liebe und in der Kunst weiß ich genau was ich nicht will* (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2010); and Ulrike Bestgen, Wolfgang Holler and Gabriele Stötzer-Kachold, *Gabriele Stötzer. Schwingungskurve Leben* (Weimar: Klassik Stiftung Weimar, 2013).

Consolidated culture: The East German public sphere and post-Nazi reeducation

In East Germany, state officials preferred the term *Kultur* or *Kulturnation* (cultural nation) to “public sphere” (*Öffentlichkeit*). The semantic value of using an Enlightenment-era idea of a nation defined by a shared culture was meant to resolve the implicit division between the public life of government and the private life of the home. As Marc Silberman explains, formative leaders of the GDR’s cultural ministry were inspired by “the *Kulturnation* that saw in classical aesthetics and literature both a compensation for unsuccessful social revolution and a substitute for politics.”⁴⁴² The term “public sphere” remains nevertheless preferential to *Kulturnation* (and not necessarily anachronistic) for two reasons. First, the term permits a comparison to theories of modern society—like those of Jürgen Habermas or Nancy Fraser—more familiar to the West. And second, the term “public sphere” highlights the contradiction between the rhetoric of the state and the GDR reality. Essentially, East Germany never succeeded in establishing a unified *Kulturnation* that collapsed public and private life. The lofty goals of a post-Nazi Communist Germany cohered by culture and anti-fascism quickly fell apart in the hands of a domineering government. In its possessive concern for the shape and character of national culture, public discourse devolved into a kind of theater. As Silberman explains, “The theatricalization of the public sphere, that is, the accommodation to staged

⁴⁴² Marc Silberman, “Problematizing the ‘Socialist Public Sphere’: Concepts and Consequences” in *What remains? East German Culture and the Postwar Public*, ed. Marc Silberman (Washington, D.C.: American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, 1997), 12.

communication with practiced roles and formulaic speech, also created acutely sensitive habits of coding language and reading between the lines.”⁴⁴³ This is, of course, what Alexei Yurchak, defines as state socialism’s “authoritative discourse.”⁴⁴⁴ Both Yurchak and Silberman argue that it was the dependence of state discourse on a recursive form of performative public speech that ultimately unraveled its power—making ideology a performance, rather than an actuality. The performative quality of, for example, the worker’s brigade meeting or May Day parades, seems to have begun as early as the 1950s. Certainly, a social order consciously playing along is not unique to the GDR. Nevertheless, the extent to which “notions of privacy and individualism thrived in the GDR,”⁴⁴⁵ can be measured by the ways in which independent thinking manifested in everyday life—from nudist culture to rock and roll music.⁴⁴⁶ Indeed, Yurchak writes that in the Soviet Union “the performative reproduction of the form of rituals and speech acts actually *enabled* the emergence of diverse, multiple, and unpredictable meanings of everyday life,” and argues that the loss of sincerity in official rhetoric began as early as the 1950s.⁴⁴⁷ Likewise, in East Germany rejections of official state culture are evident quite early. The ways in which alternative cultures assertively permeated—and replaced—the hegemonic in the GDR’s final decade is thus an indication of how much state control had withered by this late hour.

⁴⁴³ *ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁴⁴ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 14.

⁴⁴⁵ Silberman, “Problematizing,” 18.

⁴⁴⁶ Josie McClellan, *Love in the Time of Communism. Intimacy and Sexuality in the GDR*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Mark Fenemore, *Sex, Thugs, and Rock ‘n’ Roll. Teenage Rebels in Cold-War East Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007).

⁴⁴⁷ Emphasis in the original; Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, 25.

Significant to the clearly utopian fantasy of a unified *Kulturnation* was the preoccupation—which persisted into the late 1980s—that the state had with the role of culture as an instructive, pedagogical, and moralistic tool to lead the nation. In his indispensable text on the subject of East German literature and the public sphere *The Powers of Speech* (1995) David Bathrick writes that “more than any other public institution the literary writer served as spokesperson for issues of moral, philosophical, social, and above all political significance—a role that far transcended the social function traditionally accorded the realm of *belles lettres* in western capitalist societies.”⁴⁴⁸ Official policy emphasized the significance of mass culture as an educational and unifying tool for the “anti-fascist” East Germany. In bestowing them that power, cultural producers ultimately posed a real threat to the sovereignty of the country’s ruling party, the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei* (Socialist Unity Party, SED). The party leadership, as Silberman observes, was “positively paranoid” about the power of speech, both in its annunciation and on the page.⁴⁴⁹

That paranoia, really a desire to control the production and consumption of culture, begins with the GDR’s post-Nazi foundations. As early as 1946, a full three years before the formal establishment of the GDR, Soviet administrators installed a cultural advisory board to oversee the publication of texts in the Soviet-occupied sector of Germany. By spring of 1947, control of print was handed over to trusted (i.e., Communist) Germans, who established an even more centralized form of control that not only oversaw texts, but also consolidated most private publishing enterprises

⁴⁴⁸ Bathrick, *Powers of Speech*, 30.

⁴⁴⁹ Silberman, “Problematizing,” 6.

with the state. By the time the GDR officially formed in 1949, the precedent had been established for a centrally-controlled publication process that turned the moral authority of the immediate post-war into an inflexible national policy.⁴⁵⁰ Similar programs emerged concurrently in the western occupation zones. Nevertheless, the Communist Germany would follow a more bureaucratic path. By the 1980s, the GDR had scarcely diverted from the extreme measures of the immediate post-war period.

The GDR's rigid print policy was institutionalized and policed by professional unions, including the Writer's Union (*Schriftstellerverband*). The Union of Fine Artists mirrored the work of the *Schriftstellerverband*, regulating membership and restricting access to exhibitions as well as coverage of artists in its official journal, *Bildende Kunst*. Here the East German samizdat make an obvious intervention into the official public sphere. My analysis also includes galleries to stress the dual impacts that the direct censorship of a restricted print culture and the coercive censorship of a highly bureaucratized cultural system had on the country's artistic culture.

A socialist public sphere as a difference in kind

Official culture's lack of adaptation contrasted—even exacerbated—a shift in the 1970s, which saw artists, intellectuals, and writers move their discussions of culture from public platforms to increasingly private ones. As we saw in the previous

⁴⁵⁰ Ursula Reinhold and Dieter Schlenstedt, "Der erste Schriftstellerkongre 1947" in *Neue Deutsche Literatur* (Berlin: November, 1990) cited in *Zensur in der DDR. Geschichte, Praxis, und 'Ästhetik' der Behinderung von Literatur*, eds. Ernst Wichner and Herbert Wiesner (Berlin: Literaturhaus Berlin, 1991), 18 – 19.

chapter's discussion of state cultural centers, a loss of bureaucratic control acutely changed the uses of these spaces, as well as the expectations of citizens who frequented them.⁴⁵¹ By this time, the GDR's vision of a unified *Kulturnation*, Silberman explains, "had dispersed into a variety of leisure-time activities and entertainment offerings [including literature]...that could serve the needs of an increasingly stratified society seeking intimate rather than public modes of communication."⁴⁵² The fate of a dialectical public sphere was finally sealed in 1976 after several dozen writers and cultural leaders faced public castigation, expulsion from the party and leadership positions, and future marginalization after publicly condemning the government's decision to expatriate the political singer-songwriter, Wolf Biermann. The impacts on average citizens—as in the case of the artist and writer Gabriele Kachold discussed in the previous chapter of this dissertation—were even more pronounced. The impulse to initiate state reform from within—that is to say, via the East German public sphere itself—was summarily squelched by this so-called "Biermann Affair."⁴⁵³

Those who fell outside of the web of acceptability in the GDR and elected to distance themselves from official culture—especially in the wake of 1976—had virtually no means to access a wider public. In contrast to the West, where an artist has any number of options to share work, such pluralities did not officially exist in East Germany. Though variety of venue by no means constitutes uniformity of access

⁴⁵¹ See also: Esther von Richthofen, *Bringing Culture to the Masses. Control, Compromise, and Participation in the GDR* (New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009).

⁴⁵² Silberman, "Problematizing," 14.

⁴⁵³ For more on this, see, for example, Ian Wallace, "The Politics of Confrontation: The Biermann Affair and its Consequences," *German Monitor*, no. 29 (1992): 68 – 80.

or quality, the fact that a public sphere is made up of heterogeneous subjects with a multitude of interests is foundational to a modern, that is to say democratic society. Jürgen Habermas' definition of the public sphere as a "medium of...political confrontation" where "private people come together as a public" to negotiate their needs in a shared commons presupposes a number of conditions unmet in the GDR.⁴⁵⁴ Whereas these conditions are likewise consistently unsatisfied in the capitalist societies that Habermas envisions, the absence of a participatory democracy in East Germany is an important exclusionary pre-condition. East Germany's ruling party, the SED, was not required to respond to the desires of its public. To the contrary, under a mandate to "steer[r] and lead[d] the shaping of developed socialist society" the party was expected to define and police public desire.⁴⁵⁵ Moreover, in the Eastern Bloc context, a market that could potentially benefit from emerging counter-publics did not exist. The state had no obvious benefit to permitting the formation of such alternatives to hegemonic culture.⁴⁵⁶ As Nancy Fraser has observed of Habermas, the idea of the public sphere "designates a theater in modern society in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk...It is not an area of market relations but rather one of discursive relations."⁴⁵⁷ In the GDR, where ideology and

⁴⁵⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 27.

⁴⁵⁵ "Statute of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany," cited in Roger Woods, *Opposition in the GDR under Honecker, 1971 – 85. An Introduction and Documentation* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), 78.

⁴⁵⁶ The East German state's instrumentalist use of youth culture, like rock and roll or punk, was invested in controlling influence from the West, and in shaping these alternative cultures in the guise of socialism. On the former, see, for example, Fenemore, *Sex, Thugs, and Rock 'n' Roll*; for an example from official state culture, see the film *flüstern und SCHREIEN – Ein Rockreport*, DVD, directed by Dieter Schumann (1989, DEFA. Studio für Dokumentarfilme; First-Run Features, 2010).

⁴⁵⁷ Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text*, no. 25/26 (1990): 57.

the economy functioned co-constitutively, there was no remove from the apparatus of power—no public sphere where the new or the contentious might participate in shaping public life on its own terms. And, though Fraser herself rightly critiques Habermas for overly idealizing access to the public sphere’s discursive theater, her theory of multiple or counter-publics still presumes a separate space where citizens can participate in the “widening of discursive contestation.”⁴⁵⁸ Thus, a more complete understanding of an Eastern Bloc unofficial public sphere requires a theory that allows indifference and non-participation in the broader public to become a political act. Where, for example, autonomy may be defined by “unworkable”⁴⁵⁹ activities from which social labor in art cannot be extracted in the service of ideology.

Václav Havel—the Czech rebel from *Anschlag*’s ninth issue—returns. In his “Politics and Conscience” essay, Havel theorized the retreat of the average citizen from public life as “antipolitical politics.”⁴⁶⁰ He suggested that political autonomy is claimed through inaction, rather than participation in a corrupted system. Here, I interpret Havel’s idea of antipoliticality as a rejection of the strictures that the GDR defined as a possible political—or artistic—subjectivity. It is important to remember that for the Eastern Bloc subject politics always meant state politics, culture always meant state culture. This frame of the “antipolitical” has been increasingly used by scholars of the Eastern Bloc to define experimental art practice. But, what does it

⁴⁵⁸ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 67.

⁴⁵⁹ Vít Havránek, “The Post-Bipolar Order and the Status of Public and Private under Communism,” in *Promises of the Past. A Discontinuous History of Art in Former Eastern Europe*, eds. Christine Macel and Joana Mytkowska, 28, (Zurich: JRP/Ringer; Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2010), Exhibition catalog. Havránek is speaking of the Croatian Gorgona Group (active 1959 – 1966).

⁴⁶⁰ Václav Havel, “Politics and Conscience (1984, trans. 1985),” Accessed March 30, 2016, http://www.univforum.org/sites/default/files/HAVEL_Politics%20Conscience_ENG.pdf, 6.

really meant to act antipolitically, and how can we assume that there was no interest in impacting the status quo? When considered as a form of action, adopting an antipolitical cultural stance may actually point to an active claim to citizen autonomy that builds a sophisticated and sustainable counter-public. These alternative niches did not desire to be incorporated into the state culture. They wished to operate autonomously within it—to be its alternative.

Mary Fulbrook has described East German society as a “people’s paradox,”⁴⁶¹ or even more to the point as a “participatory dictatorship.”⁴⁶² Martin Sabrow’s definition of East Germany as a “consensus dictatorship” similarly describes the ways in which state government obtained popular support “by enforcing it, staging it, and when necessary, falsifying it.”⁴⁶³ Fulbrook’s analysis, which begins at the grassroots level of citizen experience is, nevertheless more immediately useful for the scales of public/private action embedded in the work of independent publications and galleries. As she explains, the participatory dictatorship—a “somewhat oxymoronic expression”—“is intended to underline the ways in which the people themselves were at one and the same time both constrained and affected by, and yet also actively and

⁴⁶¹ Fulbrook, *The People’s State*. Fulbrook argues that the official history of the GDR, which is premised primarily on state institutions, often conflicts with the memories and experience of East Germans. This perspective, which Fulbrook uses to describe everyday life, defends citizen agency and choice against typical historicizations of the GDR premised in oppression. Even more to the point, Fulbrook names a regional bias when she stresses the inadequacy of top-down historical overviews of the GDR: “[W]hile no Western [sic!] historian would seek to write the social history of a Western [sic!] society solely in terms of regime policies and popular resistance, this is very much how the social history of the GDR has been conceived, particularly when added in to general historical overviews of political developments” (11).

⁴⁶² *ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁶³ Sven Felix Kellerhoff, “Das Symbol einer friedlichen Revolution bleibt,” interview with Martin Sabrow, *Die Welt* (May 17, 2006), Accessed November 15, 2016, <https://www.welt.de/print-welt/article217403/Das-Symbol-einer-friedlichen-Revolution-bleibt.html>.

often voluntarily carried, the ever changing social and political system of the GDR.”⁴⁶⁴ Because, although the government was both aggressively and covertly repressive, its infrastructures, including workers unions and the SED party, still incorporated a large percentage of its citizenry into state politics.⁴⁶⁵ By the 1970s, as Fulbrook explains, the “rules of the game” were in place such that many East Germans had figured out ways to accommodate their needs, both public and private, within the state system.⁴⁶⁶ Her study pays primary attention to actual modes of participation by “ordinary citizens”⁴⁶⁷ in a late GDR, including formal avenues to critique quality or diversity of consumer goods and housing through so-called *Eingaben* (lit. inputs).⁴⁶⁸ Certainly the notice on the front door documented in Gudrun Vogel’s image in *Anschlag* makes plain that citizens did not always choose formal avenues to express dissatisfaction. For the purposes of my argument, I am combining Fulbrook’s approach to that of Marc Silberman (and, tacitly Alexei Yurchak) to consider how East Germany’s paradoxical social system facilitated a retreat into private life, as well as active non-participation in the official public sphere.

⁴⁶⁴ Fulbrook, *The People’s State*, 12.

⁴⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 4 & 12.

⁴⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 4 – 5.

⁴⁶⁷ Throughout her book, Fulbrook consistently uses the term “ordinary citizens” to describe the majority public she analyzes. Certainly she acknowledges the work of subcultures in “making their own history” (15). Nevertheless, the objects of her study are citizens whose stakes were more immediate, that is to say, rooted to everyday needs related to work, food, transportation, childcare, etc.

⁴⁶⁸ It is interesting to note that Fulbrook’s chapter on the East German public sphere in *The People’s State* (2005) primarily describes what she calls “orchestrated public ‘discussions,’ ” in which citizens formally gathered to voice opinions and complaints under the watchful eye of government officials. The conclusion to her chapter is markedly tentative: “The experience of being able to speak one’s mind, even if what was said was subsequently ignored by the powers that be, was crucial to the sense of being an active participant in shaping ones future; and not that of being an ‘accomplice’ in evil or a passive victim of constant oppression” (267). See also the following chapter in *The People’s State*, in which Fulbrook discusses *Eingaben* at length: “The People’s Own Voices? The Culture of Complaint and the Privatization of Protest,” 269 – 288.

A self-conscious awareness of what kinds of ideological affectations were necessary to succeed in life became customary in the East German everyday. This was the citizen's role in the performance of the GDR's official "theatricalized public sphere." To wit, as Silberman argues, "the same conditions that undermined any sense of responsibility for decision-making in the public sphere spawned an appreciation for individuality in the private sphere."⁴⁶⁹ Here he alludes to the idea of a *Nischengesellschaft* (niche culture), a more generalized phenomenon that Günter Gaus first identified in the late 1970s.⁴⁷⁰ Although Gaus explicitly depoliticizes the GDR niche culture, others, including Silberman, have emphasized that the production of small communities might be understood as a kind of "school for civic responsibility."⁴⁷¹ Silberman elaborates: "In other words, these exclusive spaces, characterized by non access, permitted oppositional interpretations of identity, interests, and needs to be articulated... a kind of willed insulation against the official public sphere that at the same time counteracted intellectual isolation."⁴⁷² Importantly, niche cultures often fortified themselves in the development of infrastructures—whether that was a network of people who could purvey a service or material, like engine repair and car parts, or a complex web of autonomous publications and galleries that became locus points for discussion, distribution, and collectivity for artists.

⁴⁶⁹ Silberman, "Problematizing," 18.

⁴⁷⁰ Günter Gaus, *Wo Deutschland liegt: Eine Ortsbestimmung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1983), 156 – 233.

⁴⁷¹ Silberman, "Problematizing," 16.

⁴⁷² *ibid.*

A material collision: The practical impacts of East Germany's creative underbelly

Katalin Cseh-Varga and Adam Czirak have recently proposed the term “second public sphere” as a means to describe the alternative publics that arose across the Eastern Bloc. They define the second public sphere as “a (pseudo)autonomous arena of communication, opinion-sharing, a network and cultural production of individuals and groups, which existed in addition to and interconnected with a dominant public sphere.”⁴⁷³ The “pseudo” qualification acknowledges the porosity of publics, an attribute that Paul Kaiser has maintained as central to the East German context, and which Piotr Piotrowski supports in his descriptions of the Eastern Bloc, writ large. Just as Silberman and Fulbrook have described the East German public sphere as performative, Cseh-Varga and Czirak argue that a first public sphere essentially did not exist, at least not in terms of the Habermasian formation because official platforms were “simply a domain where the ‘discourse police’ could exercise its power.”⁴⁷⁴ Czirak continues that “it was precisely the development of underground networks in the state socialist countries that demonstrated that no public sphere can be closed in a totalitarian way, and that no communication system can be utterly regulated.”⁴⁷⁵ The second public sphere occupied the margins of society, or more precisely, its private enclaves—from samizdat to independent galleries to artist

⁴⁷³ cited in Katalin Cseh-Varga, “Innovative Forms of the Hungarian Samizdat. An Analysis of Oral Practices,” *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, no. 65 (2016): 91.

⁴⁷⁴ Andrea Bátorová, “Interview with Katalin Cseh and Adam Czirak about the Second Public Sphere in the Former Eastern Bloc,” ARTMargins [online], October 23, 2014. Accessed November 30, 2016. <http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/interviews-sp-837925570/754-interview-with-katalin-cseh-and-adam-czirak-about-the-second-public-sphere-in-the-former-eastern-bloc>

⁴⁷⁵ Czirak in *ibid.*

studios. Both Cseh-Varga and Czirak approach their interpretations from their home disciplines of theater and performance studies. As such, they have come to define the second public sphere as something self-consciously performed—that is to say affected—but also fairly spontaneous, that is to say temporally limited to the event space of the artistic action, samizdat recitation, and so on.

To this—a Peggy Phelan and Erika Fischer-Lichte-inspired definition of performance as everyday praxis—I would like to add the profound importance of the material trace as an equally significant element of the Eastern Bloc second public sphere. Here, I draw from Amelia Jones, but also more strategically from Zdenka Badonovic who is a forerunner in the theorization of experimental art practice from the Eastern Bloc. Specifically, Badonovic’s concept of self-historicization, which describes the desire to self-archive as foundational to the late Eastern Bloc experimental culture, stresses the necessity to prove one’s actions to outsiders, especially in the future.⁴⁷⁶ My research, including interviews with the EIGEN+ART gallerist Judy Lybke that will be discussed shortly, bear this out in the GDR context. This act of “historicizing their own traditions”⁴⁷⁷ in the moment represents a desire to intervene on and shape a public record. It also represents a preemptive awareness of the collapsing of a state system, to which the Eastern Bloc’s experimental artists were

⁴⁷⁶ Zdenka Badovinac in Sven Spieker and Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez, “Creating Context: Zdenka Badovinac on Eastern Europe’s Missing Histories,” interview with Zdenka Badovinac in ARTMargins [online], August 31, 2009, Accessed November 30, 2016, <http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/interviews/497-creating-context-zdenka-badovinac-on-eastern-europes-missing-histories-interview>.

⁴⁷⁷ *ibid.*

inevitably attached. Ironically, history—which has all but forgotten these artists—has fulfilled that expectation.

The content and material make up of *Anschlag*, the vision of its editorial team, as well as its circulation constituted a range of readership that exceeded predictable “niche” scales in so far as it foresaw an unanticipated audience. Judy Lybke’s Leipzig-based gallery EIGEN+ART likewise maintained a preoccupation with audiences that could be expanded by the dissemination of print media, including within the pages of *Anschlag*. As *Anschlag* editor Karim Saab recalls, anticipated readership could be multiplied by a factor of ten to twenty people per issue.⁴⁷⁸ Adjusted for an average of twenty-five to forty copies per edition, the publication reached anywhere from 250 to 800 readers multiple times a year. In fact, *Anschlag*, according to Saab, achieved a mythic status that well exceeded its most immediate milieu. As he recalls, “Once some neighbors from a nearby town reported to [Wiebke Müller’s] parents—who lived in the Ore Mountains—that there were apparently some brave people in Leipzig who were publishing a magazine called *Anschlag*.”⁴⁷⁹ The anecdote reveals a cross-generational and cross-GDR presence for the publication: If a middle-aged couple living a few hundred kilometers away from the heart of the action had heard of *Anschlag*, then certainly the interests of others closer to its production center must have been quite profound. Given that this was technically an illegal undertaking, no formal statistical data on the consumption of this or any other

⁴⁷⁸ Karim Saab, e-mail message to author, February 23, 2016. Issues 1 – 4 (1984 – 85) came out in editions of twenty-five; Issues 5 – 10 (1986 – 89) appeared in editions of forty.

⁴⁷⁹ Karim Saab, e-mail message to author, February 23, 2016.

autonomous publication from the GDR is available. It is nevertheless quite telling that a few GDR libraries, including the State Library of Saxony, actively collected East German samizdat from 1986 onward.⁴⁸⁰ Whereas this may of course be explained as a form of surveillance and control, the attention paid to such publications by the state likewise signals their significance.

EIGEN+ART achieved an even greater level of notoriety, both across the GDR and West Germany. The gallery, which is today one of Germany's most successful commercial spaces, was a revelation in a 1980s GDR. EIGEN+ART was originally conceived as a kind of ad hoc space in Lybke's shared Leipzig apartment for, as he recounts, "losers like me."⁴⁸¹ This is modest shorthand for the gallerist's erstwhile status as a fairly unemployable artist-type who had been blacklisted from higher education and a number of career opportunities after being ostensibly imprisoned in a library by the military.⁴⁸² The lore is considerable and well recounted—at least in the German language—and arguably well-deserved. The gallery's seventy-five exhibitions, which involved easily three times as many artists, were risk-taking and ambitious. From painting to installation to durational performance, EIGEN+ART was a locus point for the dissemination and consumption of experimental practice in the GDR. It also achieved a consistency unlike any other autonomous art space. Whereas Lybke is certainly not responsible for the manner and

⁴⁸⁰ "Grafiksammlung," Accessed June 10, 2016. http://www.slub-dresden.de/sammlungen/sonstige_spezialbestaende/grafiksammlung/. See also Frank Eckart's description of the state of collections of independent publications and artists books, etc. in *Eigenart und Eigensinn*, 94.

⁴⁸¹ Katharina Hegewisch, "Im Dienste der Unsterblichkeit. Gerd Harry Lybke," Accessed June 15, 2016. http://eigen-art.com/files/text_khegewisch.pdf, 8.

⁴⁸² Ulrike Knöfel, "Du fühlst dich unsterblich," *Der Spiegel*, no. 34 (August 18, 2014): 113.

character of the artists he exhibited, he nevertheless developed a platform for the kinds of experimentation and discussion that had flooded the experimental arts scene, but which struggled to find place within the state's official and unofficial cultures. Rather than look specifically at his exhibition content, or compare EIGEN+ART to other galleries at the time, this chapter focuses on Lybke's archival and publication practices to demonstrate the foundational role they played in the success of his gallery space. The intersection between *Anschlag* and EIGEN+ART—which both cohabitated and shared resources—represents a broader cultural condition that fortified and really came to define East Germany's experimental culture in the 1980s. Latent to this discussion are the attentions these projects paid to claiming autonomous spaces within official culture, that is to say, making an alternative culture visible within the GDR. For, more than just happening or being, both *Anschlag* and EIGEN+ART were two interwoven components of an infrastructure that was not just a counternarrative or ethos, but a viable counterproduction. Both Leipzig-based projects were formidable forces, the machinations of their miniature industries steadfast and oriented far beyond their immediate geopolitical confines.

Theorizing *Gegenöffentlichkeit*

The materialist theory of a counter-public (*Gegenöffentlichkeit*) offered by Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge helps to explain the significance of the *Anschlag*/EIGEN+ART infrastructure as a kind of counterproduction. Writing in West Germany in the late 1970s and specifically as advocates for independent cinema

and television, Negt and Kluge argue that counter-publics enact a politics materially. In other words, politics happens when it can be distributed across multiple, and sometimes unanticipated, publics. In contrast to Habermas who idealizes the public sphere as a place to abstractly debate and effect policy, for Negt and Kluge it is the sites of production and reproduction that matter most. “Or, rather,” Miriam Hansen explains, “they reverse the angle on the question of political efficacy to focus on the material conditions of its possibility—the structures that control what can be said and how and what cannot be said, which and whose experience is considered relevant and which irrelevant.”⁴⁸³ If the point in Negt and Kluge is to reformulate the relations of production as a means of democratizing the commons, then the production of an alternative network of presses fortified by an equally robust system of galleries in a 1980s GDR is valuable because it represents an “effective counterproduction.”⁴⁸⁴ What is needed is publicity—a material remainder of a public, in other words, an archive. Added to the virtual body of the mass of readers who consumed a magazine like *Anschlag* was the actual mass of bodies that gathered, assembled, and created the space of appearance (such as it was) in and for itself in the GDR. It is in the event space of the gallery—abstracted onto the page of the East German samizdat—that the scale of this counter-public may meet the expectations of an ambitious theory: after all Negt and Kluge helped to build a cinema movement in West Germany.⁴⁸⁵ Their

⁴⁸³ Miriam Hansen, Foreword to *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere*, Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge (Brooklyn: Verso, 2016), xxxi.

⁴⁸⁴ Negt and Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience*, 266.

⁴⁸⁵ See Kluge’s participation in the writing of the so-called “Oberhausen Manifesto”, which was first presented with the title “*Papas Kino ist tot*” (Dad’s cinema is dead) on February 28, 1962 at the International Short Film Festival in Oberhausen. The Oberhausen Group—a term used to describe the

theory, nevertheless, allows that countering the dominant public sphere is a process that builds and grows. “Idea against idea, product against product, production sector against production sector” autonomy is built in the meeting—often a collision—of conflicting perspective and practice.⁴⁸⁶

It is here, working from Paul Kaiser and Claudia Petzold’s description of the East German experimental art scene as a “bohemia in dictatorship”⁴⁸⁷ that I propose that the material effects of the artistic scene—the mode of its production and its material culture—are equal to the artwork and the artists themselves. Kaiser and Petzold stress the spontaneity and immediacy of this milieu, calling it a “loose solidarity and emergency society that united diverse facets, artistic visions, and philosophies in informal groups, circles, and social formations.”⁴⁸⁸ This definition emphasizes the work of individuals who were thrust together by like frustration. From this shared condition had emerged a new subjectivity: the East German experimental artist. Furthermore, in defining the “not to be underestimated” impact of dissenting culture on destabilizing the state, Kaiser and Petzold argue that “the establishment of a subcultural infrastructure [and] an influential abandonment of the GDR’s modes of production” helped to create a subculture that provided a visible, that is to say viable, alternative to official culture.⁴⁸⁹ To this I would like to articulate how the simultaneous emergence of an autonomous print culture and an autonomous gallery

group of 26 filmmakers who signed the manifesto—became the forerunners for the New German Cinema Movement, which lasted from the late 1960s into the 1980s.

⁴⁸⁶ Negt and Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience*, 80.

⁴⁸⁷ Kaiser and Petzold, *Boheme und Diktatur*.

⁴⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁸⁹ *ibid.*

scene—both of which responded proactively to an inauthentic and exclusionary public sphere—became the public face of the East German subculture. Its organizing principles reflect a self-awareness, adaptability, and intentionality that helped to cohere—and sustain—a vast array of interests, desires, and proclivities. This “real talent for spontaneous collective self-organizing”⁴⁹⁰ is considered paramount to the East German public of the 1980s. Indeed, it is both with and against Marc Silberman, who writes that people like these artists “did not attempt to project new alternative systems, [but] concentrated on practical solutions to local problems,”⁴⁹¹ that I suggest a simultaneous spontaneity and intentionality in their mode of self-organization. Such a view emphasizes how both local and short-term solutions, as well as systems-productive and long-term (even global) ones girded the GDR’s unofficial cultural apparatus.

Anschlag’s proactive vision

The original editorial team of Karim Saab, Angelika Klüssendorf, and Wiebke Müller first established *Anschlag* in 1984. Dedicated activists in the solidarity movement *Hoffnung Nicaragua* (Hope for Nicaragua), which first formed in 1981, the trio initially solicited artists and writers to donate artworks and texts to be bound and sold in the service of a school in Managua.⁴⁹² After the first issue he and his

⁴⁹⁰ Silberman, “Problematizing,” 18.

⁴⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁹² Florian Berg, “Literarische Zeitschriften: Anschlag,” *Berliner Hefte zur literarischen Lebens 4* (2001): 128. For more on the group “Hoffnung Nicaragua,” see also: Karim Saab, “Karim Saab – Initiative ‘Hoffnung Nicaragua’ ” in *Revolution im geschlossenen Raum. Die andere Kultur in Leipzig 1970 – 1990*, eds. Uta Grundmann, Klaus Michael and Susanne Seufert (Leipzig: Verlag Faber &

Anschlag co-founders no longer coordinated the publication with their activism for Nicaragua. This origin nevertheless demonstrates the magazine's worldly impulse and external orientation as foundational. Moreover, Saab explains that coming across the Dresden-based independent magazine *Und (And)* inspired in him a desire to use a creative media platform to grow the networks of artists and writers already organizing a counter-public sphere. *Anschlag* thus evolved from grassroots organizing defined by global geopolitics. It quickly narrowed in on the more immediate needs of its own GDR environs. "We wanted to 'dare for democracy,' " Saab reflects.⁴⁹³ Hope for Nicaragua becomes hope for East Germany in the pages of *Anschlag*.

Production and distribution decisions were highly determined by the GDR-context. Due to censorship laws, which restricted the numbers of copies any single person could create, for each issue all contributors were responsible for providing enough reproductions of their work to satisfy the full print run. The multi-sourced reproduction process continued throughout *Anschlag*'s eight-year history, which—in its fifth issue—increased production from twenty-five to forty issues. By this time, the number of contributors was shrunk from essentially a limitless set to a more manageable dozen or so selected or invited by the editors for each regular issue.⁴⁹⁴ In general, each contributor received one issue free of charge. The rest were sold for

Faber, 2002), 67 – 69. The group was heavily supported by art auctions, and they also organized several large musical events in the evangelical church. The state's aggressive reaction to them actually, according to Saab, fueled the group and also gave it a higher profile nationally.

⁴⁹³ Karim Saab, e-mail message to author, February 23, 2016.

⁴⁹⁴ The two special issues of *Anschlag*, both conceived of and managed by Karim Saab, included many more contributors.

about 50-East German Marks (about 12.50-West German Marks or \$8) to people both in the GDR and beyond, partially via EIGEN+ART's connections to the West.⁴⁹⁵

The reproduction process and ad hoc approaches to sales and distribution were standard practices among East Germany's unofficial publications. Crucial was the necessity to work around a strict censorship law, which stipulated that print runs of one hundred or more pages required official authorization.⁴⁹⁶ Technically, *Anschlag* named itself an *Originalgrafik* (artistic portfolio), a clever and defensive nomenclature that proved to be surprisingly impenetrable.⁴⁹⁷ In general, although some were forced to close—and sometimes re-form under new names—no samizdat publishers or contributors in a late GDR faced criminal charges.⁴⁹⁸ Certainly, the secret police was aware of the publications. It is well known that the writers Sascha Anderson and Rainer Schedlinski—who also co-produced the publication *Ariadnefabrik* (*Ariadne Factory*)—aggressively informed the Stasi on the inner workings of the Prenzlauer Berg scene in East Berlin.⁴⁹⁹ Nevertheless, in a country that defined itself as constitutional, even the duplicitous Stasi could not find a way to

⁴⁹⁵ BStU, MfS, BV Leipzig ZMA AKG, Nr. 4974: 66.

⁴⁹⁶ *Bildende Kunst* censorship law (*Honorarordnung*), dated 31.08.1971. See Helgard Sauer's description cited in Frank Eckart, "Nie überwundener Mangel an Farben...Über ein Kapitel der Kulturentwicklung in der DDR der achtziger Jahre" in *Eigenart und Eigensinn. Alternative Kulturszenen in der DDR (1980-1990)*, ed. Frank Eckart (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1993), 38.

⁴⁹⁷ Karim Saab, e-mail message to author, February 23, 2016.

⁴⁹⁸ Under pressure from authorities, Lothar Fiedler (1982-1984) abandoned his Dresden-based magazine *Und* in May 1985. He re-formed under the title *USW* in 1984. The titles, *Und* (and) and *USW* (*und so weiter* / and so on) are clearly tongue-in-cheek references to Fiedler's fearlessness in the face of censorship laws. On this history, see: Klaus Michael and Thomas Wolfhat, eds., *Vogel oder Käfig sein. Kunst und Literatur aus unabhängigen Zeitschriften in der DDR 1979-1989* (Berlin: Edition Galrev, 1992), 412.

⁴⁹⁹ See, for example, David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech*, as well as the films *Der Verrat*, DVD, directed by Fredrik von Krusenstjerna and Björn Cederberg (Sweden: Charon Film, 1994) and *Anderson*, DVD, directed by Annekatriin Hendel (2014; Germany: Salzgeber, 2015).

permanently stop independent publishers, whose tactics and community-oriented strategies were simply too adaptive.

In fact, Stasi observation of *Anschlag* public meetings, which often took place in EIGEN+ART, tended to dwell on summary and anticipated rather than direct action. The reports often read more like meeting minutes than assessments or strategies. For example, the “plans of action” listed in a July 1986 report on an *Anschlag* editorial meeting—written after a full five issues had already been produced—illustrate a security system essentially spinning its wheels. The report: 1) demanded continued deployment of unofficial informants to gather more information; 2) requested more information about the role that gallerist Judy Lybke played in the production of the magazine; and 3) advised that attempts to secure a copy of the forthcoming issue be made.⁵⁰⁰ This third plan of action clearly begs the question of state power, namely: To what extent did the Stasi conspire against itself in its attempts to be inconspicuous and still omnipresent? At least in the context of *Anschlag*, the question of the Stasi may then be a moot point. The collective action of production combined with the state’s own inability to act in part ensured the publication’s autonomy.

A sustained, and arguably more interesting, critique of this and other independent publications is that they lacked a cohesive thematic or argument. This judgment actually articulates a central problem in the purpose of such publications. Most important was the production of an alternative platform that was free from

⁵⁰⁰ BStU, MfS, BV Leipzig ZMA, AKG, 4974: 45.

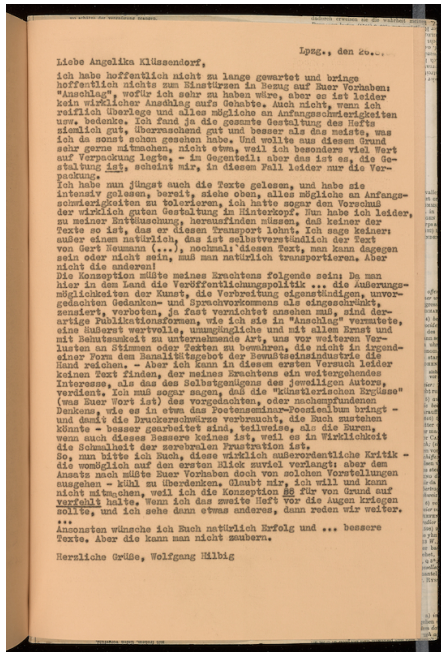
restrictions. This led to a defining paradox: Was it enough that the publications produced a platform, or should the objective have been more additive, that is to say, more aggressively attentive to outcomes beyond the artistic or literary milieus they served? Or did they do enough by producing an autonomous discourse? *Anschlag* faced this problem from inception. The first four issues placed no editorial constraints on content, resulting in what Saab diplomatically describes as a “lively, qualitatively quite diverse spectrum of mostly apolitical texts.”⁵⁰¹ The tentativeness of its original issues countered the magazine’s assertive title “*Anschlag*,” which can mean “attack” or “strike.”⁵⁰²

Anschlag’s temerity was not missed on its ostensible allies. Issue two (1984), for example included the reproduction of a scathing letter from the influential experimental writer, Wolfgang Hilbig. [Figure 4.4] Expressing regrets that he could not provide the magazine with a contribution, he writes “though I would so much like to support your efforts, unfortunately I see nothing new here.”⁵⁰³ He continues: “Believe me, I cannot and will not participate, because the concept [of this publication] has so miserably failed.” He closes his letter with a pregnant pause: “I definitely wish you success and ... better texts.” The editors of *Anschlag* have reprinted the fifty-line letter in full. In this—an essentially illegal operation’s second attempt—the editors have elected to put themselves in the sightlines of critique. Why

⁵⁰¹ Karim Saab, e-mail message to author, February 23, 2016.

⁵⁰² In response to a paper I presented at the College Art Association’s 2017 annual conference, the art historian James Van Dyke drew another connotation for the word *Anschlag*. Van Dyke suggested that *Anschlag* might refer to *Der Angriff*, the official publication of the Berlin National Socialist party. I have inquired with *Anschlag* co-founder, Karim Saab about this. As of May 30, 2017 am still awaiting an answer.

⁵⁰³ Wolfgang Hilbig, “Liebe Angelika Klüssendorf,” *Anschlag*, no. 2 (Fall 1984): n.p.



[Figure 4.4. Wolfgang Hilbig, letter to the editor, *Anschlag*, no. 2 (1984), Leipzig. Image courtesy of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.]

not succumb to Hilbig's wounding assessment? And why reproduce it, rather than disregard its mean accusations of naiveté and talentlessness? There are no commentaries to contextualize or defend against this letter. Future issues likewise do not reveal the discussions or frustrations of the authors, let alone the magazine's editorial team. *Anschlag* does not document these discussions, but nevertheless its evolution in concept and content suggest a heady dialogue off page. In general, among East German samizdat the norm seems to have been to weather the storm and publish critique. This vulnerability was a central identification point for the counter-public these publications represented. It was likewise an important characteristic that differentiated them from texts offered in the official press, which by and large served only to bolster, normalize, and homogenize state rhetoric.

Nevertheless, even though *Anschlag* published critique, it did not publish debate until one of its final issues. This is fairly consistent across East German samizdat, where an absence of dialogical texts is conspicuous. This certainly ought not imply that the scene was more cohesive or internally resilient than any equivalent creative publics. To the contrary, competition and individuation were manifest, clear outcomes of a reaction to socialization in a country that at once emphasized the heroism of the communally-minded individual while also maintaining clear hierarchies that prioritized individual artistic or literary genius. Less cynically, the experimental arts scene of the GDR was preoccupied with a somewhat naïve idea of “authenticity,” where the goal was to express oneself unimpeded by the social or political structure.⁵⁰⁴ To that end, many of East Germany’s experimental artists and writers believed the necessity for a platform overwhelmed a need for printed dialogue and debate. On his magazine, Uwe Warnke, the co-founder and editor of *entwerter/oder* (lit. cancelation/other; play on the words *entweder/oder*, which means either/or, 1982 – present), reflects that “*Entwerter/oder* was an attempt to independently bring the writing made ‘for-the-desk-only’ to an end, both for itself and in order to open up and assert a free space for others.”⁵⁰⁵ Although his publication certainly adapted over time, Warnke’s wish to produce a space for unrestricted self-expression was a formative impulse for his and similar initiatives, particularly in the

⁵⁰⁴ See, for example, Judy Lybke’s introductory essay to his gallery’s annual yearbook in 1989, which closes: “The gallery as a way of being, in which it lives anew with every exhibition through its artists. Authenticity as principle.” Judy Lybke, “4 Jahre EIGEN+ART,” *EIGEN+ART Jahrbuch 1989* (Leipzig: EIGEN+ART, 1986), n.p. EIGEN+ART archive, Potsdam, H 70 (1989).

⁵⁰⁵ Uwe Warnke, “Entwerter-Material (den Umständen entsprechend),” in *Die Addition der Differenzen*, ft. 1, 94.

early 1980s. As one young writer put it: “I already grew up in a frustrated society. For me disappointment is no longer something to be experienced; rather it is a precondition of life.”⁵⁰⁶ Some held a more critical opinion. As Christoph Tannert derisively remarks: “The majority of the subcultural and agitating artists in the GDR had no desire to flee the embrace of one side for the embrace of the other side. The interest, to conspiratorially conceive of a political and social change, was quite small. People satisfied themselves with spontaneous protests and were otherwise happy with receiving praise from like-minded people.”⁵⁰⁷ Even though both *Anschlag* and EIGEN+ART began at the outset as projects that erred on the side of inclusivity, they would soon reject the position of frustrated or self-satisfied victimization. These projects represent the more proactive, even confrontational approach, that Tannert urges.

To that end, by 1986 *Anschlag* would no longer publish just any submission. Karim Saab, actually citing the scathing Hilbig critique, explains that three issues after they printed the letter, the editorial team decided to both increase production “so that we would no longer act like criminals in fear of the state”⁵⁰⁸ and to adopt a more selective editorial vision. The magazine immediately faced criticism from contributors who interpreted the new submission policy as a form of censorship. *Anschlag* defector, Torsten Ziesche, would begin his own publication *Glasnost* in

⁵⁰⁶ Fritz Hendrik Melle in Antonia Grunenberg, “‘Vogel oder Käfig sein’. Zur ‘zweiten’ Kultur und zu den inoffiziellen Zeitschriften in der DDR” in *Eigenart und Eigensinn*, 82.

⁵⁰⁷ Cited in Gerrit Gohlke, “Ein Interview mit Christoph Tannert. In der Charybde Geheil. Über die Kontinuität kultureller Schulmeisterei” in *Die Addition der Differenzen*, 200.

⁵⁰⁸ Karim Saab, e-mail message to author, February 23, 2016.

protest, “for which we were very grateful,” Saab reflects.⁵⁰⁹ In fact, in 1987—the year after *Anschlag*’s new submission policy went into effect—two other independent magazines would start production in Leipzig, thus quadrupling the total number of publications based in the city from one to four.⁵¹⁰

Judy Lybke faced parallel controversy when it became clear around the time he moved to a new location in 1985 that he would run EIGEN+ART with a selective, curatorial approach, rather than as a team-led *Produzentengalerie* (collective gallery). This choice was just as divisive as *Anschlag*’s decision to electively publish submissions. The controversy around the gallery is particularly well documented in *EIGEN+ART im Gespräch (EIGEN+ART in Conversation)*, a special issue of *Anschlag* produced in 1988. This is the richest example of collaboration across a gallery and a publication in the GDR. A particularly precise exchange between Karim Saab and Judy Lybke from a seventeen-page interview provides a rich introductory frame to both the motivation of this special issue, as well as the parallel contexts within which both the magazine and the gallery emerged:

Karim Saab: Being an *Anschlag* collaborator, your situation is all too familiar to me. We too are often criticized and asked why we have not taken this or that text. This is always accompanied by the accusation that we are no different from the state institutions. But it is not our intention to make a quickly produced publication, but rather to produce edited volumes on our terms. And the E+A walls are certainly also not meant to be pinup-walls [*Anpinn-Wände*] for just anybody. Because we strive to choose—and feel we are obligated to do so—people like to contest our status as an alternative [to state culture].

⁵⁰⁹ Karim Saab, e-mail message to author, February 23, 2016.

⁵¹⁰ 1987 also saw the peak production for East German samizdat, with seventeen total publications.

Judy Lybke: Nevertheless you are in a better situation. In the GDR there are still other venues where people can publish. E+A is out on a limb all by itself. I think it is really, really unfortunate that the example of E+A has not caught on, and that up until now there are not comparable projects in other cities. Certainly, we cannot forget that the gallery “*fotogen*” (lit. filmable) flourished in Dresden until the city council shut it down. Unfortunately, other activities are only happening on smaller scales, and this activity is pretty inconsistent.⁵¹¹

Lybke identifies a resounding crisis, namely, a lack of gallery infrastructure.

Elsewhere in this interview, he will comment on a need for competition both to inspire better exhibitions and as a way of fortifying the autonomous scene. Strength in numbers was indeed a necessity in a country that illegalized private cultural initiatives. The fact that EIGEN+ART was one of the GDR’s few successful and lasting autonomous galleries is as much a reflection of Lybke’s unique blend of improvisation and careful preparation as it is a reflection of a creative subculture that had yet to become secure.

EIGEN+ART embodied a worldly and future-oriented approach that redefined the possibilities of unofficial culture. Moreover, Lybke’s strategy afforded his artists greater opportunities than they would have had within the state’s official art world.

With the exception of a few promoted by the state,⁵¹² very few artists from the GDR

⁵¹¹ Saab, “Gespräch mit Judy Lybke,” n.p.

⁵¹² The GDR’s most famous artists included Bernhard Heisig, Wolfgang Mattheuer, Willi Sitte, and Werner Tübke. These four painters are typically associated with the Leipzig School, a generation of artists who emerged in the 1960s with the support of the cultural functionary Alfred Kurella. Their appearance, along with the sculptors Fritz Cremer and Jo Jastram, at the 6th documenta (1977) caused controversy among West German artists (including Georg Baselitz and Gerhard Richter who pulled out

achieved national, let alone international, notoriety. The international legitimacy that a space like EIGEN+ART enjoyed in its contacts to West Germany was thus quite unusual. As VBK-art historian André Meier explains, “[EIGEN+ART’s] professionalism was unmatched by any official state galleries,” let alone unofficial ones.⁵¹³ For Meier it was the attention Lybke paid to documenting, archiving, and publicizing his gallery that set it apart from all other projects of its kind.⁵¹⁴ Yvonne Fiedler likewise argues that the network that Lybke built around his gallery was self- and community-fortifying—comprised of an ever-growing number of people less actively opposed to state culture than resoundingly disinterested in it.⁵¹⁵ The connections and opportunities for artists no longer required state mediation in this late hour of the GDR. I agree with Meier that this network of artists gained its traction in the surfeit of EIGEN+ART documentation as well as the distribution of that archive in a series of annual self-produced publications.⁵¹⁶ Though productions were small, these books were nonetheless exhaustive and precisely crafted, at once sharing the work of the EIGEN+ART artists, while also legitimating—that is to say, branding—the gallery both in the GDR and beyond.

of the exhibition) who believed the inclusion of these artists compromised the integrity and democratizing values of the documenta exhibition. For more on this, see: Claudia Mesch, *Modern Art at the Berlin Wall. Demarcating Culture in the Cold War Germanys* (London; New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2008), 130.

⁵¹³ André Meier, “Die Werkstatt-Galerie EIGEN+ART” in *Kunst in der DDR*, eds. Eckhart Gillen and Rainer Haarmann (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1990), 416.

⁵¹⁴ *ibid.*, 417.

⁵¹⁵ Fiedler, *Kunst im Korridor*, 281.

⁵¹⁶ EIGEN+ART also produced at least one special publication for an exhibition inspired by the dancer and performance artist Fine Kwiatkowski, “FINE” April 28 – May 21, 1989. EIGEN+ART archive, Potsdam, H 80 (1989).

A future in the making: EIGEN+ART's archive dreams



[Figure 4.5. Gerd Harry “Judy” Lybke greets his guests at an opening at the *Galerie am Körnerplatz*, 1983. Photograph by Thomas Steinert. Image courtesy of the Archive of the EIGEN+ART Gallery / Private archive of Gerd Harry Lybke, Josef Fillip Gallery, and the artist. © Thomas Steinert.]

Much attention has been paid to EIGEN+ART's formative history, as well as its vast and energetic exhibition and programming schedule.⁵¹⁷ Briefly, in 1983 after meeting artists through his work as a nude model at the *Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst* (Academy for Graphic and Book Arts) in Leipzig, Lybke decided to turn the home he shared with his friend Torsten Schilling into a gallery. For his first exhibition at the then-named *Galerie am Körnerplatz* (Koernerplace Gallery), Lybke hosted his guests wearing only his modeling robe. He tied his messy mop of red curls to the top of his head and stuck three eggs in it like a nest. [Figure 4.5] The

⁵¹⁷ See, for example, Herbert Lange, *EIGEN+ART. Die Geschichte der Galerie im Spiegel der Quellen* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2013); Uta Grundmann, Klaus Michael and Susanna, Seufert, eds., “Operation aus freien Stücken. Kunst als Medium sozialer Kommunikation,” *Revolution im geschlossenen Raum*, 69 – 101.



[Figure 4.6. EIGEN+ART façade ca. 1985, located in the interior courtyard of Fritz-Austel-Straße 31, Leipzig. Photo by Christian Günther. Image courtesy of the artist. © Christian Günther.]

eccentricity was actually a fairly intricate ruse—a foreshadowing of things to come. Because it was illegal to host large non-work-related gatherings in private homes, if necessary, Lybke could describe his immodest clothing as work clothes, his hair style as some sort of drawing challenge.⁵¹⁸ Two years and sixteen exhibitions later more carefully plotted subterfuge would allow him to establish an essentially legal gallery in a more professional space. By formally registering EIGEN+ART as the studio of VBK artist Akos Nowaky, Lybke was able to circumvent a long list of laws that left autonomous galleries vulnerable to state closure.⁵¹⁹ [Figure 4.6] Technically, EIGEN+ART was in fact not a gallery, but a workshop that artists could legally rent

⁵¹⁸ Gerd Harry Lybke, personal interview, March 17, 2015.

⁵¹⁹ These laws included prohibitions against public assembly without prior permission (*Veranstaltungsverordnung*), laws against noise and disturbance (*Ordnungswidrigkeiten*), misuse of living space (*Lenkung des Wohnraums*), and a prohibition against privately-run businesses (*Gewerbetätigkeit*). For an explanation of all laws used against private galleries, see: Fiedler, *Kunst im Korridor*, 49 – 53.

during exhibitions. The only caveat with this scheme, which stipulated that the artists had to keep open hours to the public, actually proved another formal protection. Indeed, the GDR's vision of a *Kulturnation* idealized contact between everyday citizens and artists. As such EIGEN+ART performed a kind of community and state socialist service by granting public access to exhibiting artists.

Lybke, who—to the dismay of many of his detractors⁵²⁰—ran his gallery single-handedly, was both inventive and truly indefatigable. The exhibitions at EIGEN+ART were nearly continuous, with an average of only four days scheduled in between each show. Artists came and went with complicated projects. The gallery's open door policy, as well as its ancillary events resulted in an average of 300 to 600 visitors per exhibition.⁵²¹ Certainly other galleries in the period were equally ambitious. Claudia “Wanda” Reichardt, for example, who was instrumental in transforming the Dresden Arts Academy's student club from a veritable instrument of the state into an experimental platform that brought students, faculty, artists, and

⁵²⁰ The so-called *1. Leipziger Herbstsalon* (First Leipzig Autumn Salon) of 1984 formatively inspired Lybke's move to a more public gallery space the following year. A truly ingenious deception, the salon involved a group of VBK artists (Hans-Hendrick Grimmling, Frieder Heinze, Lutz Dambeck, Günther Huniat, Olaf Wegewitz, and Günter Firit) who took advantage of an unanticipated bureaucratic loophole in the Leipzig trade fair, which permitted anyone in the Union of Fine Artists to officially rent a 1000-square-meter exhibit hall. It was only after the work of the six artists was already installed that officials at the trade fair caught wind of the unofficial exhibition. Over the next four weeks nearly 10,000 visitors from in and outside of the GDR saw the exhibition. EIGEN+ART's first exhibition, the *Stifterausstellung* (Exhibition of Donors), featured the Autumn Salon's artists who sold their work in support of the new gallery. (Uta Grundmann, “Der ‘1. Leipziger Herbstsalon’,” Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung website, September 6, 2012. Accessed June 10, 2016. <http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/deutsche-geschichte/autonome-kunst-in-der-ddr/55829/herbstsalon>) See also: Doris Liebermann, *Ein Piratenstück: Der 1. Leipziger Herbstsalon 1984, seine Vorgeschichte und seine Protagonisten* (Halle (Saale): Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2014). It is also important that EIGEN+ART's quick evolution beyond the vision of a collaborative project, for which the Autumn Salon's artists strongly advocated, became a serious point of contention. For more on this, see the discussion of *EIGEN+ART im Gespräch* in this document.

⁵²¹ Saab, “Gespräch mit Judy Lybke,” n.p.

average community members together, simultaneously initiated and maintained her own private gallery, the above mentioned *Galerie fotogen*.⁵²² In fact, as Fiedler has delineated in *Kunst im Korridor*, the GDR's long history of independent galleries—a few of which began already in the 1940s—demonstrates that a commitment to autonomous forms of culture and exhibition consistently paralleled official culture.⁵²³ The 1980s, as I have already noted, were marked by both an expansion of such projects, as well as in the production of independent publications. Reichardt, like Lybke, produced special exhibition publications, including one complete index of *Galerie fotogen*'s history.⁵²⁴ She also used East German samizdat, including *Anschlag*, to publicize exhibitions, film screenings, and other events, and maintained an exhibition archive. This parallel example suggests the important role that print played in the experimental art scene's counterproduction. Although EIGEN+ART is an extreme case, Lybke's impulse to use reproducible media reflects the tendencies of his period. His publications—as much as his exhibitions and events—were central tools of legitimation for the Leipzig gallery. Here was the archive come alive, the means to extend the gallery's presence and influence beyond the spatiotemporal limitations of a country walled-in, both literally and figuratively, politically and

⁵²² For a complete overview of *Galerie fotogen* see Claudia Reichardt, *Die Galerie bleibt während der Öffnungszeit geschlossen: Wanda und die Villa Marie 1982-1990* (Berlin: Schmitz, 2010). For Reichardt's work with the "*Wendelklub*" at the Dresden Art Academy, see, for example: Paul Kaiser, "Von Mülltonnen, Frühlingssalons und Brunnenfröschen. Ein Gespräch mit Ingo Sandner, HfBK-Rektor (1982-1988)" in *Ohne Uns! Kunst und alternative Kultur in Dresden vor und nach '89*, eds. Frank Eckhardt and Paul Kaiser (Dresden: Efau Verlag, 2009), 162 – 169.

⁵²³ Fiedler's study is indispensable for understanding how a German cultural tradition of home salons and private discussion groups about art both survived the Third Reich and continued into the GDR. Her multi-decade history also demonstrates how this cultural lineage persisted well into the 1980s. Fiedler's generational divisions likewise cogently argue for the way that political history and cultural conditions manifested in forty years of galleries.

⁵²⁴ Claudia Reichardt, personal interview, June 2, 2015.

culturally. The archive was a symptom of a larger ambition; its dissemination a mode of connection.

Each of the seventy-five exhibitions that took place in EIGEN+ART's two Leipzig locations was fastidiously documented. This archive set the gallery apart in its time as well as for posterity. Beginning in 1986, the year after the gallery moved from Lybke's shared apartment to a former chemical workshop⁵²⁵ located in an inner courtyard in the working class neighborhood of Connewitz,⁵²⁶ EIGEN+ART began producing annual yearbooks and portfolio editions of original artworks. The majority of the yearbook consists of a chronological overview of the shows that had taken place in the previous year, with several pages devoted to each exhibition. Artists' statements and biographical information are followed by a series of black-and-white photographs, including a portrait of each artist and installation images. Often copies of the speeches read at gallery openings are reproduced in the yearbooks. Less frequently, are other mostly editorial texts gathered in the course of the year.

The four editions produced between 1986 and 1989 are quite consistent in their formats. What changes most is the tenor of Lybke's introductory remarks. In 1986, he stresses the important "synthesis of exhibition and studio in one space" that his gallery offered.⁵²⁷ The following year, he attends to his desire to make the gallery even more public, "in order to avoid the risk of nepotism [*Inzest*] and to maintain its

⁵²⁵ The name of the factory was Rohrer and Klinger. According to lore, Pablo Picasso ordered his lithography crayons through this company. (Meier, "Die Werkstatt-Galerie," 415)

⁵²⁶ Connewitz is a neighborhood in South Leipzig, which was significantly destroyed by WWII bombing. EIGEN+ART was located in an *Altbau* (lit. old building) portion of the neighborhood, which had yet to be rebuilt.

⁵²⁷ Judy Lybke, "DIE EIGEN+ART," *EIGEN+ART Jahrbuch 1986* (Leipzig: EIGEN+ART, 1986), n.p. EIGEN+ART archive, Potsdam, H 10 (1987).

relevance in the times to come.”⁵²⁸ Lybke also begins here to stress the work of documenting gallery exhibitions, a topic of considerable import in 1988’s third annual yearbook. By 1989, the gallerist turns his attentions to the artists themselves, highlighting people like the Auto-Perforation Artists, the conceptual artists Carsten and Olaf Nicolai, and the sculptor and filmmaker Jörg Herold for their multi-media practices.⁵²⁹

Each yearbook includes in its table of contents the same explanatory and invitational note: “All works are held in a slide archive. There is documentation for every exhibition. Review of both materials may be made by prior arrangement.”⁵³⁰ As Lybke explains, fear of a precarious—even apocalyptic—future motivated the impulse both to document the work of the gallery and to disseminate the archive as a publication: “This documentation was important to us. If we were kicked out of the GDR, we would always have something to show for ourselves.”⁵³¹ To this day, Lybke names an almost obsessive interest in his own immortality, an impulse likely explained by the uncertainty of his life in East Germany.⁵³² Lybke’s experiences are myriad—and fairly well storied—in this regard. To name a few flashpoints: During military service, he was banished to the library after writing “Make love, not war” on a barracks. Soon after he was essentially barred from university (and as such any

⁵²⁸ Judy Lybke, “Die EIGEN+ART,” *EIGEN+ART Jahrbuch 1987* (Leipzig: EIGEN+ART, November 1987), n.p. EIGEN+ART archive, Potsdam, H 20 (1987).

⁵²⁹ Judy Lybke, “4 Jahre EIGEN+ART,” n.p. EIGEN+ART archive, Potsdam, H 70 (1989).

⁵³⁰ Video recordings were also available from 1987 onwards, after Lybke acquired video equipment from a colleague in Cologne. (Gerd Harry Lybke, personal interview, March 17, 2015)

⁵³¹ Knöfel, “Du fühlst dich unsterblich,” 114.

⁵³² See, for example, Werber Katzengruber, “Wir machen Kunstgeschichte mit dem Ziel, unsterblich zu werden – Interview mit Gerd Harry Lybke, 16.Februar.2010,” *Mythos Führungskraft* (Weinheim: Wiley-VCH, 2010), 230 – 244.

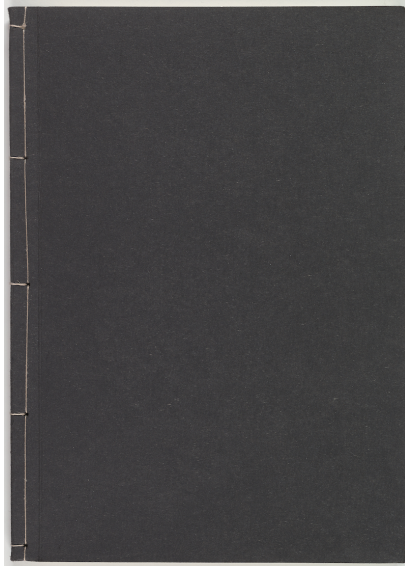
profession) after refusing a prestigious opportunity to study engineering in Moscow. A smell sample—collected by the Stasi “so that they could identify me in case of emergency”⁵³³—is today on display in the *Runde Ecke* (lit. round corner) museum, housed in the secret police’s regional headquarters in Leipzig. Although Lybke’s biography occupies an extreme end of a spectrum of the experience of non-conformists in the GDR, his work with EIGEN+ART nevertheless demonstrates a distinctive strategy within the experimental arts scene of the 1980s to counterbalance a kind of recklessness with a proactive and judicious long-term vision.

Two members of *Anschlag*’s core team, and Karin Wieckhorst (who organized photography for the publication) and Wiebke Müller (its bookbinder), also collaborated with the Leipzig gallery on documenting, archiving, and distributing its work in publication form. Many of Wieckhorst’s photographs appear in the yearbooks, as well. From her own solo exhibition in 1987 (*Begegnungen in Ateliers / Studio Meetings*), to documentation of performances and exhibition openings, EIGEN+ART’s fastidious archive is clearly indebted to this photographer. Müller bound the yearbooks, which as opposed to *Anschlag*’s characteristic whimsy and ad hoc material make-up followed a rather austere format of single-sided dot matrix texts and black-and-white photographs housed in a simple, unmarked cover.⁵³⁴ [Figure 4.7]

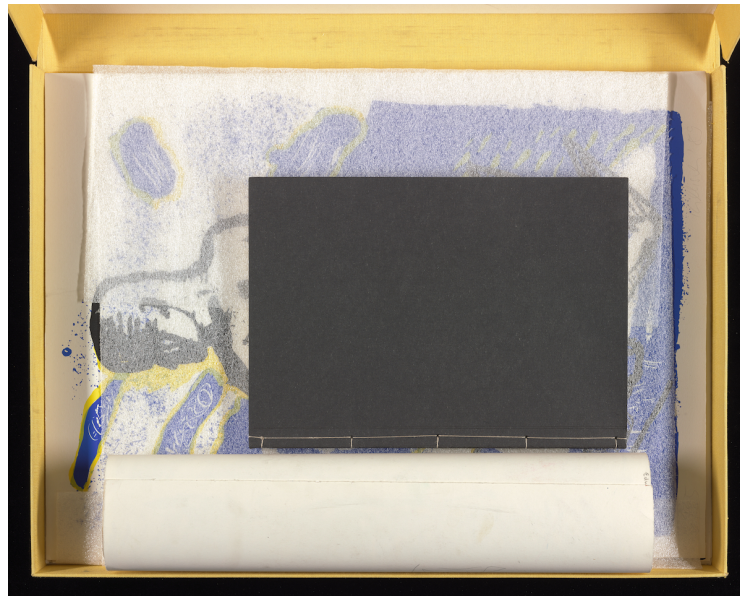
⁵³³ Knöfel, “Du fühlst dich unsterblich,” 113.

⁵³⁴ The first EIGEN+ART annual report, issued in late 1986, is distinctive in its lack of exhibition information on the gallery’s official precursor, the “Galerie am Körnerplatz.” Today, the official gallery history names Lybke’s home gallery—with its inaugural date of April 10, 1983—as the EIGEN+ART’s date of inception. An image of the address plate on Lybke’s Körnerplatz apartment likewise provides the name EIGEN+ART. See: Kaiser and Petzold, *Boheme und Diktatur*, 227.

[Figures 4.7 and 4.8. *Vier Jahre EIGEN+ART (Four Years of EIGEN+ART)*, 1989. Images courtesy of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University and the Archive of the EIGEN+ART Gallery / Private archive of Gerd Harry Lybke.]



[Figure 4.7. Yearbook, 1989. A4 paper, bound with string.]



[Figure 4.8. Artist portfolio, 1989. Dimensions and materials variable.]

Closer to the material variety of magazines like *Anschlag* are the boxed portfolios of original prints and photographs that EIGEN+ART produced in editions of twenty-five⁵³⁵ to accompany its annual reports. [Figure 4.8] Prints, listed at 39x53cm in at least two editions,⁵³⁶ range from full-color silkscreens to more understated lithographs. Black-and-white photographs, which are larger than the standard A6 or A7 images reproduced in the yearbooks, also comprise some of the portfolio's contents. Stored loosely, the original artworks were housed in large boxes with an inventory. The 1988 edition—the gallery's third portfolio—includes nineteen artists who had exhibited in EIGEN+ART between October 1987 and September 1988.⁵³⁷ The simplest work, made by the sculptor and filmmaker Jörg Herold, consists simply of a stamp that reads *KUNST WOFÜR? (Art, What For?)*. [Figure 4.9] The print contrasts starkly the ambitious installation Herold had produced for his solo exhibition at EIGEN+ART at the end of 1987. Titled *Bewusstsein oder für alle ist gesorgt (Sausage Consciousness or Everyone is Taken Care Of)* the on-site project included a large plaster sculpture (*Die Wurstmaschine / The Sausage Machine*) that wove its way through the gallery and culminated in an enormous meat grinder. [Figure 4.10] A film titled *Der Wurstfilm (The Sausage Film, 1987)* premiered at the exhibition opening. The seven-minute short shot on Super-8 black-and-white film

⁵³⁵ Some libraries and archives house yearbooks individually, suggesting that they could be purchased separately from the artist portfolios. A Stasi report, from March 17, 1987 indicates that yearbooks were produced in runs of fifty and were sold for 500-East German Marks apiece. It is unclear as to whether that price—which seems comparatively high, with respect to the cost of an issue of *Anschlag*—reflects the cost of the artwork as well. (BStU, MfS, BV Leipzig ZMA, AKG, 4974: 78)

⁵³⁶ This may have been standard size, but in a few cases, including a woodcut by Carsten Nicolai titled *Für EIGEN+ART (For EIGEN+ART)*, which appeared in the 1987/8 edition, the prints could be larger.

⁵³⁷ Only five unnamed artists from Tbilissi who had taken part in an uncharacteristically short group show of artists from Georgia were not included in the portfolio.

[Figures 4.9 and 4.10. Two works by Jörg Herold for EIGEN+ART, 1988.]



[Figure 4.9. Jörg Herold, *Kunst wofür?* (*Art, what for?*), 1988. 39x53cm, Silkscreen. From the EIGEN+ART artistic portfolio, 1988. Image courtesy of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, the artist, and the Archive of the EIGEN+ART Gallery / Private archive of Gerd Harry Lybke. © Jörg Herold.]



[Figure 4.10. Jörg Herold installing his exhibition *Bewusstsein oder für alle ist gesorgt* (*Sausage-Consciousness or Everyone is Taken Care Of*), November 27 – December 20, 1987, EIGEN+ART. Paper maché, wire, wood. Photographer unknown. Image from the archive of Uta Grundmann, reprinted on the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung website.]

captures a static image of a butcher shop observed from across a well-trafficked street. The work's title combines a play on words (in which Herold replaces the second "s" in *Bewusstsein*, "consciousness," with an "r" to make *Bewurstsein*) with an ostensible state socialist slogan. Thusly named, Herold's hyperbolic man-made sausage becomes an ironic tribute to a state unable to satisfy the material needs of its public. Herold's use of the close cognates of the German "*Wurst*" and the English "worst" is likewise emblematic of the symbolic language play characteristic of the contemporary poetry from the experimental scene.⁵³⁸ The artist's understated, but stillslogan-driven, contribution to the EIGEN+ART portfolio suggests Herold's investment in international, and especially conceptual, art practices. The message *Kunst wofür?*, as well as its plain design, makes immediate reference to the work of the East German mail artist Robert Rehfeldt whose globe-trotting postal exchanges were typically branded with trademark rubber stamps.⁵³⁹

Herold's affection for Joseph Beuys—a sentiment broadly shared across the experimental arts scene—is clearly referenced in the print, as well. It was indeed just a few months earlier in the spring of 1988 that EIGEN+ART put on its most well-known exhibition, *Nach Beuys* (After Beuys). Across a series of projects by several

⁵³⁸ See, for example, Gerhard Wolf, "gegen sprache mit sprache, mit-sprache gegen-sprache. Thesen mit Zitaten und Notizen zu einem literarischen Prozeß", in *Die andere Sprache. Neue DDR-Literatur der 80er Jahre*, eds. Heinz Ludwig Arnold and Gerhard Wolf (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 1990), 15 – 25. I have also published on this topic with regard to experimental photography in a 1980s East Berlin. Sara Blaylock, "Aufstand des Materials. Körperbilder im Prenzlauer Berg der 1980er Jahre" (A Material Revolt: Body Portraits in the Prenzlauer Berg of the 1980s) in *Gegenstimmen. Kunst in der DDR 1976 – 1989 (Voices of Dissent: Art in the GDR)*, ed. Christoph Tannert, 394 – 401 (Berlin: Deutsche Gesellschaft & Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2016), Exhibition catalog.

⁵³⁹ For more on Robert Rehfeldt and mail art in West and East Germany, see Rosa von der Schulenberg, ed. *Arte Postale. Bilderbriefe, Künstlerpostkarten, Mail Art* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 2013), Exhibition catalog.

artists, including three of the members of the performance collective the Auto-Perforation Artists, *Nach Beuys* represented a group reaction to the first and only official exhibition of work by Beuys held in East Germany. The exhibition took place ostensibly in response to popular demand, led in part by the influential Union of Fine Artist art historian Klaus Werner. Cultural officials nevertheless chose to show works on paper that preceded the artist's conceptual turn to radical politics in the late 1960s.⁵⁴⁰ The highly anticipated exhibition (named simply *Joseph Beuys*) thus skirted the controversy that may have ensued had cultural bureaucrats invited the West German artist's massive and often fragile installations or documentation from his social practice performances into the official exhibition hall at the Leipzig art school.⁵⁴¹ This likewise further underscored the necessity for the GDR's experimental artists to self-organize. Herold's message "Art, what for?" spoke a language of global conceptualism and ideological critique disavowed in public discourse. Its inclusion in the EIGEN+ART yearbook further defines that message as a kind of cultural dispatch meant to reach artists, critics, and art consumers well beyond East Germany.⁵⁴²

⁵⁴⁰ Grundmann, Uta, Klaus Michael and Susanne Seufert, *Revolution im geschlossenen Raum*, 93.

⁵⁴¹ The exhibition likewise may have been programmed to compensate for the state's refusal in 1984 to admit Beuys entry into the country to participate in a collaborative performance with Eugen Blume and Eugen Monden. See the previous chapter for more discussion on this incident.

⁵⁴² Importantly, this single example counters the informed opinion of Aleš Erjavec who maintains that postmodernism, though important across the Eastern Bloc, never impacted the GDR. In 2003, he wrote, "In East Germany, political repression was so strong that the only artists who succeeded in developing postmodern art were those who emigrated to West Germany" (25). Today, nearly fifteen years later I wish to tacitly rewrite East Germany into this history not only through the example of Joseph Beuys' clear influence on both official and unofficial cultural practice, but by stressing the significance of conceptual artistic practices as paramount to a late GDR. Aleš Erjavec, ed. *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition. Politicized Art Under Late Socialism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2003).

Lybke describes the annual yearbooks and portfolios as a kind of “*Legitimationsarbeit*” (work of legitimation) for both his gallery and for artists in the GDR.⁵⁴³ The production of annual reports served a long-term purpose of globalizing (or at least de-regionalizing) the work of artists in the GDR. That much is in fact made clear in a note Lybke included with copies of the first annual report from 1986, which he sent as publicity to his contacts in the West.⁵⁴⁴ [Figures 4.11 and 4.12] The note appears on the back of an EIGEN+ART postcard, which bears an abstract design printed in muted silkscreen tones.⁵⁴⁵ The simple visual branding used on the card, which mirrors the look of the gallery announcements still in use today, is subtle testimony to the consistency and longevity of Lybke’s vision. In his note, Lybke briefly introduces the gallery as a studio devised to support local artists and to “inform people about art made outside of the GDR.” A frank plea follows: “Because I am often lacking in material, I ask you to please help me. Thank you in advance.” Lybke’s efforts paid off; his gallery would soon reap the benefits of a reputation in West Germany via contacts with art historians and gallerists, including the organizers of the KAOS gallery in Cologne, which would eventually gift Lybke with a video camera and computer.⁵⁴⁶ Moreover, the yearbooks and portfolios became important sources of revenue for the self- and artist-funded gallery. Referring to the stereotypes that the West had of the Eastern Bloc (which are still prevalent today), Lybke explains the process thus: “[Museum directors in the West] had a duty to support the

⁵⁴³ Gerd Harry Lybke, personal interview, March 25, 2015.

⁵⁴⁴ Hegewisch, “Im Dienste der Unsterblichkeit,” 6.

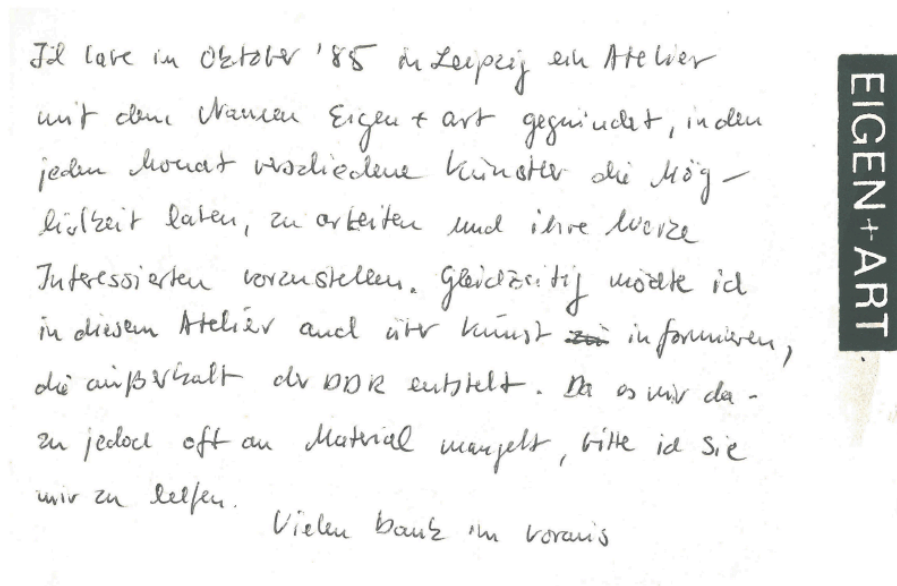
⁵⁴⁵ EIGEN+ART archive, Potsdam, H 10 (1987).

⁵⁴⁶ Gerd Harry Lybke, personal interview, March 17, 2015.

[Figures 4.11 and 4.12. Postcard front and back with message from Gerd Harry “Judy” Lybke, sent with first EIGEN+ART yearbook, Leipzig, 1987. Thirteen like cards are held in the EIGEN+ART archive. Images courtesy of the Archive of the EIGEN+ART Gallery / Private archive of Gerd Harry Lybke.]



[Figure 4.11. Front.]



[Figure 4.12. Back.]

East. But they were afraid. They didn't want to drive through the rough streets of Leipzig, to lose their way on the 'dark side' and get spooked by Russian tanks. And then a catalogue would arrive in the mail. The reaction: 'Looks good. From Leipzig. I'll take it, without running any risk of my car breaking down [over there].'⁵⁴⁷ The "braver" bunch did, nevertheless, make the short trip to the GDR. A few major cultural events in Leipzig including the annual trade fair and documentary film festival, which eased travel restrictions from the West, accelerated the gallery's growing reputation abroad. That kind of exposure brought not just financial support, but also a kind of diplomatic immunity; the East German state's fear of the "power of speech"⁵⁴⁸ extended to bad press abroad.⁵⁴⁹

EIGEN+ART im Gespräch as counterproduction

In 1988, EIGEN+ART teamed up with *Anschlag* to produce a singular special issue on the gallery, titled *EIGEN+ART im Gespräch (EIGEN+ART in Conversation)*. Though the text, which is highly critical though nevertheless productive, may be analyzed as a high point of the kinds of multi-media (or "intermedia"⁵⁵⁰) exchange that many identify as fundamental to the period, the special issue on EIGEN+ART has never before been interrogated in studies of GDR culture. This absence is conspicuous, but likewise reflects a tendency for scholars to suggest the significance of multi-media practice, but to nevertheless divide the study of East

⁵⁴⁷ Hegewisch, "Im Dienste der Unsterblichkeit," 6.

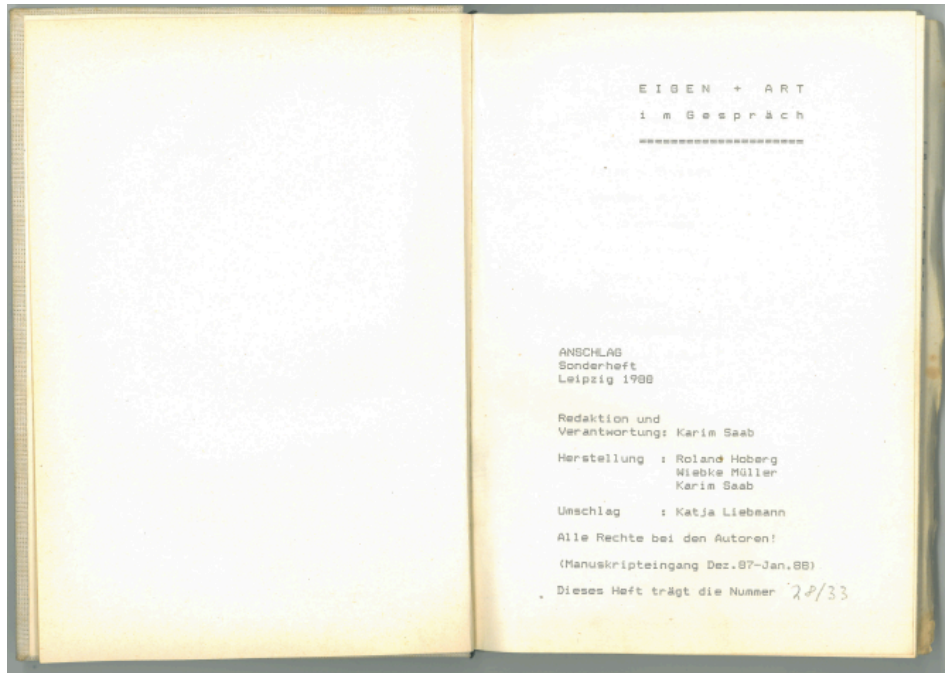
⁵⁴⁸ Bathrick, *Powers of Speech*.

⁵⁴⁹ Knöfel, "Du fühlst dich unsterblich," 115.

⁵⁵⁰ See the previous chapter for a discussion about the adoption of the term intermedia to describe multi-media practices in a late GDR.

German counterculture by media. My analysis seeks to remedy that division. Moreover, the 1988 issue is important because it represents a turning point in East German samizdat. Rarely before had unofficial magazines published the experimental scene's debate culture. As I have suggested, typically these publications must be read as representations of livelier conversations off page. In this regard, part of what makes the coexistence of *Anschlag* and EIGEN+ART so compelling is the way in which both projects weave in and out of each other, not just in this special issue from 1988, but across their histories. For example, *Anschlag*'s coverage of artists and exhibitions tends to have been culled from EIGEN+ART exhibition openings. The placement of these texts alongside more political or theoretical texts likewise insists upon a political dimension that Judy Lybke claims he intentionally avoided. Nevertheless, he admits that even though his gallery "was never about politics, but about living, that alone made it political."⁵⁵¹ Here Václav Havel's antipolitical attitude is explanatory. Yet, both *Anschlag* and EIGEN+ART oriented themselves at more than just state politics. Their multi-layered politics simultaneously rejected the status quo of both official and unofficial culture. For *Anschlag*, the decision to selectively print a heterogeneous array of texts challenged the expectations of state culture, which prohibited autonomous and dissenting voices from being published. It also offended certain people's expectations for an autonomous culture that was open and unrestricted.

⁵⁵¹ Knöfel, "Du fühlst dich unsterblich," 113.



[Figure 4.13. *EIGEN+ART im Gespräch* (*EIGEN+ART in Conversation*), frontispiece, Leipzig, 1988. Image courtesy of the Archive of the EIGEN+ART Gallery / Private archive of Gerd Harry Lybke.]

The intricacies of this controversy are represented in *EIGEN+ART im Gespräch*. Cloth-bound and unmarked, the special issue is visually quite understated within the scope of *Anschlag*'s production. It looks, in short, more like a paperback than a piece of samizdat. [Figure 4.13] About forty reports⁵⁵² by artists, writers, gallery visitors, art historians, and even West Germans on the topic of EIGEN+ART fill the issue's several dozen pages. A lengthy and candid interview between the issue's editor, *Anschlag* co-founder Karim Saab, and the gallerist, Judy Lybke, closes the issue. All texts appear on single-sides of paper, and are typed in a uniform font

⁵⁵² The number of contributions, according to my research in the EIGEN+ART archive as well as at the Humboldt University's Archiv für Regionalliteratur / Insitut für deutsche Literatur, varied per issue.

printed out on a dot matrix print out.⁵⁵³ The replacement of typewritten for computer-processed texts achieves a new visual uniformity to the *Anschlag* format that mirrors the look and design of the gallery's own publications.

Seven black-and-white snapshots inserted at random in the issue trace the journey from Leipzig's main train station to the EIGEN+ART gallery in the south of the city. The trip takes about a half hour and is delineated by digital time-stamps that begin the journey from the station at 14:53 and end at the gallery's front door at 15:21. Nowhere does the text refer to these images, aside from the title page,⁵⁵⁴ which names two photographers: Eckard Stüwe and Uwe Walter. Today the photographs may appear to reference surveillance imagery. For example, in image number three, a portly gentleman stands in a wet plaza carrying two plastic shopping bags. [Figure 4.14] The doors to a tram (entered sometime after image number two) frame his rotund figure as he stares into the distance, unaware of his observer. Image number four is shot off the tram and on a rain-dampened street. [Figure 4.15] The photographer trails behind a woman carrying a parcel. She crosses a street, and is flanked by tall unrenovated apartment buildings (*Altbau*) in the working class neighborhood of Connewitz. Suggestive as they may be, in the context of the publication these images are more documentarian than they are state-critical. The seven images are orientation points—flags on a visual map that augment written or

⁵⁵³ Karim Saab gained access to an Apple computer via an acquaintance. Some years later, after reading his Stasi file, Saab learned that this man was actually working for the state secret police. Though he printed "*EIGEN+ART im Gespräch*" with him, Saab assures that "this dubious man had no influence over its content." (Karim Saab, e-mail message to author, February 23, 2016)

⁵⁵⁴ Even this designation was inconsistent. The two copies I have consulted (one held in the Humboldt University in Berlin and the other held in the EIGEN+ART archive) have different title pages; the former does not include the names of the photographers.

[Figures 4.14 and 4.15. Eckard Stüwe OR Uwe Walter photographs in *EIGEN+ART im Gespräch (EIGEN+ART in Conversation)* 1988, Leipzig. Images courtesy of the Archive of the EIGEN+ART Gallery / Private archive of Gerd Harry Lybke.]



[Figure 4.14. Image #3 in sequence.]



[Figure 4.15. Image #4 in sequence.]

verbal instruction. Image number two seems to say: “Take the tram that faces away from the tall white building,” while image number five offers: “Hug the curve to your right two minutes after disembarking.” And so on. The seven-part path maps an easy-to-follow trail from city center to artistic enclave. This is the mapping system that brings the out-of-town guest safely to the EIGEN+ART doorstep. In this regard, it contributes quite literally to the material-based network that spread the word about the experimental scene. That the gallery’s front door remains closed in image number seven underscores the understatement of the visual documentation. The material ruse belies nothing of the contents shielded behind closed doors.

State tactics as a sign of decay: EIGEN+ART on the Stasi horizon

The official art magazine *Bildende Kunst* published at least one article on EIGEN+ART in a 1988 issue of *Bildende Kunst*, a move toward state legitimation that precipitated Lybke’s official VBK membership later that year.⁵⁵⁵ The most exhaustive—if clearly pernicious—official perspective on EIGEN+ART comes from the Ministry for State Security (i.e., Stasi). It is not worth indulging in too many of these records. Their authors were motivated and fallible. In fact, in the hundreds of pages that make up his Stasi file Lybke notes a tendency to either downplay or overstate the radicality of his gallery: “In the reports the Stasi people sometimes kept things out, sometimes made things up. We couldn’t seem too dangerous or too harmless, otherwise they would have been pulled off the case. They clearly didn’t

⁵⁵⁵ Gabriele Muschter, “Eigen+Art ist eigen,” *Bildende Kunst* (January 1988): 43.

want that. The gallery, these openings—this was a great job for them. Always something going on. A good atmosphere.”⁵⁵⁶ The Stasi reports I examined revealed a greater preoccupation with the potential money the gallery was making than with its programing, and suggest that the security apparatus leaned on tax code, rather than political infraction, to censure experimental culture: “The MfS is aware that substantial portions of the catalog, in particular the texts, were printed in West Germany. In that case, the L.⁵⁵⁷ is using his extensive contacts to NSW-citizens (*nichtsozialistische Wirtschaft*, non-socialist economic zone). It may be assumed that the L. is making a living through the sale of these catalogs, and in so doing is breaking and working around existing laws for the production and distribution of printed goods.”⁵⁵⁸ The report reveals a state grappling to control its public through legalese rather than appeals to the higher moral order of state socialism. Here, the function of official censorship—which had from the late 1970s onward sought to control print culture by implementing exaggerated tax laws against publishing work in the West⁵⁵⁹—returns us to the East German public sphere’s existential crisis.

In fact, EIGEN+ART never saw concerted efforts towards legal closure. Like samizdat publishers, gallerists were markedly unperturbed by the state in the late 1980s. Fiedler defines this as a paradox of the GDR’s final generation of gallerists, who despite their lack of interest in working within the system of official state

⁵⁵⁶ Knöfel, “Du fühlst dich unsterblich,” 114.

⁵⁵⁷ Stasi reports frequently referred to subjects by the first letters of their last named, preceded by a definite article. Elsewhere I have argued that this shorthand suggests an attempt by the East German state to make their reports appear more objective or scientific. Sara Blaylock, “La femme de leurs rêves: Cornelia Schleime et les archives de la Stasi,” *Gradhiva*, 24 (December 2016): 21 – 49.

⁵⁵⁸ BStU, MfS, BV Leipzig ZMA AKG, Nr. 4974: 79.

⁵⁵⁹ Woods, *Opposition in the GDR under Honecker*, 136.

culture, nevertheless compelled cultural bureaucracies and inspired the legalization of autonomous galleries. For example, a “small galleries and young art” working group in the VBK led by André Meier offers persuasive evidence for the state’s interest in expanding its gallery system to include independent spaces.⁵⁶⁰ Moreover, Fiedler suggests that the high profile of EIGEN+ART helped to inspire the state to turn toward more cooperative work with this and other private galleries.⁵⁶¹ Here cultural diplomacy certainly played a role, as did Lybke’s own consistent efforts to be private and legal, autonomous and conscientious of the imminent threat of state oppression. From its outset the gallery always maintained one foot in the official and one foot outside of it. At first this was a mode of self-preservation. Lybke exhibited only VBK-artists, would not advertise his gallery with posters, etc. “This,” Lybke would say in his 1988 interview with *Anschlag*, “was no different than today: begin, work concretely, carry on. Always keeping in mind the work ahead, not temporary but long-term thinking, always planning and finding ways forward, exploring possibilities to ensure that the thing would survive.”⁵⁶² The attitude did noticeably change, however. As he claimed a foothold, Lybke detached himself from the protection of state artists, including the preeminent group behind the “1st Leipzig Autumn Salon” exhibition, who had hoped that his gallery would remain collectively run. Although he insists that he “let himself be advised [by others]”⁵⁶³ Lybke always had the final

⁵⁶⁰ See Fiedler, *Kunst im Korridor*, 282 – 289 and the VBK report on small galleries from April 20, 1989, “Kunstwissenschaftliches Kolloquium ‘Beobachtungen,’ ” Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin, Verband-Bildender-Künstler-Archiv, Zentral-Vorstand, no. 1086.

⁵⁶¹ Fiedler, *Kunst im Korridor*, 284.

⁵⁶² Saab, “Gespräch mit Judy Lybke,” n.p.

⁵⁶³ Saab, “Gespräch mit Judy Lybke,” n.p.

word. He claimed sole responsibility for every achievement. Failures—the quality of the exhibitions, as Herbert Lange frankly observes, “could quite easily be debated”⁵⁶⁴—were likewise in his jurisdiction. This strategy inspired a wide range of responses.

Sui generis: A counter-public in dialogue

The reports on the gallery that fill the majority of *EIGEN+ART im Gespräch* reflect the tension, anticipation, and expectation that surrounded the gallery. Released in 1988, *EIGEN+ART im Gespräch* presents a discursive, multi-vantage perspective on the success and failures of the gallery thus far. This is no celebration of an autonomous gallery’s success. Rather, the issue of *Anschlag* represents a full spectrum of opinion from laudatory encouragement: “EIGEN+ART in its humanistic-pluralistic character knows no bounds”⁵⁶⁵ to cautious optimism: “E+A is not flawless, and is as such vital,”⁵⁶⁶ to unambiguous censure: “E+A is an esoteric business for Judy, a kind of masturbation.”⁵⁶⁷

Karim Saab, who initiated and edited the issue, had envisioned that it would serve as a kind of open forum for debate.⁵⁶⁸ He reflects, “I am particularly proud of this issue, which practiced a kind of democratic expression that was not possible in

⁵⁶⁴ Lange, *EIGEN+ART*, 35.

⁵⁶⁵ Klaus Rudolf, “die von us zu gründende, multimediale dadistische kunstbewegung EIGEN+ART in ihrem humanistisch-pluralistischem charakter kennt keine grenzen,” *EIGEN+ART im Gespräch*, n.p.

⁵⁶⁶ Gabriel Muschter, “20 eigene Sätze über EIGEN+ART,” *EIGEN+ART im Gespräch*, n.p.

⁵⁶⁷ Günther Huniat, “Das läuft mir alles eine Nummer zu zahm ab!,” *EIGEN+ART im Gespräch*, n.p.

⁵⁶⁸ Saab would also pioneer a second, even more ambitious, special issue on photography in September 1988. “Foto-Anschlag” featured original prints by 32 photographers and texts by as many art historians and critics. The photographer Karin Wieckhorst, among others, also played a decisive role in the production of “Foto-Anschlag.” For a comprehensive account of this project, see Anne Martin, ed. *Foto-Anschlag: Vier Generationen ostdeutscher Fotografen* (Leipzig: Seemann, 2001).

the GDR outside the church.⁵⁶⁹ [The text] was meant to be a discussion platform,” adding that “there were no models” for this kind of publication.⁵⁷⁰ In fact, *EIGEN+ART im Gespräch* came as a direct response to the state’s confiscation of the gallery’s visitor book in 1986. “Since then,” Lybke would reflect in his interview with Saab, “I have not laid a book out again, because I cannot take responsibility for what is written in there.”⁵⁷¹ *EIGEN+ART im Gespräch*, to a small extent, remedied the loss of this platform, an ostensible host for sharing sentiment about the space with a broader—and to some extent unanticipated—public. It is significant that *EIGEN+ART im Gespräch* was *Anschlag*’s highest print run. At 99 (and with an estimated ten to twenty readers per issue), the audience was fairly significant, and potentially diverse.

Many contributors to the issue reported a skeptical, but supportive attitude. They urged the gallery to take more risks, to facilitate more debate, and to exhibit a broader range of artists. Curator Christoph Tannert’s sharp-tongued observations are indicative of the ambivalence of many of the gallery’s supporters: “Will E+A continue to bumble along as before, without competition, as a sterile test site, sooner or later coming dangerously close to the edge of self satisfaction?”⁵⁷² Here Tannert synthesizes the greatest problematic of the period: although many artists in the GDR yearned for greater artistic autonomy, many understood that creative sovereignty was meaningless in a vacuum. This problem is ultimately a problem with the scope and

⁵⁶⁹ For more on the unique role that the Protestant church played in East German society, see: Fulbrook, “Render Unto Caesar?” in *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 87 – 128.

⁵⁷⁰ Karim Saab, e-mail message to author, February 23, 2016.

⁵⁷¹ Saab, “Gespräch mit Judy Lybke,” n.p.

⁵⁷² Christoph Tannert, “Als ob alles alright wäre,” *EIGEN+ART im Gespräch*, n.p.

variety of the East German public sphere. While publications like *Anschlag* provided a space to host open debate and dialogue about art and its intersections with politics and aesthetic philosophy, a gallery like EIGEN+ART assumed the role of an autonomous commons. This was the space where debate took place in person, and, more importantly, was enacted through the assembly of bodies (and artworks) prohibited by official culture. It was not only the variety and content of the art it placed on display, but EIGEN+ART's novel use of public space that performed its dissent. Moreover, it was gallerist Judy Lybke's attention to a bigger picture for his gallery that garnered him a kind of legitimacy and notoriety that the state ultimately found hard to ignore.

Nevertheless, Lybke would be the first to admit the failure of his gallery—or, better said, its inadequacy. In his seventeen-page interview with Karim Saab, Lybke returns frequently to the dialogical vision he has for his gallery, and the inability to achieve that vision without other people willing to take the same kind of risks he had taken back in 1983—in other words “to go out on a limb” with him. Although the workshop status of the gallery was clearly a clever way of circumnavigating legal infraction, a principle of creating a space for open exchange, dialogue, and debate about art was also a sincere goal of Lybke's. However, the gallery remains insufficient, he argues, in part because artists and their publics are not using it to its fullest extent. Few artists, he says, use the open gallery hours as a time to engage with visitors. Visitors do not grab the opportunity to read the many magazines, including *Anschlag*, that he had laid out for them. “Maybe it is just a typical phenomenon under

our current circumstances that open spaces are used too little.”⁵⁷³ There is something generous in this perspective, which suggests that perhaps the East German public needed a little more time to grow accustomed to autonomous space, to know how to engage. Similarly, a reticence to interact with one another suggests a kind of traumatic acculturation, that is to say, that turning inward had become a defensive strategy in a country whose public sphere was more performative than sincere in its collectivity. Lybke appeals to greater competition, more opportunities to prove his work wrong and to build an alternative platform through action as much as discussion. Echoes of both Christoph Tannert’s wariness about EIGEN+ART, as well as his more general observations of a passive, dangerously self-satisfied public cited earlier in this chapter, reverberate.

Lybke eventually summarizes the need thus: “Taking inventory is important, whereby I mean more than documentation. This interview is for me the kind of inventory that I mean, and should continue.”⁵⁷⁴ What is needed, he continues, are “interviews in which the voiceless can develop their voices and the ideologues do not abuse their dominance and everyone seeks to acknowledge the uniqueness of the other.” To which, Saab asks, “A world at home, instead of being at home in the world?” Lybke’s response is quieting: “This question is not at all funny. E+A cannot be self-satisfied.” The interview wraps up quickly thereafter, with Lybke emphasizing a necessity for more publications like *EIGEN+ART im Gespräch*: “The model must be made even more public, so that people can see, that this is working, so that in other

⁵⁷³ Saab, “Gespräch mit Judy Lybke,” n.p.

⁵⁷⁴ *ibid.*

places it will be adopted.” To an important extent, that kind of dialogue was beginning to happen in the late 1980s publications. In 1989, its second and final year, *Liane*—notable for its coverage of the visual arts as well as its pointed thematic issues—dedicated its last issue to the subject of alternative galleries. EIGEN+ART was one of six spaces to be analyzed. Were it not for the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989—the same month that the issue of *Liane* came out—perhaps this text would have contributed to the movement Lybke had envisioned.

Material impacts and long-term resonance

In November 1988, Judy Lybke was accepted into the VBK as an autodidact art historian. The status would ensure a future of greater permissibility for his gallery, as well as a wider spectrum of publicity. “I applied as an art historian. This was kind of just for fun...It’s certainly superficial; I am clearly not an art historian,” he would reflect in a 1991 interview.⁵⁷⁵ If a man like Lybke, who only five years prior had greeted his guests to an art exhibition in nothing but a bathrobe, could be admitted to the official Union of Fine Artists, then the stakes of membership, as well as the control that the state believed it could officially have over national cultural production, had clearly shifted. It is of course useful—and accurate—to examine this kind of permissibility as a form of instrumentalization. There is no doubt some truth to this. Yet, Lybke’s admission that he had applied to the VBK in part as a joke

⁵⁷⁵ Cited in Lange, *EIGEN+ART*, 49.

suggests that the system was not so much working him as it was he who was working the system.

The editors of *Anschlag* posed a different set of affronts, which likewise demonstrate both a lack of concern for state power and an innovative use of its systems of oppression. First, the publication deployed the language of the state iconoclastically and extra-symbolically to make its intervention into the official public sphere more legible. This kind of revisionist use of language is a signature aesthetic move among the experimental writers of the period,⁵⁷⁶ and which I have written about elsewhere with regard to portrait photography from East Berlin.⁵⁷⁷ Here the egg carton cover of issue number nine makes that affront material. The eggs are plentiful, but useless without their protective casing, a product itself, which in Wiebke Müller's artful and non-productive use as a magazine cover summons the state's non-adaptive consumer conditions. Karim Saab reflects, "Wiebke Müller's covers caused quite a stir. She picked up ordinary products from our world and used sandpaper, the Leipzig city map, Jacquard loom cards, flattened egg cartons, or paint trays."⁵⁷⁸ The everyday material grounded the often esoteric or theoretical contents of *Anschlag* in a more quotidian reality—unsubtle reminders of the context that made this experimental form of publication a necessity.

A second, clearly more individualized, affront by the editors of *Anschlag* had far more ambiguous, even perhaps contradictory ends. By 1988 two of the magazine's

⁵⁷⁶ See discussion of the language play embedded in the title "*Bewusstsein oder für alle ist gesorgt*" (Jörg Herold) in the preceding, as well as footnote 538 in this document.

⁵⁷⁷ Blaylock, "Aufstand des Materials."

⁵⁷⁸ Saab, "Gespräch mit Judy Lybke," n.p.

three original co-founders had legally emigrated from the GDR into West Germany. Angelika Klüssendorf left in 1985, rather early in the *Anschlag* history and before the editorial vision had evolved. Karim Saab's exit in May 1989 summarily stopped the production of the magazine, including the production of three special issues, which were already in the planning stages.⁵⁷⁹ Leaving the country legally required submitting an exit application. Saab was one of tens of thousands who left East Germany during the so-called *Ausreisewelle* (wave of emigration), which began in 1977, peaked in 1984, and continued to the late 1980s.⁵⁸⁰ Saab was also one of countless citizens from the GDR's experimental creative milieu who left, causing a kind of brain drain of creativity. Compounded with the cyclonic end to the country, which began with a series of public protests in October 1989 and culminated in the state's dissolution in October 1990, a canon of experimental art from 1980s East Germany has been slow to emerge as more than a kind of anomaly relevant to Germany's divided history. This is not a place to lament the loss of this history, but rather to consider how a kind of insider/outsider attitude where East German artists were often preparing a move West—or at least bemoaning the lack of services, materials, and prospects available to them in the GDR—influenced creative practice. This kind of double-consciousness has been well documented, particularly by Barbara Felsmann and Annett Gröschner in their aptly titled *Durchgangszimmer Prenzlauer*

⁵⁷⁹ One was to have reported on visits to West Germany by East Germans, which had recently been made more possible. Two others were to have looked at the citizen opposition movement in Poland and Czechoslovakia. Florian Berg, "Anschlag," 130.

⁵⁸⁰ Robin Brunold, "'Abstimmung mit den Füßen' — Die Ausreisewelle der 80er Jahre und Flucht aus der DDR," " Accessed June 15, 2016. <http://www.geschichte-lernen.net/ausreisewelle-und-flucht-ddr-80er-jahre/>. See also, Schmidt, *Ausgebürgert*.

Berg (*The Prenzlauer Berg Corridor*, 2012). Their book gathers first-hand accounts from a few dozen people living in the East Berlin neighborhood of Prenzlauer Berg. Its title refers to the status this neglected and working class neighborhood achieved as a kind of symbolic transfer station before East Germans moved to West Germany.⁵⁸¹

To be clear, not all of East Germany's experimental artists sought to emigrate. Key figures named in this chapter, including Judy Lybke, André Meier, Christoph Tannert, Uwe Warnke, Claudia Reichardt, Karin Wieckhorst, and Gabriele Kachold remained in the GDR. Lybke wryly claims to have filled out an *Ausreiseantrag*, but admits he never submitted it.⁵⁸² More than just a preparation for all eventualities, the emigration papers were also material evidence of his recklessness and his willingness to begin anew at any cost. Furthermore, Lybke consistently stresses the need to be able to show something for himself. The gallery afforded the greatest amount of opportunities for this kind of legitimation. From my perspective, the threat of incrimination, circumstances that may have forced him to flee the state, and the possibility of having to start all over again in the West actually propelled the development of his work. In this regard, then, the East German counterproduction was as both for the present as it was for the future—a kind of filling in for the lack of possibilities granted by official culture, with a simultaneous belief that someday the GDR would, to some degree, cease to exist. No one could have predicted how true that would soon be.

⁵⁸¹ Barbara Felsmann and Annett Gröschner, eds., *Durchgangszimmer Prenzlauer Berg. Eine Berliner Künstlersozialgeschichte der 1970er und 1980er Jahre in Selbstauskünften* (Berlin: Lukas Verlag, 2012).

⁵⁸² Gerd Harry Lybke, personal interview, March 17, 2015.

The attention to the imminent loss of country (and countrymen) in some sense predicted the destiny of East Germany's experimental culture in the post-GDR period. It is indeed significant that very few collective projects, galleries, and publications continued after reunification. Of course, the German term for the dissolution of East Germany is the *Wende*, the turn. In many ways, that turn has been a turn away. Karim Saab, for example, betrays an apocryphal impulse when describing the significance of his work with *Anschlag*: "After '89 I just didn't deal with that anymore. Back then it was just important to do something. This was part of my self-worth."⁵⁸³ Nearly all other East German samizdat and independent galleries folded. As Christoph Tannert explains, the necessity for this kind of communication and spontaneous—and I would add defensive—production had lost its urgency: "It just didn't make sense anymore. Why should people produce such publications in a free society? In a free society, these are nothing more than luxury goods."⁵⁸⁴ Stressing the significance of the publications as a platform for artists, he continues that after the reunification "there was no longer the need for an exchange of ideas, or this attitude about language, discourse, images, and so on."⁵⁸⁵

Writing in 1995, Marc Silberman lauded the continued influence of East Germany's "self-managed artistic and cultural projects" that took hold in urban centers, including Tacheles, the Kulturbrauerei, and Pfefferberg in Berlin (East).⁵⁸⁶ He continues, "The fact that administration and distribution of resources was

⁵⁸³ Florian Berg, "Initiativgruppe Hoffnung DDR. Gespräch mit Karim Saab," *Berliner Hefte zur literarischen Lebens* 4 (2001): 135.

⁵⁸⁴ Christoph Tannert, personal interview, May 11, 2015.

⁵⁸⁵ Christoph Tannert, personal interview, May 11, 2015.

⁵⁸⁶ Silberman, "Problematizing," 18.

unpredictable in the GDR's planned society meant that learning from experience had very little value. Everyday activities were dominated by informal negotiation, not by formalized procedures. This became a kind of collective practice that allowed a wide margin for creative nonconformity in practical matters, yet it was unable to assert itself in official institutional spaces.⁵⁸⁷ In the two decades since Silberman published his text, Tacheles has closed, and the Kulturbrauerei and Pfefferberg are now privatized meeting spaces for drinking, dancing, dining, and shopping with cultural activities a minor part of programming.⁵⁸⁸ Silberman's optimism is not to be diminished; indeed, writing in the midst of the very polemical period of German reunification, his efforts to find some kind of valence to the East German experience for a post-Cold War Germany are commendable. The problem with his interpretation rests in its emphasis on an unfulfilled desire for alternative culture to "assert itself in official institutional spaces." Indeed, as the cases of *Anschlag* and EIGEN+ART demonstrate, East Germany's experimental culture aimed to intersect, but not redefine the official public sphere—to become a discursive foil to the state, without jeopardizing creative or social autonomy. Moreover, as evident in the way that Judy Lybke instrumentalized cultural bureaucracy, crossovers with official culture were often made only when clear benefits were in sight. Although my examples have been slight, the cases of this use of the state's apparatus to support experimental art are expansive. To name but a few in closing: the clever use of cultural centers as legal

⁵⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸⁸ The recently opened "Alltag in der DDR" (Everyday Culture in the GDR) exhibition in the Kulturbrauerei's history museum marks a shift, but nevertheless does very little to represent the significance of its Prenzlauer Berg location to the GDR's experimental culture of the 1980s.

hosts for experimental culture—including the *Kreiskulturhaus* (Circle Cultural Center) in Treptow just outside Berlin, the *Permanente Kunstkonferenz* (Permanent Art Conference) in summer 1989 in which dozens of performance artists were showcased in tandem with the annual regional art exhibition, as well as the many state-run galleries—including *Galerie Nord* (Gallery North) in Dresden where the Auto-Perforation Artists installed rotting cow's feet in 1989, and the unconventional use of art schools to launch and ultimately professionally bind experimental artists to the Union of Fine Artists. A litany of activities—many of which early on did see defeat—became too much for the state to handle, even with seemingly unlimited resources for state security.

It is then, perhaps, the fact that countercultures did not face the risk of being co-opted in a way that Oskar Negt, Alexander Kluge, and Nancy Fraser warn against in capitalist contexts, which sets the East German experimental arts scene apart. In other words, is it at all possible to envision a future where DIY culture does not eventually produce a product line? The loss of this possibility in a post-socialist world, and the loss of a more complex understanding of this history are equally lamentable. Addressing the former, it is quite difficult to imagine revising the role of capital in art and culture today without falling into the traps of lauding isolationist groups. Indeed, we must never forget that East Germany may have defined itself as a kind of democracy, but it did not grant its citizens the rights to governmental oversight or meaningful participation in national politics that are foundational to western democracy. DIY was then by necessity improvisational, and not at all

anarchic (or libertarian, or vigilante, or righteous). What is left then is the significant role that the writing of history plays in shaping understandings of what was once possible—what citizens did to make a world for themselves that was meaningful, so they could be both at home in the world and build a world at home.

Conclusion. **East Germany as Archive**

Experimentation affixed to context

An implied contextual necessity foregrounds GDR-era art practices. Namely, the photography, performance art, films, events, collaborations, publications, and galleries described in this dissertation were all products of East Germany, both implicitly and explicitly. This has, of course, been a central component of my argument. The defining attachment of experimental culture to state culture is evident in the ways in which it changed—both on individual and greater social scales—in the wake of the GDR’s opening to the West in 1989. Although all members of the cast of characters I explore pursued a practice after 1989—and many did so without leaving their homes in the former East—the direction of the creative investment as well as the range of success varies considerably.

Many artists, including Thomas Florschuetz and Cornelia Schleime, had already left the GDR well before the massive social movement that led to the country’s rapid demise in 1989. After moving to West Berlin in 1988, Florschuetz developed his already quiet, introspective, and almost scientific photography into even deeper camera-enabled close-examination of the world, particularly in moments of transition, such as water droplets condensing on a glass or light passing through skin or flower petals. Schleime, a 1984 émigre, had returned to painting in her new West Berlin environment. Like Florschuetz, she quickly seized the opportunity to travel and conduct artist residencies abroad. Gino Hahnemann also enjoyed the improved mobility afforded by East Germany’s open (and then dissolved) borders.

His film practice, which had already been on the wane as early as the late 1980s, never really recovered. Nevertheless, he did make a number of videos, specifically around the subject of Berlin's gay scene. In fact, according to his partner, Matteo Fischer, Hahnemann had some difficulty adjusting to the new competitive realities of the "freed" East.⁵⁸⁹ It became more difficult to get strangers to collaborate with him on his projects, and the attendance at screenings, exhibitions, and readings also waned as a seemingly limitless world of options suddenly oversaturated the scene, making its erstwhile coherence no longer necessary, or even relevant. Likewise, as I argued in the previous chapter, the rapid end to most of East Germany's underground magazines may be attributed to a lack of necessity in a democratic context where the free exchange of ideas is a central tenet.

The shift from a socialist to a capitalist economic system was for some an existential shock, for others an opportunity. Gundula Schulze, who upon the invitation of her mentor Robert Frank moved immediately to New York City after the wall fell, described a suspicion of the careerism she witnessed among artists in her new capitalist context.⁵⁹⁰ The social documentation characteristic of her long-term East German projects came abruptly to an end. Her photos became more lyrical and abstract, atmospheric and indefinite. After just under two years in the United States, and with some marked success⁵⁹¹ she left for Cairo. In Egypt, Schulze's investigations into people, community, and living under political and cultural restraint

⁵⁸⁹ Matthias Fischer, personal interview, November 28, 2016.

⁵⁹⁰ Gundula Schulze Eldowy, personal interview, July 27, 2015.

⁵⁹¹ Including gallery representation at PACE gallery, exhibitions in the US and worldwide, and sales to the Museum of Modern Art's photography collection.

and the weight of history returned in her photography. Judy Lybke, on the other hand, hastily dove into the newly opened art market. EIGEN+ART remained in Leipzig (but moved to a more visible space in the center of town), and he soon set up a second space in Berlin-Mitte. In fact, Lybke's efforts to reinvigorate the former East Berlin neighborhood helped to establish Mitte as the commercial gallery hotspot it remains to this day. Similar efforts to expand his EIGEN+ART enterprise internationally—with forays in New York City and Tokyo—ultimately failed. Nevertheless, the success of EIGEN+ART today, which is one of Germany's top commercial galleries, is clearly indebted to Lybke's quick strategizing—not to mention the work he did to introduce the painter Neo Rauch, who had trained in Leipzig in the 1980s, to the world market.

Most who remained in the GDR territory did not see the success that EIGEN+ART enjoyed. Nevertheless, for people like Gabriele Kachold, this does not seem to have been the point. In fact, she is one of very few makers whose creative pursuits in the GDR-era fluidly connect to her post-reunification practice. In addition to her solo writing and art practices, she continued to work with the women in her artists group, and established an arts center in Erfurt with them. The *Kunsthaus Erfurt* still exists and is managed by the *Künstlerinnengruppe Exterra XX*'s Monique Förster. Personally, I attribute the continued accomplishments of the group to its foundational identification with issues that exceeded the GDR's own material and contextual framework—namely, issues of gender and sexual equality. Kachold (now known as Stötzer) has subsequently become one of the most vocal witnesses to Stasi

and state oppression, experiences, which she relates specifically to the country's deficient and contradictory relationship to women's rights.⁵⁹² Similarly, Christoph Tannert has achieved notable, even remarkable, success in the post-Wende period, not least of which as the project coordinator (1991 – 2000) and now director (2000 - present) of one of Berlin's leading contemporary art spaces, the Künstlerhaus Bethanien. Indeed, it is Tannert's advocacy for the experimental art of East Germany (often, to some controversy, at the expense of state artists⁵⁹³), which has inspired much of my own research. Tannert's work with GDR-era artists is, nevertheless, a marked exception—a reflection of both his own tenacity even in the face of the continued contentiousness of this history within Germany, and a global indifference to it, in consequence.

Eulogizing the state: Confronting frustration, exceeding archives

The Auto-Perforation Artists Else Gabriel and Via Lewandowsky had of course emigrated West only a few short months before the Berlin Wall fell. It was thus more internal division, rather than a political change, which precipitated their move to more or less separate artistic projects after 1989. In 1991, all but Rainer Görß rejoined for one last group performance aptly titled *Das Ende (5) (The End, No. 5)*, in

⁵⁹² See, for example, Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatsicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen DDR, ed., *Eingeschränkte Freiheit. Der Fall Gabriele Stötzer* (Berlin: BStU, 2014).

⁵⁹³ See, for example, Christoph Tannert, "Im Eifer der Wiedergutmachung. Zur Presentation von DDR-Kunst in der Neuen Nationalgalerie [1994]" and "Offener Brief [gegen die Einbeziehung von Bernhard Heisig bei der künstlerischen Ausgestaltung des Berliner Reichtages] [1998]" in *Bilderstreit und Gesellschaftsumbruch. Die Debatten um die Kunst aus der DDR im Prozess der deutschen Wiedervereinigung*, eds. Karl-Siegbert Rehberg and Paul Kaiser (Berlin and Kassel: Siebenhaar Verlag, 2013), 387 – 388 & 425. See, also, Jonathan Osmond, "German Art Collections and Exhibits since 1989: the Legacy of the GDR" in *Art Outside the Lines: New Perspectives on GDR Art Culture*, eds. Elaine Kelly and Amy Lynn Wlodarski (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 215 – 236.

reference to their fifth “final” appearance. The performance culminated in a mimed fence-off between Lewandowsky and Gabriel who used their middle fingers as the weapon of choice—one final demonstration of unrestrained feeling. This is expiation with a singleness of purpose, a eulogy to the GDR.

Though dead and eulogized, East Germany remains a haunting presence against which each of the artists, curators, publishers, and gallerists described in this dissertation have continuously had to contend. Are they East German artists, or artists from East Germany? Is it GDR art or art of the GDR? In contrast to other Eastern Bloc contexts, these questions are especially complicated by the fact that East Germany no longer exists, and that it has no independent cultural history that precedes the Cold War era.⁵⁹⁴ The East German remainder might be best summarized as a form of an archive *pace* Jacques Derrida’s reading of Freud’s corporeal relationship to his Jewishness.⁵⁹⁵ Of course, Derrida draws a profound connection between male circumcision and Freud’s concept of the Mystic Pad, which he used to “represent on the outside memory as internal archivization.”⁵⁹⁶ I do not mean to redirect my decidedly materialist approach by summoning the significant weight of psychoanalysis here. Likewise, to be clear, my efforts in this dissertation have been to defang the traditional narrative of East German oppression, which has summarily

⁵⁹⁴ Certainly Czechoslovakia is now the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and Yugoslavia is now defined by six separate nation-states. Nevertheless, those who study the history of these countries contend with a very different set of historical and cultural variables, including a pre-Cold War era legacy, that is not comparable to the former East German territory. East Germany has, in short, been returned to Germany, but its own instantiation of German cultural history has yet to be interrogated critically. The reinsertion of the GDR into Germany’s global art history is, of course, a central effort my scholarship.

⁵⁹⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever. A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 8 – 13.

⁵⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 13.

distracted from the agency of citizen artists. Nevertheless, the inscription of history onto a person's biography, which Derrida ultimately calls the root of "archive fever," helps to describe the looming controversy of East Germany (i.e., its haunting) on the GDR's experimental artists.

While the GDR does not necessarily remain literally inscribed on the bodies of these former East Germans, its trace is nevertheless forensic insofar as the country is best understood through the study of evidence, that is to say, its archive. A cumulative and often well-collated material mass, the East German archive comprises multiple parts. First—as this dissertation has argued—are the artworks East Germans made in response to the GDR's cultural, social, economic, and ideological context. Second, the East German archive is—more obviously and most bureaucratically—comprised of the mountains of documents left behind by the GDR's exacting bureaucracies, from its Union of Fine Artists to its Ministry for State Security. If the archive, as Derrida writes, "speak[s] the law," then these material effects both worked to reaffirm the power of the governing over the governed, and help us today to understand that power from the vantage of historical distance.⁵⁹⁷ Of course, the state itself was invested in that archive—ontologically so. In fact, the Stasi was ultimately so aware of the injustice it had served in the name of its archive that officials sought a rapid and full-scale erasure of its surveillance files after the Berlin Wall's toppling predicted an imminent end.⁵⁹⁸ Today, seventy-miles of documents remain intact, and

⁵⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁹⁸ Gabriele Kachold played an important role in stopping the destruction of the Stasi files. For more on this, see the discussion at the end of Chapter Three of this dissertation.

an effort to puzzle back together the hundreds of bags of papers torn and shredded by Stasi officials in late 1989 and early 1990 continues.

Several artists, including Gabriele Kachold, Cornelia Schleime, and Christine Schlegel, have worked with the declassified documents of their Stasi file. Arguably, the most visually compelling of these projects is Schleime's 1992/93 *Bis auf weitere gute Zusammenarbeit, Nr. 7284/85 (Until Further Useful Collaboration, Nr. 7284/85)*, aka the *Stasi Series*. [Figure C.1] In the early 1990s, in response to the public release of the Stasi files,⁵⁹⁹ the artist picked up a still film camera to produce her photo-performance project. For her *Stasi Series*, Schleime assigned fourteen excerpts of her file to as many self-portrait photographs. The texts are enlarged from an A4-standard paper size to the B1-poster; the images are likewise enlarged to achieve an almost portrait studio quality, despite their snapshot aesthetic. I have elsewhere argued at length that Schleime's piece demonstrates the necessity for new methodologies when analyzing archive-based artworks, in which personal surveillance documents drawn from corrupt governments form the material and conceptual core.⁶⁰⁰ For example, I have demonstrated that the *Stasi Series* has some visual similarities to Sophie Calle's *The Shadow* (1981), in which she hired a private detective to snap furtive pictures of her as she walked around Paris, as well as a conceptual relationship to Jenny Holzer's *Dust Paintings* (2004 – present), which incorporate disconnected excerpts of U.S. government surveillance documents into

⁵⁹⁹ The German government ratified the first version of the Stasi Records Act on December 20, 1991.

⁶⁰⁰ Sara Blaylock, "La femme de leurs rêves: Cornelia Schleime et les archives de la Stasi." *Gradhiva*, no. 24 (December 2016): 21 – 49.



[Figure C.1. Cornelia Schleime, *Bis auf weitere gute Zusammenarbeit, Nr. 7284 / 85* (Until Further Useful Collaboration, Nr. 7284 / 85), 1992 / 93. 100 x 70cm, Photograph on silk-screen. Image courtesy of the artist. © Cornelia Schleime.]

abstract paintings. Nevertheless, the lack of agency Schleime had in the making of her vast Stasi file, as well as the starkly personal quality of her surveillance present clear differences. The attention to gendered scopic desires, which inspired Calle's project, as well as the critique of governmental duplicity in Holzer's are present in Schleime's work. Nevertheless, the personal, that is to say the autobiographical, quality of her *Stasi Series* renders it a gravitas and danger that cannot be explained away by postmodern indifference or irony. In short, the evaluation of experimental

culture made not only during the Cold War era, but also in the post-socialist contemporary requires a consideration of context that challenges traditional western frameworks. Lacking a clear understanding of the East German archive—as both a concept and a tangible reality—comes at the expense of a richer, and more globally oriented conception of this art.

I bring in the uniqueness of Schleime's *Stasi Series* here not as a suggestion that the art of East Germany should be exceptionalized. Rather, I urge that taking seriously the relationship between this country's experimental practices to an oppressive cultural context actually helps to complicate and redefine similarities to the West as signs of parallel or intersecting histories. How does, for example, an artist like Schleime's response to her surveillance file offer insight into contemporary surveillance imagery, which likewise seeks to leverage power or dictate a person's livelihood and well being? Or, to draw from examples discussed in this dissertation: How can photographs of the aging in a state socialist context help us to better understand some of the trappings of social systems predicated on idealism? How do the contextual battles for gay or women's rights in a place like East Germany reveal a pressing global issue, namely, a cross-border, cross-ideological incapacity for the creation and protection of equality on both institutional and private levels? Or, even more generally, in what ways does the urge to experiment in an oppressive political system parallel or diverge from experimentation in a heavily commercialized cultural context? These are just a small sample of the questions that I have sought to conjure in this dissertation.

Conjuring questions: A look at two recent exhibitions

As I explained in my introduction, most of the work that has been done to investigate the art of East Germany—in particular on the level of experimental culture—has taken place in the exhibition hall and catalogue. Two recent parallel exhibitions, both held in Berlin in the summer of 2016 and both organized all or in part by Christoph Tannert, suggest that a more critical approach to the presentation of East Germany's experimental art is underway. *Gegenstimmen. Kunst in der DDR 1976 – 1989 (Voices of Dissent. Art in the GDR 1976 – 1989)*, co-organized at the Martin-Gropius-Bau by Tannert with Eugen Blume—also originally from East Germany—, was the first exhibition of its kind to look at experimentation in painting, specifically that made in art schools and/or by Union of Fine Artists members. These works were set in relation to other more familiar experimental forms, like performance and installation. Although the exchange across state schools and the experimental scene was more implicit than explicit, *Gegenstimmen's* approach marked a significant departure from the schematics of official and unofficial culture that have tended to define the late GDR.

Even more compelling, from the perspective of interrogating East German art in relation to global art history and contemporary practice, was Tannert's *Ende vom Lied (It's All Over)*, held at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien. While sixteen of the twenty-eight exhibited artists were born and studied in the GDR, four others had come from Lebanon, Japan, Italy, and Belgium to study in East Germany, and the remaining eight comprised artists whose practices had some relation to East German history,

only. Among this final group were four artists working with the history of the Stasi, including Arwed Messmer. [Figures C.2 and C.3] For his series *Reenactment MfS* (2014), the photographer uses a mixture of original and restaged photographs that document failed attempts by citizens to escape the GDR. Messmer's project summons questions about the violence that brews along national borders, which are certainly pertinent to the contemporary moment. His photographs of discarded and bloody articles of clothing, people documented in the moment of capture, or footprints marking smooth border zones could be from the contentious Israel/Palestine or U.S./Mexico borders.



[Figures C.2 and C.3. Arwed Messmer, *Reenactment MfS*, 2014. Book facsimile. Images courtesy of the artist. © Arwed Messmer.]

Another work in the exhibition likewise contemporizes the GDR context, specifically in its reverence for the feminism of Gabriele Kachold (Stötzer). [Figure C.4] Drawn from the series *Radical Admiration* by the young German artists Lydia Hamann and Kaj Osteroth, the painting *Admiring Gabriele Stötzer. Es wird sich das nicht ändern* (*This Will Not Change*) is a visual montage of Kachold's creative writing, photography, films, performance art, pottery, and painting. Their admiration



[Figure C.4. Lydia Hamann and Kaj Osteroth, *Admiring Gabriele Stötzer, Es wird sich das nicht ändern (This Will Not Change)*, 2016. 45-1/4” x 63”, Oil on canvas. Image from *Ende vom Lied* exhibition, taken by the author in September 2016. Image courtesy of the artists. © Lydia Hamann and Kaj Osteroth.]

is likewise personalized by a self-portrait inclusion. Hamann and Osteroth have painted themselves posing with their fingers miming a hole, a clear reference to a page from the artist’s 1983 photo book *Frauen Miteinander (Women Together)*. The Stötzer painting is one in a series of homages to feminist artists, including Martha Wilson, Zanele Muholi and Yayoi Kusama, which Hamann and Osteroth have produced “so that we could encounter the world with them as role models, intellectually and emotionally.”⁶⁰¹ By naming Stötzer as a progenitor for feminism in the arts the painters underscore the potential for exploring other areas of East German

⁶⁰¹ Lydia Hamann and Kaj Osteroth in *Ende vom Lied*, 134.

experimental practice as instructive models for the present, and not simply as historical anomalies.

Tannert explained to me that he included the two pieces by Messmer and Hamann/Osteroth in his exhibition—as well as the other works by artists invested thematically, but not biographically in the GDR—because of their clear relationship to East Germany. When I asked him if he considered the artists’ interest in the GDR telling of the growing significance of art from the former Eastern Bloc, he insisted that his curatorial approach was factual, not interpretive.⁶⁰² Tannert was suspicious of the enduring contributions of East German art to our understanding of the legacies of the Eastern Bloc, writ large, or of surveillance culture and inequality, more generally. It occurred to me in our conversation that perhaps here was the moment that truly demonstrated a difference between the approach of a scene protagonist, such as Tannert, and a veritable outsider, such as myself. I had read *Ende vom Lied* as the first intentional effort for an East German-specific exhibition to draw conclusions with this history that exceed the geopolitical lens, which has unnecessarily constricted its own mobility and relevance. The exhibition is both that and what Tannert says—an opening to new interpretations and a more expansive historical accounting.

Our differences in perspective draw attention to the number of approaches still possible—even inevitable—in the analysis and applications of East Germany’s history to contemporary scholarship and artistic practices. Tannert’s response likewise suggests the looming necessity within the German context to treat the art of

⁶⁰² Christoph Tannert, personal interview, October 17, 2016.

East Germany as a historical subject, rather than as a point of departure. His investment in experimental culture from the GDR is, of course, autobiographical. He, too, is trapped in his own archive, as well as that of East Germany. Certainly, I maintain the necessity for the visibility of the region, that is to say to appreciating its own specificity. Nevertheless, I have likewise been driven to study the experimental art of East Germany as a means of understanding a number of parallel histories—from the direction that modernism could go in a non-capitalist context, to the legacies of German fascism in the Cold War East, to questions of labor, the working class, and its representation in art and visual culture, to the origins of experimental culture in response to social inequality, structural hypocrisy, and—more importantly—a primordial drive to create the world around us anew.⁶⁰³

* * *

Coda: Looking ahead

The great achievement of completing a dissertation is ambivalent. The past six years that I have spent studying the Cold War has introduced me to a range of creative practices, which I have truly come to admire. I am passionate about this history, and am eager to use the core examples of my dissertation as starting points for exchanges with art and cultural historians, film critics and scholars of visual culture, artists and curators on subjects related to art in the age of Communism, feminism in state socialism, collectivity and group identification, male and female sexuality, and much more. All that said, the examples and interpretations I have

⁶⁰³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

presented in this dissertation have only introduced a sliver of the possibilities for the study of the art of East Germany, experimental or otherwise. Here resides my scholarly ambivalence. I am aware that I have excluded many examples and possible avenues of thought in order to construct a narrative that would be coherent, pleasurable to read, and also comprehensive. Ironically, my desire to be synthetic has actually been complicated (or reduced) by a like desire to offer specific insights into particular artists, events, and projects. This is all to say that as I conclude this text, I am looking ahead to a future where I am not one among a small (if potent) handful of scholars studying East Germany's experimental culture, but one person participating in a dynamic field of inquiry that unites geographies, histories, disciplines, and approaches. I expect the renegotiation of my conclusions, the rebuttal of my insights, and the expansion of my reductions. I await—and invite—these rejoinders with great anticipation.

I would, for example, be interested in reading scholarship that deals more overtly with the expansion of modernism in the Cold War East Germany, which my dissertation implies, but does not necessarily elaborate upon. In this regard, looking more closely at how East Germany maintained, but retooled the concerns of Germany's 20th century avant-garde in the guise of state socialism on the levels of both official and experimental culture, would do much in the service of finding intersections across the Cold War's divided Germanys. Also necessary is further research into how socialist realism's plea for a worker-inspired and worker-responsive form of art influenced not only experimental practices oriented toward

representation (i.e., photography and film), but also the interdisciplinary and especially collective practices that were paramount to the period. To this end, it would be fascinating to explore how a lack of an art market, that is to say how East Germany's state socialist economy influenced the lifestyles and perspectives of artists working in both state and "unofficial" capacities. There is likewise certainly room to consider how sexuality and definitions of masculinity and femininity differed and paralleled their western instantiations. For example, the hierarchy of East Germany's state culture seems to have exacerbated, rather than resolved, the atomization and misogyny generally associated with capitalism. Finally, further investigation into the cross-bloc exchanges (real or imagined) would be a great benefit to building the East German presence within the vital and vibrant field of Central and Eastern European art and cultural history, feminist studies, and film studies.

Let this dissertation be an opening; there is certainly work to be done.

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