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On the Road to Damascus: Searching for New Socialisms in East Germany's 1983 *Lutherjahr*

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Introduction:

*“We can see how the world’s people are searching for new modes of existence, and we ourselves are the architects of our own socialist order.”*¹

- Erich Honecker, General Secretary of the Socialist Unity Party, 1980

Michael Triegel was baptized in 2014, at age forty-six. When Bishop Koch completed the baptism in Dresden, Saxony he said to Michael: “A Catholic has been born from the spirit of art.” This was an unlikely event for someone who grew up in an East German world that, to say the least, looked down on religious institutions.

Growing up in the small Saxon town of Erfurt, Michael was taught that one guiding principle in life is that religion is the “opium of the people.”² In addition to Karl Marx’s famous phrase, Michael was given lessons on historical materialism—but for him, dialectical formulae could not answer the many questions he had as a teenager. Instead he turned to the classics of literature and philosophy: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka, Horace, Dante, Plato, and Nietzsche.

When he was fourteen years old, Triegel scored a holiday job working as a security guard for the Martin Luther *Ausstellung* (exhibition) taking place at the *Haus zum Roten Ochsen*—the one-time Renaissance home turned art museum in his local town. When he was not monitoring visitors to make sure they did not touch the artwork, he read books about famous Renaissance artists like Albrecht Dürer and Rafael. It was not so much the historical context that interested him, but rather the Renaissance style of color and woodcut that grabbed his attention. Dürer and

¹ Martin-Luther-Komitee der DDR, *Martin Luther and Our Age: Constituent Meeting of the GDR Martin Luther Committee, Berlin 13 June 1980* (Berlin: Panorama DDR, 1980), 16.

² Robert C. Tucker; Karl Marx; Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: Norton, 1978), 54.

Rafael's work inspired something in Michael that he could not pinpoint. The dull grey of everyday life was given color and form with religious art. Still, because he lived within the East German apparatus, he had to study the Old and New Testament and explore this new interest in secret.

In 1987, a nineteen-year-old Michael Triegel had been in the middle of an eighteen-month military service when he traveled back home for Christmas holiday. He decided to go to Christmas Mass with some friends: the midnight "Gloriosa" bell rang, Christmas singers sang, and he felt the comfort of his hometown friends. For a moment, he felt like he was not in East Germany. Although this marked a sort of "Damascus moment" for Michael, convicted faith did not come easily. He tried to "understand" faith by reading theology—yet conceptualizing his arrival to faith could not be accomplished through logic.

After the Berlin wall fell he drove to Rome where he was able to witness the pinnacle of Christian art in the Vatican. The feelings that he experienced in Rome would inspire his concept of faith and also his lifetime work. That same year, in 1990, he enrolled at Leipzig's prestigious art school, the *Hochschule für Graphik und Buchkunst*. In 2015, one year after his baptism, newspaper *Die Zeit* hailed him as the most famous religious artist in Germany.³

The main stage where the following story takes place is in 1983 at the *Haus zum Roten Ochsen*, in Erfurt, Germany—the same place and time where Triegel worked as a security guard. The central theme of this study revolves around the celebrations of Martin Luther's 500th birthday that took place in Germany in 1983. But at the core of every question I pose and try to

³ Michael Triegel, email interview by Benjamin Sloan, March 19, 2018; March 20, 2018, Berkeley, California. Transcript available upon request for all interview sources conducted for this study. All interviewees provided responses with prior knowledge that their responses were being used for University of California Berkeley research. All translations in this paper are my own. Arjana Begzati helped proofread translations from German to English.

answer is the fact that Michael Triegel needed something else in 1983, aside from what the DDR government could offer. And in fact, he was not the only one that went looking for answers. The SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, or Socialist Unity Party Germany), the central state apparatus in the DDR, as well as local state representatives, and other individuals such as artists and museum directors also looked for alternatives to represent their lives under socialism. Nineteen eighty-three demanded a re-articulation of what socialism meant for East Germans along ethical, religious, and political planes.

The SED chose to celebrate the Luther *Jubiläum* (jubilee) in grand fashion in 1983. For a government that was theoretically orthodox Marxist, this came as a huge surprise. In fact, the celebrations of Luther even overshadowed the centennial of Karl Marx's death.⁴ Luther's centrality to national German heritage exceeded that of Marx, and arguably, any other German. Here the complications of 1983 can be found: a socialist government which was at least on paper orthodox Marxist-Leninist—and by that atheist—was celebrating a figure who meant as much to German Christianity as Karl Marx did to 20th century socialism. Scholars have tried to unravel this enigma, and have done an exceedingly successful job at portraying the political atmosphere of the time, and why a move towards a heroic Luther would be seen as helpful for the DDR on an economic and internationally political level.⁵ Recently, Peter Maser published his work

⁴ Mark Peterson, "Workers of the World Unite—for God's Sake!," in James D. Tracy (ed.), *Luther and the Modern State in Germany* (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1986), 77. This claim is also made in Mary Fullbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR 1949-1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 116.

⁵ Stephen P. Hoffman, "The GDR, Luther, and the German Question." *The Review of Politics* 48, no. 2 (1986): 246-63. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1407130>; Robert F. Goeckel, "The Luther Anniversary in East Germany." *World Politics* 37, no. 1 (1984): 112-33. doi:10.2307/2010308; Jon Berndt Olson, *Tailoring Truth: Politicizing the Past and Negotiating Memory in East Germany, 1945-1990* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015), 148-163. ; Peterson, "Workers of the World Unite," 77-99. ; Robert F. Goeckel, *The Lutheran Church and the East German State* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 276-277. ; Hartmut Lehmann, "The Rehabilitation of Martin Luther in the GDR; or, Why Thomas Müntzer Failed to Stabilise the Moorings of Socialist Ideology," in Dianne Kirby, (ed.), *Religion and the Cold War*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 200-210. For scholarship in German see Thomas A. Brady, "Luther und der deutsche Marxismus," in Heinz Schilling and Anne Mittelhammer (eds.) *Der Reformator Martin Luther 2017: Eine Wissenschaftliche und gedenkpolitische Bestandsaufnahme* (Berlin,

“*Luther Mit alles im Butter?*”: *Das Lutherjahr 1983 im Spiegel ausgewählter Akten* (2013), which surveys many of the untouched details of the *Lutherjahr*. Maser has scoured archival documents concerning the *Lutherjahr*, from meeting records of DDR committees and statistics of tourists visiting for the celebrations, to details in the planning and shooting of Luther movies and TV shows.⁶ Despite the meticulous detail of his study, Maser and other scholars have failed to successfully connect the political to the personal in regards to the 1983 *Lutherjahr*.

This study examines this subject from a new perspective. It uses the *Lutherjahr* celebrations as a case study to better understand how East Germans understood what socialism meant to them in the early 1980s, and where it was heading. The layout of this case study works itself from top to bottom in a three-tier process. “Part I” will examine how the national SED leadership wished to portray Luther, and what this meant for the new versions of East German socialism that they attempted to institute. Typical for a highly ideological government, the DDR carefully created a political liturgy meant to help guide its citizens towards a universal worldview. Following that, “Part II” will travel down to the regional level, where local *Ausstellungen* celebrated the Reformation and Martin Luther. The catalogues to these *Ausstellungen* gave visitors and readers an itinerary for how to absorb Luther’s message. Exploring these *Ausstellungen* is key in understanding how even at the level of local state

München, Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), 195-203; Dorothea Wendebourg, *So Viele Luthers: Die Reformationsjubiläen des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt GmbH, 2017), 211-244. ; Hansjörg Buss, “Deutsche und Luther Reformationsjubiläen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert,” in Richard Faber and Uwe Puschner (eds.) *Luther zeitgenössisch, historisch, kontrovers* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, 2017); Hartmut Lehmann, “Das Marxistischebild von Engels bis Honecker,” in Hans Medick and Peer Schmidt *Luther Zwischen den Kulturen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 500-514. Hartmut Lehmann is the foremost scholar on Luther receptions in the 19th and 20th century. He recently published a collection of essays on this topic, see Hartmut Lehmann, *Luther Gedächtnis 1817 bis 2017* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012).

⁶ Peter Maser, “*Luther Mit alles im Butter?*”: *Das Lutherjahr 1983 im Spiegel ausgewählter Akten*, (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2013).

leadership—Museum director, Mayor, Minister of Culture—articulations of personal socialist realities differed.

Finally, “Part III” devotes itself to opinions of individuals Germans who were less tied to the official state than in Parts I and II—namely, artists. The *Ausstellungen* that Michael Triegel worked at, the “Erfurt-Luther Dialogue,” featured a section where artists contributed their contemporary artwork, either completed in the 1970s or 1980s. The reason that this unstudied *Ausstellung* was unique is that it gave artists the platform to discuss how they understood the importance of Luther and Reformation symbols through a written “dialogue” section. Between this “dialogue” and interviews with individual artists who either took part in or had contact with those that contributed to the Luther year, a number of different strains of “personal socialisms” emerge. The subsequent emotions and symbols associated with the *Lutherjahr* gave individuals the occasion, and the platform to express their own socialist realities. These “realities” found expression along a number of currents, not all of which upheld the political liturgy of the regime. Some individuals quietly criticized the regime while still using language that adhered to socialist jargon. Others expressed a socialist sentimentality that found its expression through religious iconography. Were these new searches for ethical and spiritual identity new to 1983, or were they merely dormant beliefs that were finally granted admission into public discourse? The artists and figures of this story navigated through an evolving political landscape and in many ways responded to the international discourse on human rights of their time. And because of Western criticism to the regime, orthodoxy was no longer a priority—cultural figures were granted room to more freely connect their changing socialist identities to personal beliefs systems. The personal socialisms that I portray in this study were new to 1983.

Considering the variety of opinions and beliefs that characters at each level of this story produced about their socialist reality, it is no surprise that the 1980s marked the final decade of a socialist Germany. Taken together, these three tiers reveal a number of new ethical frameworks that East Germans attempted to live by. This study also presents the ability for individual Germans to construct individual socialisms that worked against the official doctrine of the regime. But in order for those individual socialisms to make any sense, the SED's official doctrine must be parsed out.

Building German Socialism: 1951-1975.

In 1951 the East German government decided that each teacher in the DDR would have to subscribe to a historical materialist curriculum rooted in scientific atheism. Students were discriminated against if they took part in Christian youth organizations such as the *Junge Gemeinde*, and were essentially forced to join the SED's permitted youth group, the FDJ (Freie Deutsche Jugend).⁷ In 1954 the SED re-introduced the *Jugendweihe*—a secular version of Christianity's confirmation ritual.⁸ The *Jugendweihe* ritual even had its own type of bible, *Weltall-Erde-Mensch*—Universe, Earth, Man. *Weltall-Erde-Mensch* served as a replacement for the Christian bible, teaching students scientific approaches to life, including chapters on Marx and Engels' teaching. The church combated this rivalry to their sacred rite of passage, arguing that the *Jugendweihe* projected an alternative belief system.⁹ Realizing the danger that the

⁷ Fullbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 94.

⁸ For a response to this, see Reinhard Henkys, *Gottes Volk im Sozialismus: Wie Christen in der DDR Leben* (Berlin: Wichern-Verlag, 1983), 23-35.

⁹ Church leaders were not wrong in their assessment. In addition to East Germany, cultural and political leaders in the Soviet Union were aware of the importance of either eradicating or replacing Christian rituals with secular and atheistic rituals, see Victoria Smolkin-Rothrock, "'A Sacred Space Is Never Empty': Soviet Atheism, 1954-1971," PhD diss. University of California Berkeley, 2010.
http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/etd/ucb/text/SmolkinRothrock_berkeley_0028E_10940.pdf.

Jugendweihe posed, Church leaders attempted to protect their institution: those who took the *Jugendweihe* could not be confirmed in the church.¹⁰ But as much as church leaders tried to combat the *Jugendweihe*, their rhetoric appeared to be futile: while 17.7 % of fourteen year olds completed the *Jugendweihe* in the mid 1950s, that number would rise to more than 90% in the 1960s.¹¹ Those that chose to be confirmed by the Lutheran church faced discriminations, such as barring those students from advancing to university, and taking part in state activities. Simply put, being confirmed in the church equated to giving up any chance for vertical mobility in the East German social-economic sphere.¹²

Contemporary statistics indicate that there was a significant drop in Protestant membership in East Germany, as well as a nearly 50% cut in the amount of residents that engaged in church life rituals: baptism, marriage in the church, and burial services.¹³ Still, these figures do not include the nearly universal erosion of confirmation for its replacement, the *Jugendweihe*. Nevertheless, the Church persisted as an issue that threatened ideological uniformity in the DDR. If the heretics—Christians— could not be fully sidelined, then they must be integrated into the system. DDR officials debated whether the Church would be considered a “Church in Socialism,” or whether it would be appointed as a “side act,” helping with social issues like homelessness and alcoholism.¹⁴

By the 1970s, both the cultural and economic orthodoxy that defined the early years of the DDR began to fade. In 1971 Walter Ulbricht was relieved of his post as head of the SED due to his refusal to concede to the Soviet Union’s desire of compliance with *Ostpolitik*—the

¹⁰ Goeckel, *The Lutheran Church*, 50.

¹¹ Fullbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 97.

¹² Goeckel, *The Lutheran Church*, 141, 181. ; Childs, David, *The GDR: Moscow’s German Ally* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), 47.

¹³ For table, see Goeckel, *The Lutheran Church*, 21.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 172-175.

strengthening of the relationship between West and East Germany.¹⁵ The results were twofold: the SED could navigate East Germany towards greater international recognition, but at the same time risked ideological contamination.¹⁶ Three years prior, the East German state had already made further ideological concessions to its citizens in offering freedom of “belief and conscience” in its new state constitution.¹⁷ This marked a victory for the church: Christianity may have been stifled in the public sector, but at least Christians could be faithful privately. While in the 1970s the DDR gained greater international recognition on political, economic, and culture fronts, it was accomplished at the cost of protecting any hope for an ideal socialist society. Regardless, the SED’s decision to promote 1983 Luther celebrations was inspired from an attack on another front. In the wake of an international human rights movement in the 1970s, the moral integrity of the DDR regime had taken a number of blows.

The suffocating social policies that defined the DDR received public critique at the 1975 Helsinki conference on Human rights—leading to more than one hundred thousand East German residents applying for emigration.¹⁸ Not long after, on August 22, 1976, Lutheran Pastor Oskar Brüsewitz burned himself alive in front of the *Michaeliskirche* (St. Michael’s church) in Zeitz. His martyrdom has been immortalized with his final message: “A radiogram for everyone, a radiogram for everyone, the church in the GDR accuses communism of oppressing children and the youth at school.”¹⁹ In order to slow the bleeding, the DDR claimed that Brüsewitz was crazy,

¹⁵ Goeckel, 156. ; Fullbrook, *A History of Germany*, 172-174; A.J. Nichols, *The Bonn Republic* (London and New York: Longman, 1997) , 209-212.

¹⁶ Gloeckel, *The Lutheran Church* 156.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁸ Samuel Moyn has argued that in the 20th century Human Rights was the foremost Utopia after World War II, see Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia : Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012). In regards to Helinski, see 176-211.

¹⁹ Jan Palach Charles University Multimedia Project: <http://www.janpalach.cz/en/default/zive-pochodne/brusewitz>

and accused the West of using his crazed ramblings as slander against them.²⁰ But the damage had been done, and the scandal did not bode well for an East German government that was trying to create a more communicative and less isolated relationship with the West—*Ostpolitik*. One year after the Brüsewitz tragedy, during a rock concert in East Berlin, nearly 500 youths rioted while chanting “Russians Get Out.”²¹

Between these public relations crises East Germany found themselves in need for ideological rehabilitation and a re-assemblage of their political message. A year after the 1977 concert riot, General Secretary of the SED Erich Honecker staged the famous “March Summit” between the leaders of the DDR and the church. The summit was meant to help ease tensions between an oppressed East German Church and DDR leadership.²² This was a political intervention meant to publicize the progressive efforts of the regime: if the Church—which stood for an international symbol of humanitarianism—maintained a healthy relationship with the state, then the regime could claim its legitimacy as upholding a state that protected human rights. The same year Honecker assembled a team of scholars to head an *Arbeitsgruppe* (working group) set to organize the celebrations for Martin Luther’s birthday anniversary in 1983.²³ East Germany needed a new image, both internally and externally.

Part I: The Elect: Scaffolding, Constructing, and Maintaining a 1983 Martin Luther

The rehabilitation of Luther began in the 1960s with the emerging concept of the *frühbürgerlich Revolution* (early bourgeois revolution), and its “objective” place in the narrative

²⁰ Neues Deutschland, August 21, 1976, see page two: <http://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/ddr-presse/ergebnisanzeige/?purl=SNP2532889X-19760821-0-2-29-0>

²¹ Pedro Ramet, “Disaffection and Dissent in east Germany.” *World Politics* 37 (October 1984), 90.

²² Gloeckel, *The Lutheran Church*, 241-246.

²³ For a study of the Luther Committee see, Maser, “*Mit Luther alles in Butter*,” 78-106; Martin Roy, *Luther in der DDR* (182-189).

of historical materialism. In 1960 the DDR Historian Max Steinmetz co-founded an academic group determined to research the “History of the Reformation and the peasants’ war in Germany.” As Steinmetz put it, the DDR had to counteract the “neglect of the early bourgeois revolution in the Marxist-Leninist history of the DDR.”²⁴ The DDR collectivized most of its land, the Church had been marginalized accordingly, and it was time to revisit the words that bound all of these concrete actions together: the doctrine of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

Engels and Marx traced the development of capitalism to the late medieval times, claiming that Luther represented the first struggle of capitalism against feudalism. When the German revolution of 1848 failed, Engels wrote the *The German Peasant War* (1850) in an attempt to reconcile the fact that his and Marx’s prophesy of a successful German revolution proved to be wrong. But with the DDR reviving the original German socialist legacy, they could finally fulfill the Marx-Engels prophesy of a German revolution. For academicians, reviving the vitality of the Müntzer versus Luther tale helped re-legitimize the importance of German history in the narrative of new hope for a socialist utopia.

This still does not explain the amount of funds, planning, and overall resources expended by the DDR on the Luther *Jubiläum*. In addition, a massive exaltation of Luther does not make sense in context of the writing of Engels. Engels hailed Thomas Müntzer, the leader of the Peasants War, as a “magnificent figure,” who was one of the first pre-socialist revolutionaries—contrary to Luther who was seen as a “servant to the princes” and a “peasant slaughterer.”²⁵ Müntzer received his due celebrations in 1975, marking the 450th anniversary of the Peasant War, which he led against the feudal lords of the Holy Roman Empire. Celebrations were held in

²⁴ Hoffman, "The GDR, Luther, and the German Question," 254.

²⁵ Thomas Albert Howard, *Remembering the Reformation: An Inquiry into the Meanings of Protestantism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 112.

his honor, highlighted by Werner Tübke's massive one hundred and twenty three meter long and fourteen-meter high panorama of the Peasants War at Bad Frankenhausen.²⁶ Even though Müntzer remained important for the 1983 celebrations because of his relationship to socialist orthodoxy and applicability for revolutionary hopefuls, his 1975 anniversary appeared minor compared to the Luther *Jubiläum*.

The *Lutherjahr* also casted a long shadow over the 100th anniversary of Karl Marx's death, leading to a number of satirical commentaries. One example of this was when Artist Rudolf Muller created a small sketch that portrayed Luther and Marx on different sides of a Joker playing card.²⁷ Scholars have made a number of legitimate claims for the emergence of the 1983 spectacle: the DDR wanted to attract Western tourism in order to boost their failing economy; SED leaders wanted to prove the legitimacy of their own nation, pressures of *Ostpolitik*, attempts to respond to accusations of ideological bias in DDR historiography, and a search for an East German national identity.²⁸ What is clear is that the DDR needed Luther in order to survive the 1980s: celebrating Luther as a mass spectacle could not only re-invigorate East Germans with a new Germanized socialist spirit, but could also help bridge financial and political gaps with the West.

²⁶ For Werner Tübke's Panorama, see Rolf Luhn, and Eva-Marina Froitzheim, *Sichtungen und Einblicke: zur künstlerischen Rezeption von Reformation und Bauernkrieg im geteilten Deutschland; Begleitband zur Ausstellung im Bauernkriegsmuseum Kornmarktkirche der Mühlhäuser Museen (30.09.2011 bis 04.12.2011) und im Deutschen Bauernkriegsmuseum Böblingen (15.01.2012 bis 18.03.2012)* (Petersberg: Imhof, 2011), 116-121 ; and Olsen, *Tailoring the Truth*, 164-175. For Müntzer in other exhibitions in the 1970s, see Jan Scheunemann, *Luther and Münzer im Museum: Deutsche-deutsche Rezeptionsgeschichten* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt GmbH, 2015), 237-274.

²⁷ Maser, "Mit Luther alles in Butter?," 271 ; Rolf Luhn; Eva-Marina Froitzheim, *Sichtungen und Einblicke*, 87.

²⁸ Olsen, *Tailoring the Truth*, 148-149. ; Howard, *Remembering the Reformation*, 116, 117. ; Hoffmann, "The GDR, Luther, and the German Question," 247. For arguments that I have already covered, regarding the Church-State relationship see, Goeckel, "The Luther Anniversary in East Germany," in *World Politics*, Vol 37, No.1, 1984, 112-133.; Mary Fullbrook, *A History of Germany 1918-2014: The Divided Nation, Fourth Edition* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 223.

The 1983 *Lutherjahr* was a spectacle. Sixty-six Martin Luther exhibits were planned for cities and towns just in East Germany.²⁹ One hundred sixty-eight thousand Germans and foreign visitors attended the DDR *Kunst der Reformationszeit* exhibition in 1983 and 140,000 visited the East Berlin installation *Martin Luther und seine Zeit*.³⁰ One report states that in West Germany (Bundesrepublik, BRD) alone, fifty television productions, eight hundred radio broadcasts, and six hundred books were published.³¹ In addition to the individual commemorations in the West, the *Bundesrepublik* planned an *Ausstellung* in Nurnberg costing some 1.9 million deutschmarks. The BRD was not alone in the big money productions, with the DDR investing 11.9 million East German Marks for a five-part film on Luther.³² The DDR had little spending money, considering that the BRD had loaned a large sum of money to the East German government: the Luther celebrations were seen as either having the possibility of alleviating the DDR from immediate financial crisis or re-edifying a new German national pride with Luther at the center. Although the *Lutherjahr* was indeed a spectacle, the scaffolding of the celebrations in the East—the meetings, planning, and close ideological construction of the year—tells a more nuanced story.

For the DDR these celebrations were the product of five years of intense planning and detailed ideological carving. In 1978 the *Arbeitsgruppe* was formed, consisting of top tier East German historians and politicians, whose job was to help construct a figure of Martin Luther that could be reconciled with Marx and Engels' socialist dogma.³³ On June 13, 1980 an official Martin Luther committee was conceived, headed by Erich Honecker, general secretary of the Socialist Unity Part (SED). The Luther Committee helped map out the restoration of physical

²⁹ Maser, "Mit Luther alles in Butter," 140.

³⁰ Ibid., 144.

³¹ Ibid., 181.

³² Ibid., 181-207; Rotraut Simons, "Das DDR-Fernsehen und die Luther-Ehrung," in Horst Dähn and Joachim Heise (eds.) *Luther und die DDR* (Berlin, Germany: Edition Ost, 1996), 129.

³³ Hartmut Lehmann, *Protestantisches Christentum im Prozeß der Säkularisierung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 128 -129.

Luther monuments and relics, such as the Wartburg castle where he translated his bible, his home in Erfurt, and the *Lutherhalle* in Wittenberg.³⁴

In addition to handling administrative and financial logistics like these building projects, the group was responsible for using the “historical” conclusions garnered by the *Arbeitsgruppe* to construct an appropriate public image of Luther. The goal of this planning was not to create a platform where Germans could connect with their own past—instead, Germans and foreign visitors were to gain a new socialist understanding of Luther. A group of social scientists helped devise the *15 Thesen Über Martin Luther*, created in order to institute a uniformed language in how to regard Luther in 1983.³⁵ The theses range from upholding Luther as a catalyst for the “frühbürgerlichen Revolution,” to a representative of the church intelligentsia. The theses also make it known that the 1983 *Lutherjahr* will handle the nationalistic-monarchistic movements after the failed revolution of 1848.³⁶ In other words, *Lutherjahr* presented a platform to help explain why the revolution of 1848 failed, and how that failure catalyzed a National Socialist movement.

At the center of this story is the fact that Honecker and his committee attempted to create a universal language in referring to Luther. By creating a universalized language, and trying to enforce this ideological dialect in as many of the Luther celebrations as possible, Honecker and the DDR officials appear to closely represent what Emilio Gentile has called a “political liturgy”: “to worship the sacralised collective entity by way of an institutionalized cult and figures representing it, and through the mystical and symbolic portrayal of a sacred history.”³⁷ The DDR

³⁴ Peterson, “Workers of the World Unite,” 78.

³⁵ For all 15 Theses, see Maser, “Mit Luther alles in Butter,” 113-114.

³⁶ Ibid., 114.

³⁷ Emilio Gentile & Robert Mallett, “The Sacralisation of politics: Definitions, interpretations and reflections on the question of secular religion and totalitarianism,” in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 1:1, 18-55 (2000), 22.

did not force citizens to commemorate Luther, but what the state was able to do was attempt to curate the dialogue around Luther as much as possible—the goal being to inculcate its citizens with a new Germanic socialist mentality. Furthermore, the theses were not intended to only reach Germans: the ninth theses locates the Netherlands, the American colonies of Great Britain, and France in the same category as Germany in that they all entered into the “cycle of bourgeois revolutions that resulted from the Reformation.”³⁸

In considering Luther a *Vertreter der Intelligenz* (representative of intelligence) in thesis two, historian Hartmut Lehmann argues the East German government was attempting to associate Luther and his role as a catalyst in the movement from feudalism to early capitalism, to the impact that the Russian *intelligentsia* had on the success of the October Revolution in 1917.³⁹ This characterization of Luther layers itself with theses thirteen and fifteen: thesis thirteen claims that the Luther celebrations of the DDR will handle his significance to nationalistic-monarchistic movements after the failed revolution of 1848; thesis fifteen asserts that only after the victory of the working class in Germany, has it been possible to appropriately understand Luther.⁴⁰ The SED claimed that they would “occupy themselves” (*beschäftigt sich*) with the nationalizing of Luther after the 1848 revolution. Because Luther could finally be appropriately celebrated, the SED attempted to portray a dark period of nationalism between 1848 and the time of the DDR.

Marx and Engels were comfortably dead by the time of the 1983 Luther celebrations, so their new followers would have to adapt socialist modes of thinking to their contemporary time. The language and rhetoric behind the *15 Theses über Martin Luther* show how the SED hoped to help propel the DDR into a new moment in materialist history. But another possibility is that

³⁸ Maser, “*Mit Luther alles in Butter*,” 113.

³⁹ Lehmann, *Protestantisches Christentum*, 106.

⁴⁰ Maser, “*Mit Luther alles in Butter*,” 114.

Honecker and SED leaders saw themselves as already living in an acceptable form of socialism, considering that Luther was finally able to be properly celebrated. The appropriate understanding of Luther represented a marker to highlight the success of the regime in its goal of a fully socialist state—known as “Real Existing Socialism.”⁴¹

As the leader of the operation, Erich Honecker exceeded the historical materialist pronouncements of the *Theses*. Honecker considered Luther “one of the greatest sons of the German people,” and spoke for all Germans when he said: “We can say that our Homeland, the German Democratic republic, has absorbed (aufgenommen) [Luther’s] valuable heritage.”⁴² Scholar Mark Peterson highlights how utilizing the term *Erbe*, which means “heritage,” instead of say, “tradition,” clearly publicizes a well-established theoretical argument.⁴³ Giving Luther the title of representing *Erbe* turns him into an active instead of passive part of history, able to transfer his historical significance to the present. With Honecker using the verb *aufnehmen*—to absorb, assimilate or ingest—he opened up the possibility for Germans to embody a transferable Lutheran spirit. From a substantial standpoint, considering Luther as a “sacred” German figure cannot be questioned.

These theoretical commandments did not only remain in the clouds of high politics, but were also applied to most of the cultural exhibitions and public commemorations for the *Jubiläum* in the East. Official statements and propaganda material like the Luther *Theses* were sent out to individual districts, where local state leaders made their messages cohesive with the SED’s intended cause. As one citizen of Halle wrote: “All available possibilities are to be

⁴¹ William W. Hagen, *German history in modern times: four lives of the nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 384.

⁴² Peterson, “Workers of the World Unite,” 83: : “Wir dürfen sagen, daß unser Vaterland, die Deutsche Demokratik Republik, dieses kostbare Erbe in sich aufgenommen hat. Unser Staat der Arbeit und Bauern verwirklicht die Ideale der Besten Söhne des deutschen Volkes im Sinne seiner Politik zum Wohle des Menschen.”

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 84.

utilized to promote the deepening of the socialist consciousness and the feelings of a socialist *Heimat* in the district of Halle.”⁴⁴ What remains important is another expression of how Luther could help propagate socialist consciousness or inspire “feelings” of “Heimat,” which roughly translates to “home” and “homeland.”⁴⁵ Erich Honecker also expressed a desire to “strengthen [DDR Citizen’s] feeling of *Heimat*” through the Luther celebrations.⁴⁶ Both Honecker and the citizen living in Halle longed for a new nationalized version of socialism. The rich germaneness of Luther’s legend helped fulfill that for both of them.⁴⁷

East Germany’s central leadership established its political liturgy through five years of careful planning. Both Erich Honecker and his team of historians working on the *15 Thesen Über Martin Luther* deviated from orthodox Marxism in their portrayal of Martin Luther. Collectively, they saw celebrating Luther as either a means to transmit his *Erbe* to 1983 in order to spur new stages of socialism—or simply as a way to help bridge German history with an amending dogma. The logic behind this reconciliation followed this line thinking: if the SED can dogmatically claim that key moments of German history fit objectively into official socialist history, then Marxist-socialism will gain legitimacy for German citizens, who may be questioning the legitimacy of the operation. But for a political apparatus like that of the DDR, leaving too much

⁴⁴ As quoted from Olson, *Tailoring Truth*, 155-156.

⁴⁵ The same year the Luther celebrations were taking place in the East, filmmaker Edgar Reitz was working on his sixteen-hour film entitled *Heimat*. Reitz would later respond to questions about the meaning: “The word is always linked to strong feeling, mostly remembrances and longing. ‘*Heimat*’ always evokes in me the feeling of something lost or very far away, something which one cannot easily find or find again. See Anton Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 163-192.

⁴⁶ Olson, *Tailoring Truth*, 158.

⁴⁷ The theme of *Heimat* in post war Germany is a rich topic. In a longer study, this could be explored in greater detail. For studies of post-war *Heimat*, see: Anton Kaes, *From Hitler to Heimat* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1989), 163-192; Alon Confino, *Germany as a Culture of Remembrance: Promises and Limits of Writing History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006). ; Sonja Fritzsche, “The Continuities of an East German Heimat: Gender and Technological Progress in ‘Du bist min. Ein deutsches Tagebuch.’” *The German Quarterly*, 83, No. 2 (Spring 2010), 172-88). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29534046>. ; Friederike, Eigler, and Jens Kugele (eds.), *Heimat : At the Intersection of Memory and Space* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, Inc., 2012).

room for interpretation threatened uniformity. In order to protect that, the state's official security apparatus—the MFS (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit)—was given the responsibility to monitor the Luther celebrations.

In one document produced and delivered to MFS members watching over the Luther celebrations, directions were given to make a “determined” effort in watching the non-socialist “foreigners,” lest they have the opportunity to *Mißbrauch* (abuse or misuse) the Luther celebrations. In the same brief, tourists from Poland were targeted in two of the five bullet points.⁴⁸ In Poland, the Soviet Union suffered its first major threat in the early 1980s to a rebelling group—Solidarity.⁴⁹ The Polish Catholic Church offered dissenters a safe platform to express grievances for their surrogate political parent. The MFS—as directed by German state representatives and most likely Soviet officials—were determined to protect Germany from the same ideological contamination that the Catholic Church subjected the Poles to.⁵⁰ Furthermore, evoking the dangers of “Mißbrauch” was not an isolated occasion: one museum catalogue for the exhibit *Gedenkmedaillen auf Martin Luther und die Reformation* in Eisleben singles out the *Mißbrauch* that occurred during the 1917 celebrations of Luther.⁵¹ The catalogue writers were commenting on the nationalist image that Luther took during the First World War. What exists between the fear of Polish visitors and any possibility of misusing his image is a paranoia that the Luther celebrations were going to lead to heretical thinking—and from there, dissent and rebellion. The East German state was right to suspect the possibility of Germans looking for

⁴⁸ Maser, “*Mit Luther alles in Butter*,” 22.

⁴⁹ Gloeckel, *The Lutheran Church*, 259. ; Also, see Padriac Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe, 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 34-42. ; Jack M. Bloom, *Seeing Through the Eyes of the Polish Revolution : Solidarity and the Struggle Against Communism in Poland* (Leiden: BRILL, 2014), 1-16.

⁵⁰ Fullbrook, *A History of Germany*, 247.

⁵¹ Klaus-Peter Brozatus (Catalogue) and Fritz Ebruy (Text), *Katalog der Gedenkmedaillen auf Martin Luther und die Reformation, Eisleben in der Ausstellung der Gedenkstätte “Martin Luthers Geburtshaus” zu Eisleben* (Eisleben: State Museum Eisleben, 1984), 12.

ideological alternatives—but because those alternatives existed under the umbrella of socialism, they were able to survive.

One of the dangers of moving away from orthodoxy is creating a culture of pluralism, where citizens have the liberty to improvise their own versions of a changing socialist rhetoric. For this reason it is vital to step down from the level of political liturgy and into the local experiences of this *Lutherjahr*. In many ways attending local exhibitions was the location where the SED's message was most strongly transmitted to German citizens. In 1983 museum exhibitions served a parallel purpose to that of a religious institution's temple: a sacred location where one could connect with the spirit of that tradition. In this case that tradition was German socialism.

Part II: Houses of the Holy: Venerating Luther in the German Museum

A visit to Luther's home, or *Lutherhalle*, in 1983 might have made you second-guess whether you were in at museum at all. Intimidating archways laden with elaborate designs led you along a pathway that showcased original portraits of historical figures from Luther's time. In order to inspect the many relevant medallions and coins collected over the last 500 years, one needed to climb down a tight wooden staircase, which led to what had been Luther's cellar: a circular tunnel-like room constructed of brick from top to bottom. Next, you might have wanted to visit the newly renovated amphitheater, which in order to enter, you had to pass through two castle-worthy doors, accompanied by full body portraits of princes on either side. Inside the amphitheater awaited a small shrine enclosed in a glass casing, with Lucas Cranach's iconic Martin Luther portrait as the centerpiece.⁵²

⁵² Scheunemann, *Luther und Münzer im Museum*, 312-215; 320-323.

When visitors attended *Lutherhalle Wittenberg*, and many of the other *Ausstellungen* scattered across Germany during the *Lutherjahr*, they thought they were just going to a museum. In actuality, museumgoers entered into a space where they were encapsulated in an experience that directed their attention to selected messages for a short period of time. Art museums cause visitors to “act” in a passive way: viewers are at one time or another collectively interpreting the same theme, object, historical event, or artistic movement. Although their collective thoughts cannot conceivably be traced or determined, the image in front of them asks, no—forces them to think about the themes that image invokes. And with *Lutherhalle* being a house museum—the living place of a historical figure turned into a museum—visitors were able connect with Martin Luther on a personal level that exceeded that offered by a university or commercial museum. In a commercial or university museum visitors maintain an aesthetic distance to the artifacts they are inspecting. This is impossible within the intimate confines of the house museum.

No matter how objective of a stance the viewer tries to take, the information in front of them only offered select possibilities. Museums are sanctuaries for procuring particular virtues, ethics, or beliefs.⁵³ According to Polish scholar Krzysztof Pomian, “museums took up where the churches had left off, functioning as places where all the members of a society could participate in the celebration of the same form of worship.” He continues to highlight how museum attendance increased with the “disaffection” of traditional religion, and especially how the “nation has now become both the subject and object of this new cult, which has superimposed itself on the old one.”⁵⁴

⁵³ Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London New York: Routledge, 1995), 12-13.

⁵⁴ Krzysztof, Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500-1800*, translated by Elizabeth Wiles-Portier (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 43-44; also, see Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, translated by George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 36-52; David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1978), 100-167. Yuri Slezkine has also written that “There is no

Nation building in the DDR inherited this cult in its own unique form. The DDR's museum exhibitions turned Luther's work and the objects associated with his life—little trinkets collected from his home, paintings, leaflets from his journal, and bibles—into relics, which helped cultivate the 1983 Luther cult. The relics presented for museumgoers translated the spirit of Luther into tangible terms that they could both literally and figuratively grasp.⁵⁵

This section bridges the gap between Part I, where politicians carefully constructed a political liturgy, and Part III, which handles the opinions of individual Germans. Jumping from high politics to individual artists disregards the fact that official political liturgies do not remain homogenous as they become localized. In addition, the artists who play a role in this story all contributed to Luther *Ausstellungen* in 1983—and most central to this story, the *Haus zum Roten Ochsen*. In a lot of ways, analyzing the *Zum Geleit* (Preface) and *Vorwort* (forward) sections of Reformation museum catalogues sheds light on how leaders of the exhibits wanted to their visitors to interact with Luther and the historical message that he represents. But more than anything, introductory statements of these exhibitions provided viewers with a pedagogical rendering for how to regard the objects or paintings that they were about to either encounter in the remainder of the catalogue book or in person at the exhibit. These *Kataloge* served as scripts for how visitors should engage with the material they were about to witness.

The *Lutherhalle* had its own script to direct the experience of the “Martin Luther 1483 - 1546” exhibition, which ran in Wittenberg during the *Lutherjahr*. The mayor of Wittenberg at the time, Klaus Lippert, began the catalogue with a defining statement about the city:

such thing as a ‘disenchanted’ world or a profane polity. No state, however routinized, is fully divorced from its sacred origins, and no claim to legitimacy is purely ‘rational-instrumental’” in Slezkine, *House of Government*, 181.
⁵⁵ Pomian writes, “a relic was any object said to have been in contact with a character from sacred history, and whenever possible was an actual part of his body” in Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities*, 16.

“Lutherstadt Wittenberg is today a thriving industrial city with a rich cultural tradition.”⁵⁶ Luther was sure to occupy the majority of the exhibition’s attention, but Lippert wanted his readers to understand that Lutherstadt was more than a historical relic—it was a manifestation of socialism’s success in producing a thriving industrial community. He then wrote, “I wish this catalogue upon many users and readers, because it shows how serious we are about keeping up humanistic traditions and strengthening historical consciousness.”⁵⁷ Not only the following exhibition, but also specifically the catalogue was used in order to help deepen a historical consciousness which adhered to Marxist principles. In other words, engaging with this catalogue and exhibit allowed visitors to better formulate and solidify their socialist identity. For the mayor of a city in the DDR, deepening “historical consciousness” was clearly code for better understanding Marxist historical materialism.

The director of the *Lutherhalle*, Hans-Joachim Beeskow, continued Lippert’s trend of evoking a type of “consciousness” or transmittable experience between visitors and the exhibition: “The Luther memorial of 1983 allows us to have an intensive conversation with the reformer, and we want this conversation with him to continue.”⁵⁸ He continued, “In this sense the following catalogue should intensify, deepen, and complement the current exhibition ‘Martin Luther – 1483 bis 1546’ for visitors and help them understand that Martin Luther is [in fact] 500 years young.”⁵⁹ With Beeskow claiming that through the *Lutherjahr* commemorations we can

⁵⁶ H.-J. Beeskow, V. Joestel, R. Kabus, Chr. Klenner, J. Pötzchike, E. Stiegler, *Katalog der Ausstellung Martin Luther 1483 bis 1546 in der Staatlichen Lutherhalle Wittenberg* (Wittenberg: Lutherhalle Wittenberg, 1982), 7: Die Lutherstadt Wittenberg ist heute eine blühende Industriestadt mit einer reichen kulturellen Tradition.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 7: Ich wünsche diesem Katalog viele Nutzer und Leser, denn auch er legt davon Zeugnis ab, wie ernst es uns darum ist, humanistische Traditionen zu pflegen und das Geschichtsbewußtsein zu stärken.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 9: Die Luther-Ehrung im Jahre 1983 hat uns mit dem Reformator ein intensiveres Gespräch treten lassen und wir wollen weiterhin mit ihm im Gepsräch bleiben.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 9: In diesem Sinne versteht sich der vorliegende Katalog, der den Besuch der ständigen Ausstellung “Martin Luther” bereichern, vertiefen, und ergänzen soll, und bei dem sich die Erkenntnis einstellen könnte, daß Martin Luther “500 Jahre jung” ist.

speak with Luther, he set up the possibility for an emotional encounter with Luther: this exhibition's intent was not to inspire historical reflection, rather the point was to engage with Luther as a human, to feel and understand what he felt.

What makes *Lutherhalle* especially significant is that in slight contrast to Pomian's argument that museums inherit from churches the ability to conjure the unprofaned, *Lutherhalle* presented both the profane and the unprofaned on equal footing: it was both a remaining relic from Luther's life and was turned into a museum. Because of this, Director Beeskwow and Mayor Lippert's desire to create a new "historical consciousness," via a spiritual "conversation," had a particularly transmittable affect on exhibition goers. Using Pomian's model, the conjuring that occurred in *Lutherhalle* was not only accomplished passively by the fact of it being a house museum—it was also initiated by the leaders of the exhibition. In 1983 *Lutherhalle* paralleled a Sunday service at a historic European religious temple. Like in the latter situation, those that experienced *Lutherhalle* in 1983 were given literature meant to direct their emotional, potentially spiritual experience, all the while standing within a lasting relic. A faithful Christian trusts the literature offered to them in their pew, just like an East German may have trusted what their *Ausstellung* catalogue told them.

We also know that the exhibition catalogue was not created by Lippert and Beeskwow themselves: in one passage Beeskwow thanks the services of DDR Luther committee leaders Gerhard Brendler, Günter Volger, Ernst Ullmann, and others.⁶⁰ But the difference between these catalogues and the ideological scaffolding discussed in the previous section is that these exhibits fell into the hands of German citizens and western visitors. For those who attended exhibitions in

⁶⁰ Ibid., 8.

different cities, the pedagogical message they received depended on who was leading that particular exhibition.

If *Lutherhalle* symbolized the most important Luther relic in Germany, the “Kunst der Reformation” exhibit in the State Museum Berlin represented the DDR’s most expensive and state invested museum experience of the Luther celebrations. Understanding the importance of images in connecting museums goes with the past, DDR leadership borrowed artwork from forty different cities, including Seville, Vienna, Stockholm, Prague, Kroměříž, Leningrad, Moscow, Budapest and Amsterdam.⁶¹ The introductory information in the catalogue for this exhibition also expressed the DDR’s desire to make these exhibitions a performative experience. Minister of Culture Dr. Hans-Joachim Hoffmann prefaced the catalogue by connecting Luther’s writing and the art inspired by him to early class struggle and the DDR created “frühbürgerlichen Revolution.” He then makes an ambiguous claim that “the new presentation of man should be honored with this art exhibition.”⁶² There are two ways to interpret this statement. The first being that Hoffmann was referring to the concept that the “frühbürgerlichen Revolution” marked a key moment in historical materialism which caused new relationships to form between social classes. The second possible intention behind this statement is that he believed that the DDR and its occupation of Marxist-Leninism had birthed a completely new image of the human existence.

Europeans had been looking for a “new man” long before the 1983 *Lutherjahr*. In 1861 Nikolay Chernyshevsky published his novel *What Is to Be Done? The Story about the New Man*. Chernyshevsky, a member of a Russian intelligentsia questioning the mores of the Tsarist regime, framed what he thought was the coming of new formulation of man.⁶³ And revered

⁶¹ *Kunst der Reformationszeit* (West Berlin, Elefanten Press Verlag GmbH, 1983), 7.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 9: Die neue Darstellung des Menschen soll mit dieser Kunstaustellung gewürdigt werden

⁶³ Yinghong Cheng, *Creating the New Man : From Enlightenment Ideals to Socialist Realities* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 15-20.

scholar Carl Schorske showed us how Vienna's fin-de-siècle intellectual and artists circles attempted to orient themselves around a new version of "man," in light of the failures of 19th century liberalism.⁶⁴ Specific to the DDR, in 1958 General Secretary of the SED Walter Ulbricht announced the "Ten Commandments for the new socialist man." Each commandment begins with an uncompromising "you should..." followed by guidelines for how this new man is to behave.⁶⁵

Moses' guideline for how to live was highly outdated, as was any other formulae. Yet in 1983 Dr. Hans-Joachim Hoffmann was still searching for a "new man" in the catalogue of a Reformation *Ausstellung*. The Reformation that Luther helped spur offered a new framework of ethical conduct. The church and its quasi-political hierarchy no longer played complete arbiter of morals. National liberalism renewed this possibility in the 19th century, but died out after the Second World War. A binary of possibility then emerged: either side with the liberal democracies of the West or fall into the fold of Soviet socialism. Yet with the decline of orthodoxy and a possible rise in feelings of indifference within the soviet zone, new blueprints for an ethical framework were being sought out.⁶⁶ Intellectuals, politicians, and in this story, artists longed for a new clarity for how they should behave. A new presentation of man was one way of handling this search for a new ethical code—another was to revive new versions of old terminology.

When Wittenberg Mayor Klaus Lippert wrote that the Luther *Ausstellung* shows how the DDR is "serious" about keeping up humanistic traditions, he was making use of a term that was

⁶⁴ Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1980), 4.

⁶⁵ Walter Ulbricht, *10 Gebote für den neuen sozialistischen Menschen* (1958). https://bildungsserver.berlin-brandenburg.de/fileadmin/havemann/docs/material/1958_zehn_gebote.pdf

⁶⁶ Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 5-7. <http://assets.press.princeton.edu/chapters/i11217.pdf>

the product of a number of regenerative historical processes coming together simultaneously. The historian's first instinct, and especially in the context of Martin Luther, is to connect the humanism referred to during the 1983 celebrations to the eruption of literary and artistic "humanism" in the time period that Luther lived in. As an educated man, Luther was the product of this new humanistic system of learning that prioritized fluency in Greek, Latin, and an engagement with classical Greek and Roman texts (*ad fontes* [back to the sources]). While Luther may have been the product of a humanist education, he is still typically divorced from the Renaissance canon of Christian humanists that proliferated during the 15th and 16th centuries. Instead of conforming to the novelty of Luther's historic time, the term in 1983 actually existed in a plurality of ways, speaking to currents in international political and social discourse.

When characters in this story evoked the word "humanism," they were making use of an evolved term created on the backs of historical and contemporary currents. The first being the "humanism" that erupted during the Renaissance period that surrounded Luther's life, particularly south of the Alps. The second falls under association with 19th century German intellectuals. German thinkers of the 19th century took the 16th century version of "humanism"—which was originally an attempt to replicate the ancient "classical" thinkers in artistic and literary pursuits—to a new level in attempting to "understand," rather than to simply imitate the "ancient man." Figures like Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1824) and Wilhelm Von Humboldt (1767-1835) explored ways that this 19th century version of humanism, *neuhumanismus*, could help scholars of their age apply what was an increasingly scientific language of scholarship to the study of ancient literature.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Jay Bolter, "Friedrich August Wolf and the Scientific Study of Antiquity," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, Vol. 21, 1980, 83-99.

The two contemporary currents of thought associated with the 1983 use of humanism—human rights and “socialist humanism”—layered themselves on these two historical narratives. For East Germans “socialist humanism” occupied a number of possibilities: antifascist rhetoric,⁶⁸ reference to Marx’s “real-socialism,”⁶⁹ reminiscing on the classical studies of the 19th century, as well as the possibility of socialist humanism being the manifestation of a mass working culture.⁷⁰ While the discourse on socialist humanism existed within the internal culture of the DDR, “socialist human rights” served an international political purpose.

Although commentators of many kinds lambast the DDR as an inhumane dictatorship, the regime had indeed developed a comprehensive language of “human rights”—regardless of its inability to realize this language in everyday life. East Germans criticized Western liberal democracies' concept of human rights as being abstract, accusing westerners of focusing on a meta-concept centered on the primacy of the "human," rather than addressing real life issues. East German publishers and politicians promised economic freedom in the Marxian sense that citizens would not be abused as commodities. According to this logic, if citizens were promised economic welfare and basic life necessities—food, shelter, and modes of subsistence—then their “rights” were being protected.⁷¹ Humanism was not necessarily coterminous with human rights, but because of their shared linguistic root—human—the terms were phonetically close enough

⁶⁸ Andreas Agocs, *Antifascist Humanism and the Politics of Cultural Renewal in Germany* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017), 156–77.

⁶⁹ Martin Jay writes, “The term ‘real humanist’ first appeared in Marx’s *The Holy Family* in 1845 in opposition to the abstract, ahistorical humanism of Feuerbach,” in Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 348. The significance of this lies in the fact that East Germans would then apply this version of “real humanism” to both the concept of “socialist humanism” and “socialist human rights.” Horst Groschopp, *Der ganze Mensch Die DDR und der Humanismus - Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Kulturgeschichte* (Marburg: Tectum Wissenschaftsverlag, 2013), 472-479.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Paul Betts, “Socialism, Social Rights, and Human Rights: The Case of East Germany.” *Humanity* (June 11, 2014): <http://humanityjournal.org/issue3-3/socialism-social-rights-and-human-rights-the-case-of-east-germany/>

that visitors would have engaged either term in potentially interchangeable ways.⁷² How visitors interpreted the term in the context of these *Ausstellungen* depended on their own worldview: a professor of law interpreted the word humanism differently than the butcher.

Mayor Lippert was not the only state official to evoke this malleable term. Günter Schade, the General Director of the State Museum in Berlin, writing in the *Vorwort* of the “Art of the Reformation” *Ausstellung*, claimed that Reformation art played a central role in the “humanistic” and progressive heritage (Erbe) of the DDR’s socialist society.⁷³ Likewise, speaking at the first constituent meeting of the DDR’s Martin Luther Committee in 1980, Erich Honecker stated: “It is above all the sweeping changes of our times which require us to align ourselves with historical progress, reason and humanity. In the struggles of his day, Martin Luther exercised a major influence on historical developments. He was one of the most important humanists striving for a more just world.”⁷⁴ The language that Honecker used around the humanism exemplifies the multifaceted nature of the term in 1983.

In Luther’s time he actually polemicized with Christian humanists, namely Erasmus of Rotterdam. Surely, he did not consider himself the “humanist” that Honecker referred to him as.⁷⁵ Rather, Honecker took advantage of another connotation of “humanism”—the humanitarian idea of trying to make the world more “just.” Other Eastern bloc states, like Poland, were dealing with their own crisis of being criticized by both citizens and western media for not providing a

⁷² Western Marxists like E.P. Thompson took the term “socialist humanism” and associated it with what East Germans would consider “socialist human rights.” Thompson wrote: socialist humanism is “humanist because it places once again real men and women at the centre of socialist theory and aspiration, instead of the resounding abstractions – the Party, Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism, the Two Camps, the Vanguard of the Working-Class – so dear to Stalinism,” see E. P. Thompson; Calvin Winslow, *E.P. Thompson and the Making of the New Left: Essays and Polemics* (New York: Monthly Review Press 2014), 49-88.

⁷³ *Kunst der Reformation*, 9.

⁷⁴ Honecker, *Martin Luther and Our Age*, 11.

⁷⁵ Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (New Haven: Yale University Press, c1989), 209-218.

humanitarian culture. Therefore, individual organizations tied with Solidarity took the initiative to provide services to the ill and imprisoned.⁷⁶ Wanting to avoid a public image crisis like that in Poland, Honecker and his team attempted to market to western guests and media the humanistic, in this case humanitarian, culture of the DDR.⁷⁷ Although the regime conformed to non-socialist political developments, some state officials still clung on to the hope for the arrival of a new level of socialism.

The “Erfurt-Luther-Dialoge” established itself as one of the more unique exhibits of the 1983 year. Open to the public from May 5th until November 15th, the “Erfurt-Luther-Dialoge” not only presented historic works of art connected to Erfurt, but also featured recent work produced by contemporary artists, who attempted to portray Münzter, Luther, and the Reformation according to their own individual articulation. In the introduction to the catalogue Karl Heinz Bornmann, Director of the Fishmarkt Galerie, offered an alternative understanding for how Luther celebrations can impact the DDR. First, he wrote that for the Germans, the international workers movement, and for the obligation of humanity’s progression, the anniversary of Karl Marx’s death presented a “new strength to draw from history for the solution of the tasks of the present and the future.”⁷⁸ This makes perfect sense considering Marx was the foremost prophet of socialism. But in the next line, Bornmann included Luther in the same category: “We see the recognition of Luther’s life and his life work in the same sense.” For

⁷⁶ Kenney, *Carnival of Revolution*, 41.

⁷⁷ Maser, “*Mit Luther alles in Butter*,” 214. Paraphrased from: “Gegenüber den kapitalisten Ländern bietet die Luther-Ehrung vielfältige Möglichkeiten, humanistischen Grundsätze der Kulturpolitik und Kirchenpolitik in der DDR, der sozialistischen deutschen Nation, wirksam und erlebbar zu demonstrieren...Der antikommunistischen Hetze des Imperialismus wird damit aktiv entgegenwirkt.” ; also note that some minor changes were made in in 1980 when the Luther committee met, *see* page 215.

⁷⁸ Hilmar Ziegenrucker, *Erfurt-Luther-Dialoge : Ausstellung zur Martin-Luther-Ehrung 1983 der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Galerie am Fischmarkt, Erfurt: Published by the city of Erfurt, 1983), 5: neue Kräfte aus Geschichte für die Lösung der Aufgaben der Gegenwart und Zukunft zu ziehen.

Bornmann, conceiving Luther and his historical importance could help catalyze not only the Germans, but the workers of the world on their journey to the promised land.

Just a few pages later, art historian and future State Secretary of Culture Gabriele Muschter stressed that recognizing the importance of social contexts in history can be used for the present and to project (*projizieren*) the future.⁷⁹ In using the verb *projizieren*—to project—Muschter exceeded Bornmann’s claim that history can help drive socialism into a future, which we can assume is another stage of socialism. Muschter explicitly expressed how necessary understanding this history is for the future of socialism. Like many aspects of the 1983 *Lutherjahr*, state officials were not on the same page in regards to the role that Luther could play for their state’s future. Zooming out for a moment, the contradiction and slight differentiation between how these different state officials conceived the usefulness of the *Jubiläum* shows us how difficult it was to implement a universalized ideology in East Germany at the time.

At times, officials hailed an already thriving “new presentation of man.” Others were still in search for answers of questions that the previous three decades had left them. This is vital in dispelling any notion that East German citizens—and Eastern Bloc states in general—had a homogenous experience under socialism. In creating a link between the varied articulations of socialist reality in East German exhibitions and the official political message instituted by the SED, we see how state members represented anything but a universalized understanding of Marxism in 1983. This last section will travel down to the last part of this three-tier model in

⁷⁹ Ziegenrucker, *Erfurt-Luther-Dialoge*, 77. Other artists in the DDR were also explicit about their attempt to use art as means to project a socialist future. See Kyrill Kunakhovich, "The Red Director: Karl Kayser and the Evolution of GDR Theater." *German Studies Review* 40, no. 1 (2017): 103-121. <https://muse.jhu.edu/>. East German director Karl Kayser wrote: “Only when artists study life will they be able to represent it truthfully and realistically,” Kayser explained; “in this way, the personal becomes universal and the universal personal, and the artwork turns into real life—into a forum—into a battleground.”

exploring how individual Germans interpreted Luther and the Reformation, and through these topics, their own experiences.

Part III: The Laity and the Search for a New Socialism

As we travel down the social ladder from high politics, the space for individual interpretation widens. At the local level, different Reformation *Austellungen* were created within the scope of their nation's dominant political narrative—but the authors and creators of those respective museum experiences were allowed the liberty to express their own views within the boundaries of Marxist-Leninism. This marked this first point in this story where the political messages that came from above made contact with the German citizen or *Ausländer* (foreigner, or outsider). Even if the messages that targeted museumgoers were more individualized, they were nevertheless constructed with reasons that exceed personal interpretation—and for this reason, we must look beyond these exhibition catalogues.

In our context, there are limitations in trying to tell the history of the 1983 *Lutherjahr* through the alibis and accounts of politicians or local leaders. Yet the sources in the previous sections and the opinions of individual Germans should not be divorced. What emerges is an opening in this case study where we look at individual responses to the 1983 *Lutherjahr*, somewhat independent of official political language. This section will explore the opinions and works of art by individual artists who partook in the *Lutherjahr* celebrations. Some artists produced work that was finished earlier than 1983, yet their works and opinions were collected for exhibitions in the 1983 celebrations. Nearly all of the pieces of art were included in Reformation *Austellungen*, similar to the ones discussed in the previous section.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ The exception in this case is Uwe Pfeifer's *Tischgespräche mit Martin Luther*.

With Luther's commemoration, a collision occurred between the two faiths of East Germany—Christianity and socialism. In the debris of this collision, it is possible to detect a number of new confessional strains that made new attempts at trying to re-assemble not only Martin Luther, but also the symbols and historical moments that coincide with his image—Christ's crucifixion, Thomas Münzter, and the Peasants War. In some cases, artists attempted to grapple with the historic Luther, and at other moments the images of Luther and the Reformation stood in as symbols of their contemporary experience. The variety of articulations of the Reformation put forth by DDR artists may appear out of place in comparison to the strict ideological scaffolding that took place by the Luther Committee. But in the context of artistic movements during the 1960s and 1970s, it made perfect sense.

During the early 1960s young artists like Lutz Ketscher, Matthias Klemm, Rolf Müller, Gregor-Torsten Kozik, Michael Morgner and Hanz Zander took classes at the *Hochschule für Graphik und Buchkunst Leipzig*, also known as the HGB.⁸¹ Although some worked with different advisors than others, these artists all contributed to a small community that emerged as a safe haven for creative freedom. They also held something else in common: each one of these artists contributed in some way to the *Lutherjahr* commemorations.

Regardless of ideological pressures from the DDR government, the HGB allowed its students a large amount of freedom to create art according to their personal interest.⁸² Prior to 1961 the HGB was subject to the leadership of Kurt Massloff and Kurt Magrigz, whose priorities were to push a Stalinistic version of socialist realism that sought to bring Marxist imagery to

⁸¹ Lutz Ketscher, email interview by Benjamin Sloan, March 3, 2018. He studied under Gerhard Jurt Müller, Wolfgang Mattheuer, and Hans Mayer-Foreyth.

⁸² Volker Stelzmann, email interview by Benjamin, March 11, 2018. He attended the HGB starting in 1963: Die kreative Freiheit war an der HGB generell sehr groß, obwohl mit Druck von außen versucht wurde, diese Freiheit einzuschränken. ; also, see *Revolution im Geschlossen Raum*, 11.

illiterate workers.⁸³ The move to a more liberal expression of art comes as a surprise considering that in 1957 Leipzig's first "Cultural Conference" came to the conclusion that art would be used to: "educate Socialist Man, to transmit knowledge, to bring joy [and] enthusiasm."⁸⁴ Yet four years later Bernhard Heisig became rector of the HGB and brought a greater emphasis on allowing artists to express their own individual perception—in contrast to the former Socialist-Realist emphasis on what they "saw."⁸⁵ Three years later Heisig left his post as rector due to unclear reasons. Nevertheless, he was seen as "emancipating" HGB artists from the dogmas of realism.⁸⁶

Heisig's impact would lead to the formation of the "Leipzig School" of artists. During the 1970s this movement brought with it a higher importance on the *Privatbild* (private image): the DDR was beginning to lose control of what it would have hoped was a homogeneous interpretation of a socialist universe.⁸⁷ Due to a low rate of state commissions, artists began to hold their own local and autonomous exhibitions in locations that could hardly be considered galleries. The new generations of artists, one critic commented, had created "its own art world."⁸⁸ On the brink of the *Lutherjahr*, artistic individualism was the norm. As historian Kryill Kunakhovich claims: "With the rise of cultural consumerism, enforcing orthodoxy ceased to be a priority."⁸⁹ While the HGB and the Leipzig school only represents an artistic movement in one

⁸³ Klaus Michael and Susanna Seufert, *Revolution im Geschlossen Raum* (Leipzig: Verlag Faber, 2002) 10.

⁸⁴ As quoted in Kryill Kunakhovich, "In Search of Socialist Culture: Art and Politics in Krakow and Leipzig, 1918-1989." PhD diss., Princeton University. 2013. 188. <http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/dsp01vm40xr70t>

⁸⁵ Michael and Seufert, *Revolution im Geschlossen Raum*, 10. This is based on an account from famous product of the HGB, Arno Rink, who also went to the HGB during the early 1960s.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 10. For Bernhard Heisig's impact on East German Art, see April A. Eisman, "Bernhard Heisig: The Cultural Politics of East German Art." PhD diss. University of Pittsburg, 2007. http://d-scholarship.pitt.edu/8226/1/EismanA_Pitt.2007.pdf.

⁸⁷ Birgit Poppe, "Bilder des Sozialistischen Alltags in der DDR: Studien zur Ikonographie und Erberezeption der Leipziger Schule nach 1970," in Hefte zur DDR – Geschichte, No. 43 (Berlin: Gesellschaftswissenschaftliches Forum, 1997).

⁸⁸ As quoted in Kunakhovich, "In Search of Socialist Culture," 360.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 361

city of the DDR, the artists and styles that emerged impacted the styles and intellectual development of expression across East Germany. One medium where this push for individualism manifested itself was around depictions of Luther, the Reformation, and the Peasants War.

The New Revolutionaries

Growing up in East Germany, students were taught that history moved in stages and that the future was conditional on the actions of the present.⁹⁰ With the support of the Soviet Union, Germany's move to socialism appeared to be a promising new stage—but by the 1980s the orthodoxy that was prevalent after the war had died down. Thousands of miles away, in South America, socialism was being realized in a more revolutionary way, which grabbed the attention of East German artists feeling complacent with their own version of Marxism. And what made South American Marxism unique was that it did not separate Christ from the proletariat. Gustavo Gutiérrez, leader in a new movement known as “Liberation Theology” put this in perspective: “the development of liberation theology in Latin America has been accompanied by a continual awareness that we have entered into a new historical stage in the life of our peoples and by a felt need of understanding this new stage as a call from the Lord to preach the gospel in a way that befits the new situation.”⁹¹ Gutiérrez framed his articulation of Marxism on the belief that an ethnic-national or continental wide group could reach new stages of socialism unconditional of the rest of the world's progress. This resonated with Germans who possessed a rich Christian tradition: combining an imported ideology with Germany's history of religious symbolism helped artists reconcile their present with the past.

⁹⁰ Michael Triegel, email interview by Benjamin Sloan, March 19, 2018. According to Triegel *Wissenschaftlichen Materialismus* was a primary part of the East German school curriculum.

⁹¹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Teología de la Liberación* (Lima: CEP, 1971), Translated by Matthew J. O'Connell as *The Theology of Liberation*, Revised Edition (Maryknoll, New York, 2016), xviii.

Theo Balden's "Hommage a Víctor Jara" (1974) seemed like a strange piece of artwork to include in the "Erfurt-Luther-Dialog" *Ausstellung* that ran during the 1983 *Lutherjahr*. The "Hommage" is a plastic sculpture portraying a broken bust of what appears to be a Roman man, meant to represent the Chilean socialist and revolutionary Víctor Jara, who was brutally murdered at the beginning of Augusto Pinochet's reign in 1973. Jara was tortured, shot forty-four times and then tossed into the street. When civil servants finally found him, he was completely dismembered—bullets were scattered across his body, and his hands were hanging from the threads of his wrists.⁹² For Balden and other socialists, Jara represented a new formation of Christ, and what he stood for.

In the "dialogue" section of the *Luther Ausstellung*, Balden calls Jara the "new ECCE HOMO"—the historic depiction of Christ on the cross. Balden was an East German artist, who was at least exposed to, if not whole-heartedly invested in the concept of religion as the opiate of the masses. Even if Christ's image bore little importance to socialist dogma, the image of him on the cross clearly resonated with Balden's feelings of suffering and sorrow. Scholar David Martin complements this point: "if Christ as savior cannot be realized in full, nevertheless aspects of His role and fragments of religious consciousness continue to float freely in contemporary society in the form of sacrifice for others, victimhood, concepts of the massing of evil in the system and of collective solidarity in social guilt."⁹³

One particularity of Balden's association of Jara with Christ is that "Victor Jara can be you and can be me."⁹⁴ This pronouncement followed a theological model: if Jesus died for

⁹² Andrew Tyler, "The Life and Death of Victor Jara – a classic feature from the vaults," *Guardian* (Guardian News and Media Limited), September 18, 2013. <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2013/sep/18/victor-jara-pinochet-chile-rocks-backpages>

⁹³ David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot, England; Virginia, United States: Ashgate Publishing Limited), 191.

⁹⁴ Ziegenrucker, *Erfurt-Luther-Dialoge*, 105.

humans on the behalf of God, Jara died for us on behalf of the promises of socialism. Balden not only evoked Christian images, but also configured his idea of martyrdom in a way comparable to how theologians make sense of Christ's martyrdom. Although Balden's plastic sculpture does not explicitly include Luther in its imagery, it was nevertheless included in the *Ausstellung* for a reason: Luther's DDR assemblage must not stand on its own, but rather be included with other religious art that can be reconciled with socialist principles. On this note, Balden's evocation of the historic ECCE HOMO fit well within the framework of how East Germans took advantage of the novelty of history.

As with the authors of exhibition catalogues, the artists who participated in the exhibitions shared the idea that history is more than a story to learn from—history is a way to conceive the past in order to handle the present as it becomes the future. When asked how Balden's work connects to the “frühbürgerliche Revolution” or the Reformation, he responded by saying, “I like to develop the objects of my work from ‘old’ to the present with the claim of the future.”⁹⁵ He continued, “This eternal struggle of man for their progressive renewal and liberation concludes as a result from War Tylrer, Jörg Ratgeb, Copernicus, as well as Martin Luther, like Karl Marx, Karl Liebknecht and Lenin who drew on the past for wisdom and strength.”⁹⁶ Balden saw history, and by that, the revolutionaries who work as “History's Locomotives,” as contributing to an eternal attempt at liberation.⁹⁷

Other artists, such as HGB product Gregor-Torsten Kozik were more explicit than Balden in their desire to use the spirit of the past in order to confront the present. Kozik's

⁹⁵ Ibid., ich habe gern den gegenstand meiner Arbeit aus dem “Alten” hervor zum Gegenwärtigen zu entwickeln mit den Anspruch auf Künftiges.

⁹⁶ Ibid., Dieser ewige Kampf des Menschen für seine fortschreitende Erneuerung und Befreiung schließt daher War Tyler, Jörg Ratgeb, Kopernikus, Martin Luther ebenso ein, wie Karl Marx, Liebknecht und Lenin, denn auch sie schöpften Wissen und Kraft aus dem Vergangenen.

⁹⁷ Reference to Martin Malia, *History's Locomotives : Revolutions and the Making of the Modern World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

contribution to the “Erfurt-Luther-Dialogue” was an abstract piece done in chalk, charcoal, and graphite titled “Der Neue Mensch” (The New Man). The piece was a black and white conglomeration of different objects put together, and only with help from its title, appears to be a human. More clues, such as a nail posted in the top right corner, and a quote listed above the title, “belief must be foreman and captain in all work,” tells us that this “man” is Martin Luther—yet the piece is dedicated to a “Ernesto Cardenal.”⁹⁸ At the time, Cardenal lived in Nicaragua, working as a Catholic priest, poet, and liberation theologian.

Kozik’s work and his commentary in the “dialogue” section of the exhibition catalogue indicate that he clearly remained close to Christianity’s symbols and cultural tradition. But in order to express this without state censorship, Kozik claimed, “I have oriented myself on a ‘lays’ history of Atheism,” and in another section wrote “I am an atheist, but the humanistic and social goals of original Christianity are close to me—the crucifix [and] ECCO HOMO tower over the image and body of our time.”⁹⁹ Even in a world where Christianity played the role of an opiate, Kozik struggled to permanently divorce Christian themes from his life as a socialist.

Another angle to view Kozik’s struggle through is the words of HGB classmate Volker Stelzmann: “Life in the DDR was material and spirituality was very constrained. At least one could extend their spiritual freedom with themselves and with friends.”¹⁰⁰ Although impossible to prove, Kozik expressed what an outsider could easily label as religiosity. But he covered these expressions with a thin disguise in claiming to be an atheist. Another way that he was able to morph his Christian sentimentalities with socialist ideals was through making connections with South American revolutionaries and liberation theologians, such as Ernesto Cardenal.

⁹⁸ Ziegenrücker, *Erfurt-Luther-Dialoge*, 91: der glaub muß Werkmeister und Hauptmann sein in allen wercken.

⁹⁹ Ziegenrücker, *Erfurt-Luther-Dialoge*, 105.

¹⁰⁰ Volker Stelzmann, email interview by Benjamin Sloan, March 11, 2018: Das Leben in der DDR war materiell und geistig sehr eingeschränkt. Zumindest geistige Freiheit konnte man für sich selbst und mit Freunden ausweiten.

Kozik mentioned in the dialogue section of the *Ausstellung* that he had recently read a book by Cardenal—“Die Auferstehung der Völker,” or the “Resurrection of the People.” He saw a “*Potenzierung* of energy” between Cardenal, Luther, as well as Thomas Münzter. *Potenzierung* translates to “exponentiation” or “potentization”—words that in mathematical and scientific terms have different meanings. In the mathematical sense, it means to raise the quantity of a number to the power of its exponent: for example three to the power of three equals nine. In medicinal terms, potentization means to dilute a substance with alcohol in the process of making homeopathic medicine. He calls this energy a “*vita activa*,” which he understands in the following terms: [Cardenal’s] new man, who is not an individual, but rather encompasses all people, who live for each other—people of a perfected communist community, that I see again, just as Luther already saw.”¹⁰¹ The *vita activa* that Kozik situated himself around is a transferable energy that begins with Luther, and then moves to Cardenal, and eventually to himself. Traveling from Luther’s time to 1983, this energy had undergone both an exponentiation and a potentization—diluting itself and building on itself at the same time—not far from a dialectic process. Kozik found himself and his contemporaries stuck in paralysis. In honoring Cardenal and Luther in the same piece, Kozik saw this as a moment where he could change the role that art played in his world. Art should no longer stand merely as a critique on society, but rather spur tangible action.

Uwe Pfeifer, who attended the HGB Leipzig a decade later than Kozik, literally sat Luther down with the South American revolutionary Che Guevara in a painting he completed for the *Lutherjahr*. The three part painting, *Tischgespräche mit Martin Luther*, looks as follows:

¹⁰¹ Ibid., Translation: Sein neuer Mensch, der kein einzelner ist, sondern alle Menschen umfaßt, der für die anderen lebt, menschen einer vollkommenen kommunistischen Gesellschaft, erscheint mir wieder wie das Licht, welches Luther schon sah.

Luther sits at a round poker-looking table, clad in his usual black preaching garb; Che Guevara sits in front of him, while a radio microphone hangs from the ceiling, before Luther's mouth. The painting, which portrays Guevara interviewing Luther, is being presented to the viewer by two naked figures on either side of the table—a man to the left listening to the Luther-Guevara interview with headphones, and his female counterpart to the right smoking a cigarette.¹⁰²

One convincing reason for Pfeifer and Kozik's attraction to South American socialist revolutionary circles was the existence of local Leipzig movements like the *Initiativgruppe Hoffnung Nicaragua* (Initiative Groups Hope Nicaragua) or IGH. The goal of this group was to create a dialogue between the Sandinista National Liberation Front of Nicaragua and Christians living in the DDR. Karim Saab, one of the founders of the IGH, created a number of "Theses of the Theologies of Liberation from the Northern DDR Perspective." The theses, published in 1983, echoed Gustavo Gutiérrez's tenants of Liberation theology, primarily putting the importance of the poor to the forefront of social responsibility. One thesis of the IGH resounds Kozik's idea of a new "new man": "When a person from Mozambique tells us about hope, that the new relations in their land have created a 'New Man,' it should encourage us to think about the socialist ideals of the DDR."¹⁰³ Like Gutiérrez, Karim Saab saw Mozambique's socialist leadership as successfully forming an ethno-national "New Man."

When hundreds of thousands of Portuguese fled Mozambique in 1975, the once colonized state was left to construct its own government from scratch.¹⁰⁴ In the ashes of this

102 Rolf Luhn, and Eva-Marina Froitzheim, *Sichtungen und Einblicke*, 90.

103 Wilhelm Volks, "'Hoffnung Nicaragua' in Leipzig-ein Beispiel entwicklungspolitischer Basisarbeit in der DDR," *Quetzal: Politik und Kultur in Lateinamerika* No. 6/7 1994: <http://www.quetzal-leipzig.de/printausgaben/ausgabe-06-07-lateinamerika-und-deutschland/hoffnung-nicaragua-in-leipzig-ein-beispiel-entwicklungspolitischer-basisarbeit-in-der-ddr-19093.html>: Wenn uns ein Mosambiquaner von der Hoffnung erzählt, daß die neuen Verhältnisse in seinem Land einen 'Neuen Menschen' prägen werden, sollte uns das anregen, über die Verwirklichung dieses sozialistischen Ideals in der DDR nachzudenken ..."

104 Gary Siedman, "Socialist Construction in Mozambique" *The Crimson* (November 10, 1975). <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1975/11/10/socialist-construction-in-mozambique-pbwbhen-the/>

crisis, the Marxist political party Frelimo assumed power. The East German government proceeded to intervene on a number of economic and political fronts.¹⁰⁵ Although the DDR may have saw themselves as an ideological surrogate to this newly budding Marxist state, IGH members actually looked to Mozambique's formation of the "New Man" for inspiration.

Whether or not Kozik or Pfeifer came into direct contact with the IGH, they nevertheless operated in close degrees between each other. Enough evidence exists to argue that similar sentiments were circulating among shared intellectual circles in Leipzig. The East German "new man" was insufficient for socialists at the time, prompting a search to other places such as South America and East Africa.

Hail Mary Full of Grace: Confession or Criticism?

Michael Triegel, who worked as a security guard during this exhibition, described its portrayal of Luther as a "perversion."¹⁰⁶ Although fourteen-year-old Triegel had been immersed in materialist schooling during this time, he was still able to locate the contortion of Luther's image. This leads to a logical question: did these artists also recognize the "perversion" of Luther's image, or were they simply too immersed in trying to assemble their own socialist reality, that any sort of ideological tampering became immaterial? The answer is yes, and no. Artists looked for new ways of trying to reconcile their own personal convictions with the ideological current of the time. But these new articulations also undermined the regime's goal of

¹⁰⁵ George A. Glass, "East German in Black Africa: A New Special Role." *The World Today*, Vol. 36, No. 8 (August 1980), pp. 305-312.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40395204.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A29a737714354e5e0e027a071c45152b9>

¹⁰⁶ Michael Triegel, email interview by Benjamin Sloan, March 19, 2018; March 20, 2018: 1983 hatte ich als 14-jähriger im Sommer einen Ferienjob als Aufsicht in der staatlichen Lutherausstellung im Haus zum Roten Ochsen in Erfurt. Schon damals fiel mir auf, wie die Figur Luthers durch die DDR pervertiert wurde, besonders als Erich Honnecker der Vorsitzende des nationalen Lutherkomitees wurde.

a universal socialist language. If an artist was going to push against the regime, they had to do it with discretion.

Artist Hubertus Giebe, commenting in the “Erfurt-Luther-Dialogue,” wrote: “We must find a pictorial form, to allow new issues between revolutions as tragic moments of the past and of the present. One has to not only think about the [Paris] Commune, or the 1848 revolution, 1918 Germany, or on the lack of response against German fascism.”¹⁰⁷ In Giebe’s opinion, other tragedies like the Peasant’s War offered a way to look to the past in order to project more “humanism.” On the surface, these pronouncements appear to be in line with the SED’s message. Yet for individual Germans, evoking “humanism” exceeded the SED’s attempt at conforming to a popular international code.

Beyond the Luther celebrations, a number of HGB graduates—including Horst Sokolowski, Arno Rink, and Volker Stelzmann—produced artwork that made use of Christian symbols around the same time. According to HGB classmate Lutz Ketscher: “The application of biblical motives and symbols in the work of these artists was surely not meant to be for Christian missionary reasons, but rather as traditional humanistic work in critique of the rigid state doctrine of communism.”¹⁰⁸ Based on Ketscher’s comment, a new possibility arises: both the state and artists attempted to make use of the idea of “humanism” for reasons that pushed against each other. State leaders like Lippert and Schade used the term to try to reconcile German citizens with new developments in socialist ideology, where as artists did the opposite by quietly criticizing the regime.

¹⁰⁷ Ziegenrucker, *Erfurt-Luther-Dialoge*, 102: wir müssen Bildformen finden, neuen Fragestellungen zwischen revolutionären wie tragischen Momenten der Geschichte und der Gegenwart ermöglichen.

¹⁰⁸ Email interview, Lutz Ketscher, 3/13/2018: Die Anwendung biblischer Motive und Symbole in den Bildern dieser Künstler waren sicher nicht christlich missionarisch gemeint. Sondern eher als traditionelle humanistische Werte in Kritik zur damals herrschenden rigiden kommunistischen Staatsdoktrin.

Hochschule für Graphik und Buchkunst Leipzig graduate Lutz Ketscher attempted to show the massive contradiction of the DDR attempting to celebrate Thomas Müntzer and Martin Luther nearly simultaneously. For Ketscher, understanding this contradiction was the “hour of inspiration” for his piece “Controversy Luther-Müntzer or Müntzer or the devil on the wall”¹⁰⁹ (1974). The 21x28cm tempura painting features Luther’s famed moment in the Wartburg Castle: when Luther was translating the Greek bible into German during the winter of 1521 he was supposedly attacked by the devil, causing him to throw a bottle of ink at the place on the wall where he saw Satan. Yet, in Ketscher’s piece he put a portrait of Müntzer on the wall in the place where the devil would have usually been depicted. Ketscher realized that styling Müntzer as a German martyr would have fed into the ideological goals of the state. Therefore, he positioned Luther in a militant pose in the foreground, “while Müntzer remained caught in history” on the wall.¹¹⁰

In Ketscher’s attempt to highlight this contradiction, he was doing his best at criticizing the regime while still remaining in its graces. In a telling moment, Ketscher admitted “Ten years earlier this political manipulation would have made me angry. So one had to accept their individual opinions.”¹¹¹ For Ketscher, “the entire socialist reality became completely contradictory,” and expressing this in art was his best attempt at dissent within the boundaries of safety.¹¹² This was not the only moment in his art career where he showed his dissatisfaction

¹⁰⁹ Lutz Ketscher, email interview by Benjamin Sloan, February 12, 2018: Das Dilemma war, das Luthers religiöse Reformationbestrebungen und Thomas Müntzers politischer Abtritt mal ursprünglich ziemlich verbunden gewesen sein sollen. Wie dem auch sei, die DDR musste sich notgedrungen auch mit Luther befassen und das war für mich die Stunde der Inspiration.

¹¹⁰ Lutz Ketscher, email interview by Benjamin Sloan, February 21, 2018: Deshalb habe ich Luther in streitbarer Pose in den Vordergrund gestellt, während Müntzer in der Geschichte gefangen bleibt.

¹¹¹ Ibid., Zehn Jahre früher hätte mir diese Ansicht mächtigen politischen Ärger eingebracht. So aber akzeptierte man die "individuellen" Meinungen, auch, weil sich in den evangelischen Gemeinden immer mehr Widerstand regte.

¹¹² Ibid., die gesamte sozialistische Realität immer widersprüchlicher wurde.

with the East German state. In the 1960s the SED decided to demolish the *Altstadt* (old or historic part of a city) of his hometown, Gera, in order to turn what was once a historical tourist location into a zone used for industrial production. In response he produced a series of eight paintings—all between 1974 and 1978—in which he put his surrealist aesthetic to use in displaying a destroyed city that had lost its identity.¹¹³ Ketscher completed these works at the same time that he was working on his Luther-Müntzer work: between his Reformation image and the series on Gera, Ketscher was clearly attempting to show the distorted experience that he had living in the DDR. Still, criticizing the DDR in its politics was difficult to show.¹¹⁴

Although Ketscher's work may have sought to originally display contradiction, his "Controversy Luther-Münzter or Müntzer or the devil on the wall" was featured in the DDR curated "Erfurt-Luther-Dialogue." Gabriel Muschter, writing in the introduction to the artist dialogue section spoke for Ketscher when she categorized his painting as offering a more realistic image than other works. Taking the liberty to comment freely in an "official" way, Muschter labeled Ketscher's work as portraying a critical angle of Luther, while still being "transferable to today's events."¹¹⁵ What she did not know, or rather chose to ignore and intentionally distort, was that Ketscher's inspiration came from an attempt to express the contradictory reality of living in East Germany.

Conclusion: Revisiting Utopia

¹¹³ Lutz Ketscher, email interview by Benjamin Sloan, March 15, 2018; March 18, 2018: Die herrschende kommunistische Partei, SED, wollte keine Touristenstadt, sondern eine Industriestadt mit neuen Bauten und breiten Straßen im Stadtzentrum. Und haben ab 1960 rücksichtslos alles abgerissen, was im Wege stand und nannten das: "Sanierung des Stadtzentrums" Heute sieht es so "modern" aus wie überall auf der Welt.

¹¹⁴ Erich Wellhöfer, email interview by Benjamin Sloan, date, March 21, 2018: In der Kunstszene gab es auch wenig private und vor allem staatlich Galerien. Kritisch-politische Positionen war schwer zu zeigen. Wellhöfer was commissioned by the state to complete a depiction of Luther for a 1983 *Ausstellung "Martin Luther und unsere Zeit."*

¹¹⁵ Ziegenrucker: *Erfurt-Luther-Dialoge*, 79: auch in der Übertragbarkeit auf heutige Ereignisse.

Ostensibly East Germany was one socialist nation, except in reality it was a nation where a number of different socialisms co-existed. The commemorations that took place in 1983 serve more than just surveying how Luther and the historical symbolism of the Reformation were inherited by a postwar Germany. What occurred was a moment where Germans from the level of high politics, to regional leadership, to individuals were prompted to express their realities in a new way. From the plurality of responses a new way of understanding life in the DDR emerges. But this public musing—via official liturgy put out by the SED, catalogues of Reformation exhibitions, and expressions (both artistically and through interviews) from artists—was contained within the boundaries of Marxist language. If East Germans veered too far from the official message, consequences could be guaranteed.

For example, one DDR statesman turned dissident Rudolf Bahro criticized the SED's conception of "real existing socialism" in his *Die Alternative: Zur Kritik des real existierenden Sozialismus*, he was then promptly arrested and eventually deported to West Germany. Bahro argued that the Soviet Union and its client states represented industrial despotism instead of any version of "real existing socialism" —the idea that Eastern Bloc states were currently engaging in the best version of economic socialism that they could realize.¹¹⁶

Artists, who represent the most autonomous actors in this case study, were permitted the most freedom in expressing their views. Leading up to the 1970s and early 1980s East German art began to exist "in socialism" instead of having to project "socialist realism."¹¹⁷ The verbiage may appear minor, but the liberties granted in regards to how individuals understood socialism

¹¹⁶ For Rudolf Bahro and his dissent, see David Bathrick, "The Politics of Culture: Rudolf Bahro and Opposition in the GDR." Duke University Press, *Stable New German Critique*, No. 15 (Autumn, 1978), pp. 3-24 Duke University Press Stable <http://www.jstor.org/stab> ; Henry Krisch, *German Democratic Republic* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview press), 131. ; Der Spiegel, August 22, 1977 Vol 35., <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-40763980.html>

¹¹⁷ Yvonne Fiedler, *Kunst im Korridor: Private Galerie in der DDR zwischen Autonomie und Illegalität* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag GmbH, 2013), 39.

was tremendous. Although artists retained greater freedoms than state officials, there still remained parallel developments between their understandings of socialism. What we see is a field of “personal socialisms,” and attached to those, personal utopias. Considering that Marx and Engels never gave a blueprint for what that the Promised Land looked like, Marxists living in the 1970s and 1980s of the DDR had some freedom to decide if they were living in a utopia.¹¹⁸ And if they weren’t already there, they tried to find a way to reach that point.

For East Germans at every level, understanding history was seen as a way to propel the DDR into this socialist future. Erich Honecker, as well as state officials like Gabriele Muschter used history as a catapulting point for a revolutionary future. Honecker saw the Luther celebrations as a way to better understand the failed revolutions of the past, and their relationship to the current state of the DDR in 1983. Karl Heinz Bornmann saw looking back to historical moments as a means to find “solutions” for the present, and eventually the future. Minister of Culture Gabriele Muschter used a Luther exhibition to express how important it is to understand the social contexts of history—which could then “project” the future. Understanding the failed revolution of 1848 was vital for the state—as evidenced in the *15 Thesen Über Martin Luther*. Hopefully, in understanding the past failures, the future could bring better fruit. But for others a linear path from Germany’s path to its future was non-existent. Hubertus Giebe asked readers “Where have we come from, and where are we going?”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ For another way to see Real Existing Socialism, see Manuel, Frank E. ; Manuel, Fritzie P, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, (Cambridge; Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979), 806: “The political activity that goes on Marx’s name has only incidental relationships to the jottings of 1844—so often invoked in contemporary Marxology—that constituted s 26-year-old’s attempt to spell out his own hopes and those with which he would inspire mankind. In a way, official Marxist and proto-Marxist lands with theologized utopias that go along different paths have no need for new utopias, since my proclamation they *are* utopia or a mere stage or so away from it. Their self criticism and doctrines of eternal revolution become a façade for Roman smugness.”

¹¹⁹ Ziegenrucker, *Erfurt-Luther-Dialoge*, 102.

Giebe also hoped to look to past events in German history in order to create a present that was more humanistic. Giebe's evocation of this term falls in line with the popular rise in human rights discourse of the era. But based on the information offered by Lutz Ketschner, we know that Giebe's intent was quite possibly to criticize the regime. State officials also hailed the humanistic potential in commemorating the Reformation—except either party used the term for contrasting reasons. State officials Klaus Lippert and Dr. Günter Schade saw the DDR regime as providing a “humanistic” and “progressive” life for its citizens. The Luther celebrations had the effect of both protecting and promoting the humanistic heritage of the DDR. But for Giebe as an artist, living under the policies of the DDR did not fall under his definition of a humanistic world—and looking to the past could help Germany return to a former, more humane, version of itself.

Another “personal” socialism expressed during the *Lutherjahr* was the “new socialist man.” By 1983 any sort of a “new man” was in need of a rehabilitation, prompting Gregor-Torsten Kozik's artwork and articulation of his “new man” around liberation theologian Ernesto Cardenal. While Dr. Hans-Joachim also made use of this same idea, he saw the “new presentation of man” as having already arrived. If Minister of Culture Dr. Hans-Joachim's conception of the “new socialist man” was ambiguous, Gregor-Torsten Kozik's “new socialist man” was the product of serious philosophical and even theological musing.

Citizens at all levels who lived in the DDR were searching for a new ethical code to live by. Traditional Christianity's ethical framework was bruised by the DDR's policies. Liberal democracies' culture of “freedom” was also not an option. So what manifested was a conglomeration of beliefs, articulations, and codes for how to live in socialism—for both individual Germans and politicians.

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