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PROBLEMATIZING THE “SOCIALIST PUBLIC SPHERE”: CONCEPTS AND CONSEQUENCES

Introduction

Public sphere is a concept derived from theoretical models and historical descriptions of the emergence of bourgeois society in the eighteenth century. How does it relate to the **socialist** public sphere in the German Democratic Republic (GDR)? In this overly administrative society, one with little or no tolerance for the constitutional guarantees of individual freedom and participation characteristic of liberal democracies, there existed, of course, modes of intellectual exchange, communication, discussion, and public expression. Still, the institutional structures of this putatively planned society left no room for open, rational debate, the very core of the idea of public sphere or *Öffentlichkeit* as defined by Jürgen Habermas.¹ What, then, does it mean to approach the social and cultural interaction in the GDR within the context of these terms?

As a Marxist-Leninist state, the GDR combined traditional features of monocratic societies, characterized by immobility, homogeneity, conservatism, and modern features of industrialized societies, characterized by mass production, mass appeal, and mass mobilization for an abstract goal. Yet, state control was never complete or absolute, and the Party was always obliged to compromise and recognize marginal spaces beyond its influence, especially in the area of culture and religion. In the cultural domain, for example, the number of organizations for those involved in the arts, in mediating the arts, in mass culture, etc. grew rapidly and engendered new demands and expectations that often conflicted with the Party's sense of authority or extended beyond its reach, despite efforts at hierarchical control and surveillance. Another aspect of the problem became visible in pronouncements of the official cultural policy when the Party repeatedly called for “open dialogue” but reacted with repressive, punitive acts whenever artists or writers actually made specific demands. I am suggesting, in other words, that there was no gradual shift from premodern to modern structures but rather that the simultaneity of **both** characterizes the GDR, not only in the last two decades but already in the 1950s and 1960s. In a more narrow sense, I question those who regard the appropriation of modernist and avant-garde cultural and artistic forms that began in the 1970s as a paradigm for the rediscovery of or “catching up” to

modernism. This position, which has been argued strongly by western scholars, ignores the fact the aesthetic shift in the 1970s was in the first instance a response to the political and moral stagnation in GDR society, not to structural modernization.²

I am arguing furthermore that the public sphere in the GDR did not emerge only in the 1970s but rather the oppositional discourse and activity that became more and more apparent during the last two decades of its existence were the product of events and experiences in the 1950s and 1960s.

Öffentlichkeit is a concept that can be said in the most general sense to weave together economic, social, political, and cultural dimensions of a particular historical state, and as such it offers a framework for problematizing the way we retrospectively understand the GDR. In this respect my goal is fairly modest: to work toward more differentiated categories that can take into account the complexities of experience behind the so-called iron curtain. The image of a homogeneous, totalitarian society in which personal and social interests coincided simply mirrors the state-propagated illusion of collective harmony. The GDR may now be a closed chapter in strictly historical terms, but it is part of the postwar history of Germany, and the way we explain it to ourselves will have consequences for the way we judge and narrate Germany's relation to the present. Thus, it is important to specify how people saw themselves in the GDR, to understand their lives and habits as a system of social relations and differences, as a practice with both a rationale and historical meaning, although not necessarily a “rational” one. This demands a self-awareness and historical understanding that

is not often visible nowadays. Reflecting on her past, writer and essayist Daniela Dahn remarked: “The internal structures of the GDR were by far not so monolithic as many apparently think today.”³ The concept of *Öffentlichkeit* is a helpful tool for grasping more precisely the complex encounters with institutions and cultural forces within these internal structures and the relationship between institutional power and private behavior, whether it was opportunistic, oppositional, or both. My comments here are intended to interrogate the specificity of consensual and oppositional behavior in everyday life within the systemically immanent politicization of all social relations.

Opposition, resistance, convergence, congruence, complicity: these are all words which need to be made historically specific and meaningful in the context of GDR culture. Often enough since 1989 the state of GDR culture studies in the West has been bemoaned: no one read the signs of paralysis and stagnation leading to collapse, analysis was selective and oriented toward an idealized or stultified image of the socialist reality, texts were used to derive direct insight into “real life,” and the analysis of representative authors and single texts often neglected their conditions of production and reception. While the GDR’s collapse has perfunctorily erased most of the institutional support of its culture, it has also opened up archives, simplified access to individuals, and freed GDR cultural studies from carrying the burden of what belongs more rightfully in the domain of the social sciences. As literary and cultural historians we do not exclude sociological and political concepts from our work, but we do set different accents and different distinctions from those of sociologists and political scientists. As a result, demographic or typological descriptions can recede in favor of recreating the framework for understanding the dilemmas and decisions faced by individuals, trying to do justice to the conditions, hopes and illusions, objective difficulties, and failures they faced.

The process of revitalizing GDR culture studies has already gotten underway. David Bathrick has made an important contribution to begin this process with his prize-winning study *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR*.⁴ The title points to the crucial issues: speech, culture, and political change. More important for my purposes here, Bathrick’s phrase “socialist public sphere” serves as a framework for investigating the role of dissident party intellectuals and socialist writers in the GDR. He shows that the cultural, or more specifically, the literary public sphere increasingly became the only intermediary site where critique was tolerated and effective, in contrast to inner-party dissent. In many ways my comments here are an extension of Bathrick’s argument, formulated not in the spirit of correction but critical appreciation.⁵

At the outset of his study Bathrick refers to historian Hayden White’s analytical approach, which draws attention to historical narratives as imaginative constructs subject to the methods and tools elaborated by literary and textual critics.⁶ Cultural historians of the GDR, Bathrick and myself for instance, are also subject to this hermeneutical precept, that is, we are “reading” events, lives, and texts, frequently against the grain, as symptoms of a system to be reconstructed and as constitutive elements of that system. Equally significant for the (cultural) historian’s undertaking is a self-reflective awareness of positioning, of narrative voice, if you will. In the epilogue of his study, Bathrick shows how emotionally charged the series of three “literature debates” have been that took place after 1990 in reunified Germany. His own approach is not entirely beyond these emotions, for his urge to understand and convince can not be neatly separated from questions of self-identity and political conviction. I too am in a position that is not free of emotions, or “investments” as Bathrick calls them (5-6). As an outsider who has taken a keen professional interest in the GDR since 1970, who has lived unforgettable personal experiences and made close friends there, I find myself subject to a special combination of memory and historicization, tinged with desires for justification, condemnation, reconciliation. Thus, I do recognize Bathrick’s final wisdom vis-à-vis oppositional voices in the GDR that insists on situating them within the historical context from which they spoke, one characterized by a “double-edged evolutionary process” of self-legitimation within the system and the challenge to it (241). But I would go one step further and claim that critical intellectuals in *any* society, including ours and including us, are always

subject to the double-edged evolutionary process in their relationship to the institutions of power.

Locating the Public Sphere

First let us consider some terminological issues. There are various definitions of “public” - state-related, accessible to everyone, of concern to everyone, pertaining to the common good or shared interest - and they correspond to symmetrical variations in the meaning of private.⁷ Indeed, one of the central achievements of the bourgeois public sphere, according to Habermas, was to distinguish the private from the public by creating the discursive possibilities for private persons to deliberate about public matters. The public sphere, in this tradition, is the institutional site for private individuals to construct public consent. Of course, the “public” as well as the “private” are historical categories, that is, they rest on politically and culturally determined classifications that delegitimize some interests and valorize others. Although the public sphere is in principle open to internal difference, it nonetheless excludes specific groups from political participation in specific social formations (for example, working-class women in the nineteenth century).⁸ Consequently, the model of the public sphere implicitly concedes the presence of alternative accessibility to “official,” public political life. This will be an important consideration for the socialist public sphere in the GDR where participation in official politics was especially restrictive. For a socialist public sphere did not exist there if by that we mean a set of institutions, communication networks, and practices which facilitated debate about causes and remedies to political stagnation and economic deterioration and which encouraged the creation of oppositional sites of discourse. Based on this traditional definition of the ideal, self-transforming public sphere in which everyone participates in the practical discourse, evaluation, and validation of communicative principles, one could simply write off the public sphere in the GDR as a perversion and be done.

Not only historically but also culturally there are differences in the understanding of the “public” in the GDR. One dimension, for example, that impinges on the nature of the “public” is the concept of community. In contrast to the “public,” which is constructed by means of antagonism and debate, no matter how constrained, community refers to a relatively homogeneous and bounded collectivity characterized by consensus. The GDR’s self-representation characterized it as a nonantagonistic community (*sozialistische Menschengemeinschaft*), and the state developed a range of policies to ensure national and ethnic homogeneity as well as security procedures to eliminate ideological difference. These measures aimed to control or even prevent social transformations and thus helped the party to maintain its power. On another level, the plethora of private groups (*Nischen*), artists circles, and subcultural enclaves in the GDR reflected very different self-perceptions. Many regarded the privacy and intimacy of such “communities” as protection against their ideas or voice spreading into a wider arena or even as conspiratorial. Others signaled their difference in order to gain attention, in the East or beyond the border in West Germany, hoping perhaps that notoriety would protect them. Yet others “dropped out” entirely or finally left the GDR. Officially *Öffentlichkeit* did not exist in the GDR. The tradition of Marxist analysis views the separation of state and civil society as an invention of the eighteenth century, that is, of a historically contingent period of bourgeois domination. It regards the liberal public sphere as a domain of bourgeois egoism and competition that fosters alienation and atomization rather than democracy. The ideal of public discourse becomes, consequently, a classic example of ideology, the false consciousness that masks the state as an instrument of the controlling class under the guise of equal rights. Marx and Engels envisioned a different model of organic unity or collective social harmony premised on the withering away of the bourgeois state, a form of political organization representing bourgeois economic interests. From the perspective of state socialism, then, the autonomous institution of civil society is a disruption “that must be controlled, regulated and dominated by the superior rationality and order guaranteed by state power.”⁹ The state in this ideal socialist society is the caretaker of

universal interest, superior to individual interests, and in its Leninist extension this synthesis of the general good is crystallized in the party, in its leaders and functionaries.

In this respect there is a logic to the GDR's founding in 1949 as a counter model to parliamentary democracy and the constitutional state in the western mode. The small group of emigrés who returned to Berlin from exile in Moscow to aid the Red Army in administering the Soviet Occupation Zone after Germany's surrender was equipped with experience from their political defeats in the Weimar Republic and with a theory of Marxism-Leninism more attuned to the assumption and maintenance of power than to the construction of an egalitarian and free society. At the latest by 1949 the communist party (SED or *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland*) had abandoned whatever efforts had been undertaken to reestablish everyday civil society and directed its energies toward cementing its own leadership and control. Committed to the process of modern rationalization, the new leaders sought to eliminate the parallel developments of autonomous social subsystems. The instantiation of the one-party system, especially in its Stalinist mode of the *Partei neuen Typs* (new type of party), was directed at preventing the formation of a pluralistic, self-organizing civil society opposed to the Party and its claims to legitimacy. Party discipline, which formalizes an asymmetrical relationship between "discourse partners", became a weapon for conformity among the political elite, while public discourse tended to vanish in behind-the-scenes negotiations and between-the-line innuendoes. Thus, both socialist theory and practice in the GDR collapsed the state apparatus with the public sphere, thereby cementing authoritarian, hierarchical structures. Yet, if the public sphere did not exist in the traditional sense, public opinion did have a place, or to be more exact, published opinion, in which the social consciousness of the ruling class is reflected.¹⁰ In a socialist formation like the GDR the ruling class is defined as the majority working class, whose party controls the means of production and distribution. The party then assumes the traditional function of the public sphere because it represents in principle the identity of all class interests in the socialist society. Peter Hohendahl has equated this sublated version of the bourgeois public sphere with *Parteiöffentlichkeit* (party public sphere), which claims "to mediate between the Party and State on the one hand and the Party and the mass of citizens on the other."¹¹

Parteiöffentlichkeit and its pendant party discipline quickly bogged down in what Habermas referred to as the plebiscitary-acclamatory public sphere typical of dictatorial industrial societies.¹² In fact, a widely accepted explanation for the GDR's premodern social organization finds corroboration precisely in such phenomena. To be sure the bureaucratic and administrative structures consolidated in the early years with their ritualized representative functions and prescribed political status were premodern, even feudal when compared to the model of the liberal public sphere. But from the beginning an ongoing process of differentiation characteristic of complex, modern societies was also underway, not the least owing to the GDR's self-proclaimed goal to compete with capitalism. This introduced internal changes that constantly undermined the premodern, or better, antimodern, closed social order, inducing a dynamic of structural conflict that the party was never able to master. *Parteiöffentlichkeit*, as the organized reason of the party, was, then, on the one hand nonsense, on the other hand, party discipline did allow a limited space for internal free discussion, but without consequences for the public.

Mapping the Socialist Public Sphere

The point of departure for a discussion of the **socialist** public sphere should logically be the public sphere *tout court*.¹³ There is little need here to reiterate Habermas's normative aspects of the bourgeois public sphere, since this ideal type tends to mask precisely the internal contradictions and differences that emerge there. In other words, Habermas's *Öffentlichkeit* is less helpful for its critical edge than for its suggestiveness in describing the particularities of functions and structures in the socialist public sphere. Bathrick's *The Powers of Speech* is more to the point.

Bathrick defines three major, interlinking public spheres in the GDR: the official public

sphere under party control, the West German media (including primarily broadcasting media but also other publication outlets), which were scrutinized closely and for different reasons at all levels of society, and the unofficial or counter public enclaves that emerged during the 1970s and 1980s (34). Rather than a map of the socialist public sphere, this triadic structure conveys a chronological image of the increasing differentiation of public space in the GDR. Straddling all three of these is yet another layer of mediation, the literary public sphere, institutionalized in the early years to legitimate the authority of the Party's socialist "ideal" and after 1970 increasingly independent as a vehicle of critical discourse (35-41). This latter function becomes the main object of attention in Bathrick's study. The socialist public sphere as such is treated in a concise commentary on a 1979 article by the literary scholar Robert Weimann, which introduced for the first time the concept of socialist public sphere within the GDR context (47-50).¹⁴ Both Weimann and Bathrick argue finally that socialist *Öffentlichkeit* did not really exist (yet) either theoretically or practically, but rather the concept referred to a projected or ideal notion of an open relationship between writer and audience that would not be controlled by a third instance (SED). In the following comments my aim is to pursue the evidence for a post-bourgeois or nascent socialist public sphere in the GDR by identifying the formation of various kinds of (hybrid) publics and the relations between them against the background of an ideal-typical socialist state.

Habermas's early work on the public sphere, in particular his critical perception of its structural transformation in late capitalism, has been faulted because it seems impossible to account adequately for the complex interpenetrations of state and society as a context for the ideal of a public sphere and at the same time claim for it the representative function as a forum for oppositional activity and debate. In a similar vein, I want to examine whether it is possible to speak of a socialist public sphere with attributes that include both hierarchical, monocentric claims to power and the spaces of counter or oppositional activity. As we have seen, the concept of socialist public sphere was applied to the GDR already in the late 1970s, yet the multiple qualifiers circulating around *Öffentlichkeit* are only one indication of its indeterminacy. To distinguish the socialist variant from the classical sense of responsible, general discourse about public matters, commentators have introduced, for example, formulations like *die sogenannte Öffentlichkeit* (so-called), *verbotene Öffentlichkeit* (prohibited), *zensierte Quasi-Öffentlichkeit* (censored), *verhinderte Öffentlichkeit* (obstructed), *eine relative Öffentlichkeit* (a relative), *informelle Öffentlichkeit* (informal), *kleine Öffentlichkeit* (small), *Spezialisten-Öffentlichkeit* (specialists'), *Suböffentlichkeit* (sub-), and *partei-gesteuerte Öffentlichkeit* (party-controlled). All of these reflect the need to acknowledge corrupted or regulated, yet productive forms of communication in the GDR.

Bathrick too introduces multiple appellations for the public sphere in the GDR without indicating whether they are parts of a larger whole, alternatives, or complements. These include: the officially sanctioned socialist public sphere (31), the cultural public sphere (41), the artistic public sphere (45), the critical socialist public sphere (110), the nondialectical public sphere (125), the literary socialist public sphere (224), and the counter public sphere (240). This last phrase Bathrick uses to distinguish what he calls the "established" literary opposition (e.g., Christa Wolf, Christoph Hein, Heiner Müller, etc.) from the Prenzlauer Berg poets, who developed a network of semipublic and unofficial outlets for their writing and multimedia performances during the 1980s. As far as I know, however, these poets and the GDR underground in other East German cities like Dresden Neustadt, Leipzig's Eastside, Erfurt, and Karl-Marx-Stadt shunned the use of the term "public sphere" to describe their spaces, including "counter public sphere," because it presumes an explicit political motivation, a domain of activity they rejected.¹⁵ Instead one finds phrases like *nichtkonforme Kultur* (nonconformist culture), *autonome Kunst* (autonomous art), *Gegenkultur* (counter culture), *Ergänzungskultur* (supplemental culture), *Kulturopposition* (oppositional culture), *unabhängige Kultur* (independent culture), *inoffizielle Kultur* (inofficial culture), *ausgegrenzte Kultur* (excluded culture), and *zweite* or *andere Kultur* (second or other culture).¹⁶ Attempts by participants to describe these parallel spaces of cultural and artistic activity, in other words, locate them not on a map vis-à-vis the systemically given parameters

of politics in the public sphere, but rather insist on their absolute autonomy. This “other culture’s” stress on imaginative activity, on the practice of inventing and circulating a culture outside of official boundaries, was naturally unable to escape the political boundaries of the system which brought it forth, but it does mark a significant difference insofar as it was able to reject the collective anxieties that served to reproduce the limitations of the established public sphere.¹⁷

To return to Habermas, in his later work he shifted his focus from the normative model of liberal democracy to questions of intersubjective communicative processes in modern societies, which can be understood as an indication of the need to integrate more complex social realities into his model of social change.¹⁸ In this context he writes of the GDR as a “totalitarian public sphere:”

It is precisely this communicative praxis on the part of citizens that, in totalitarian regimes, is subjected to the control of the secret police. The revolutionary changes in eastern and central Europe have confirmed these analyses. Not coincidentally, they were triggered by reform policies initiated under the banner of *glasnost*. The German Democratic Republic is the primary case in point. In a first step, out of these citizen movements grew the infrastructure of a new order, whose outline had already become visible in the ruins of state socialism. The pacesetters of this revolution were voluntary associations in the churches, the human rights groups, the oppositional circles pursuing ecological and feminist goals, against whose latent influence the totalitarian public sphere could from the beginning be stabilized only through reliance on force.¹⁹

In the meantime it has become clear that this GDR opposition (like the literary public sphere) was unable to influence the construction of a “new order,” and in this respect their experience is unique among the oppositional movements in Eastern Europe. They played only a peripheral role in the rapid integration of the GDR into the reunified Federal Republic, which took a form they had never intended. That the opposition’s hopes were dashed in the reality of political collapse - and we must be careful here in representing the opposition as a unified voice - raises legitimate questions as to what role it actually played in breaking the grip of a totalitarian regime, for none of the citizen movements or critical writers seemed to have linked up to the majority of the population prior to October 1989. Here Habermas’s focus on communicative (inter)action, on voice and language as the vehicle for communication may be suggestive.

It is noteworthy that socialist leadership historically was positively paranoid about the power of the word. Party, state, and the security apparatus reacted with panic to the least public criticism, as if words could bring down the entire edifice. Of course, this was on the one hand the Enlightenment legacy inscribed into Marxism-Leninism, the belief in the social efficacy of rational argument, and on the other it was the legitimate and in retrospect justified conviction that here was the Achilles heel of actually existing socialism. The fact that voices or the collective voice of “*Wir sind das Volk*” communicated a message loud enough to unseat the geriatric leadership in October 1989 is a strong argument for the power of speech.²⁰ The fact that voices (and noise) continue to play such an important role in the process of political transformation in societies under crisis (I am thinking of Belgrade and Sofia in recent months) only corroborates it. The citizen movements in the GDR lacked contact with the broader population precisely because of a lack of public communication. With the founding of the *Neues Forum* in September 1989 this isolation was partially overcome, and the group’s manifesto even defined dialogue and discussion, that is, the end of ritualized political language, as its goal: “In our country the communication between state and society is obviously disturbed... We need a democratic dialogue...”²¹

If, then, one accepts the presence of *Öffentlichkeit* in the GDR - a position that itself is open to question or that at least must be carefully qualified, it is necessary to examine its function and limits. A narrow definition would see it singularly as the privileged arena of struggle organized by the party; a broad definition would emphasize multiple publics among different collectivities. The distinction is important, since it locates where emancipatory “politics” took place and even what constituted the political in that historical context. Discussions based on a

narrow definition of *Öffentlichkeit* often proceed no further than partitioning blame among collaborators and morally courageous dissidents. The broad definition treats variants and crossovers, an approach that seems more fruitful to capture the contradictions of GDR society.

The public sphere touches upon the core of intellectuals' and writers' identities because their most important tool is language and their prime goal is communication. It has become a cliché that the logocratic nature of communism predisposed the "intelligentsia" to an important role in socialist societies, conveying the party's utopian vision to the general public in one direction as educator of the masses and in the other representing the people's needs as mediator for the vanguard leadership. The reverse side of the coin was the equally widespread surveillance and repression of writers and intellectuals by communist leaders. Revisionists, dissidents, and renegades were not mere class enemies but betrayers who interpreted the "sacred" words and texts differently and therefore threatened the maintenance of power.²²

Bathrick argues that, rather than traditional politics as in Habermas's public sphere, literature and discourse about cultural values became the privileged sphere for critical reasoning, for in the collapsed space of the socialist public sphere the literary writer was by definition not just a private person but a public institution: "In the GDR, as in other socialist societies, the area of culture and in particular literature came to provide an invaluable forum for articulating the needs for pluralism and for actively organizing the groundwork for a more democratic public sphere. More than any other public institution, the literary writer served as spokesperson for issues of moral, philosophical, social, and above all political significance - a role that far transcended the social function traditionally accorded the realm of belles lettres in Western capitalist societies" (30). Situated between the state and the private sphere, the writer indeed becomes in this construction a cipher for the public sphere itself, the site where dominant discourse is contested. At the same time it is advisable to keep in mind two limitations. First, the "intelligentsia" as a group was not homogeneous in the GDR. It included party elites, technicians, artists, writers, scholars, and teachers. Of course, not all of them were oppositional intellectuals; only a minority saw itself in this role, and their acts ranged from quiet diplomacy and humanitarian gestures to conspiratorial dissidence and open defiance. Similarly, not all critics were intellectuals, so that other forms of everyday opposition must also be recognized, ranging from surreptitious labor opposition through work-by-rules actions to spying for the West out of political conviction. Second, the focus on intellectuals assumes a sophisticated, urban social strata that is frequently equated with East Berlin, thereby ignoring developments beyond the boundaries of the capital. As a result there has been an unfortunate tendency to focus on representative writers and intellectuals from Berlin at the expense of "normal" citizens and provincial life when elaborating the status and function of the GDR public sphere.

Speech in the Public Sphere

The exclusion of interest groups and social conflicts from the political arena in the young GDR of the 1950s meant that literature and writers assumed significant functions of representation and role modeling. Literature became public event, and writers were invited to contribute to the constitution of a new socialist identity. Just as in the early bourgeois public sphere, cultural activity was to prepare the ground for political processes, of course without the autonomous institutions on which it was premised in the Enlightenment. From the party's point of view culture and politics collapsed into cultural policies (*Kulturpolitik*), a closed system with its own rules including loyalty to a given course and the definition of art as conditioning all activities. But the idea of intellectuals and political leaders as partners dominated cultural life in the GDR: "We registered a demand with those in power when we said we considered ourselves as socially critical writers who wanted to be integrated with their criticism into the system in which they live; in fact, we expected that the critique would be accepted even by those criticized, if not longingly then at least for the sake of the thing."²³

This (retrospective) description of an attitude shared by writers who were planning an

independent anthology of literary texts in 1975 is typical, and their self-definition as (critical) partners of those in power reflects their treatment as an elite by the party. A corollary of this partnership, which only on the surface contradicts it, was the sense of solidarity among critical intellectuals as an oppositional force: "There was a unity and a good understanding among intellectuals. But this was only based on the fact that, somehow or other, you were *anti*... Real differences were hushed up."²⁴ This clinch between the partners of the socialist public sphere developed quite early in the GDR and preoccupied oppositional energies until its very end. The legacy of nondifferentiation among the critics only began to emerge after 1989, probably most strikingly in the change in affiliation by members of the citizens' party *Neues Forum* (later *Grünen/Bündnis 90*) to the CDU in January 1997.

The new socialist identity to which culture was to contribute in the GDR was grounded in the notion of a unified, homogeneous *Kulturnation*, a concept that itself reaches back to the Enlightenment. The expectation and practice of literature as an educational tool, as a moral weapon or a weapon of moral criticism enabled literature to distinguish the private (one's own voice) from the public (the putative consensual will of the working class), although the fundamental critique of authoritarian structures embedded in the private morality of the Enlightenment emerged rather late in the GDR. The editors of the planned anthology quoted above continue: "We look back and chuckle at our illusions. But we remember also the tough fights with those in power, which were sometimes a fight about single words but always a fight for the place in the moral center of the society."²⁵ Similar to Habermas, who privileged private virtues like morality, authenticity, and sincerity over public virtues of negotiation and consensus-building in his description of the constitution of the early bourgeois public sphere, these writers - still in 1994 - recall their activities

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twenty years earlier primarily as a moral struggle. Here one begins to recognize the long-term effect of the Party's goal of depoliticizing social conflict in the early GDR and channeling it into moral and cultural values that were to be realized by pedagogy rather than politics. An equally sobering long-term effect was the widespread attitude toward speech as duplicitous or as nonbinding game. Public and published communication were perceived as the very opposite of communicative interaction, expressed in the frequent references to the falsity (*Verlogenheit*) of the media, the school system, or official statistics. Similarly, the perception of the socialist public sphere as a "playground," as a "rigged game," or as a situation with "rules of the game" exposes the awareness of the limitations of consent and the mechanisms intended to prevent any unforeseen speech.²⁶ The theatricalization of the public sphere, that is, the accommodation to staged communication with practiced roles and formulaic speech, also created acutely sensitive habits of coding language and reading between the lines.

Did these habits define, then, the rules of discourse in the socialist public sphere? Or did the Party's special status and its exclusion of certain discursive "issues" negate the very notion of discourse that grounds interactive communication and social change in the liberal public sphere? Systems theory characterizes Soviet-type societies as one in which a part of the system dominates the entirety; in this case the priority of the ideological subsystem transforms philosophy, science, art, literature, etc. into sham discourses.²⁷ Although such approaches allow for limited spaces in which private opinion can be expressed, it discounts the idea that protected niches represent a structure for discourse about social issues. In my view, however, two factors qualify this approach for the GDR: the Party itself was always forced for structural reasons to engage in political discourses beyond its own needs of legitimation, and the presence of the church maintained and, after 1972, organized possibilities for a variety of critical, autonomous discourses. This should not be confused with the ongoing official demand for "critical and creative difference of opinion" (*kritische und schöpferische Meinungsstreit*) or the entreaties to begin "the important discussion" (*das große Gespräch*) about one issue or another. These were formulaic phrases which masked the instrumentalization of power by the Party.

Bathrick's notion of the "powers of speech" refers to Michel Foucault's definition of institutional discourse, not one produced by individual subjects but constituted by means of

linguistic and textual practices. He invokes this framework in the introduction (13-21, set off with an epigram by Foucault) in order to analyze the way opposition functioned in the GDR because it helps him define dominant institutions of power, the challenges to and changes in those institutions, and the way individuals were both agents and objects of power relations (15). A strict Foucaultian approach to literary or cultural history would not recognize the role of intellectuals or writers as subjects who have intentions and who can control language. Rather, they would be treated as functions of discourse or ideological conventions, subordinate to legal and institutional structures that delimit discursive activity, and attention instead would focus on the institutional regime of meaning production. Bathrick is aware of this "inner dilemma of the Foucaultian paradigm" (22), and his entire study proceeds to seek evidence for the self-organizing activity of the opposition in the GDR. Indeed, the literary writers he most frequently invokes - Heiner Müller, Christa Wolf, Volker Braun, and Christoph Hein - again and again construct their texts around figures who become subjects by producing meaning and thereby implicitly model for the reader strategies for escaping the instrumentalization of power. The uneasy balance between Foucault's denial of agency and Habermas's insistence on the autonomous subject in the public sphere describe two antithetical poles that can not be bridged. Indeed, the insistence on an individual intellectual's or writer's "subjective authenticity" (e.g., Havemann, 67) or well-meaning efforts at providing an alternative way (e.g., Hein, 56) - only two of many examples cited by Bathrick - does not address the way they were implicated as well in the micro-mechanisms of the exercise of power. For many of these (socialist) intellectuals and artists defined their own activity - consciousness producing, cultural engagement, or aesthetic practice - as the most important factor in critical activity.

Central to Bathrick's reconstruction of the GDR opposition is the binary distinction between inside and outside, a spatial trope for differentiating between critics who aimed at reform of the system from within and those on the margins who rejected the entire edifice as corrupt. The result is a study about the development of revisionist socialism in the GDR: "The forms of opposition I treat in this book emerge in every instance from a rewriting of some master code from within the code itself" (19). Since the inside/outside distinction rests on procedures of consensus-building and exclusion, I am particularly interested in seeing how such mechanisms evolved discursively in the early years of the GDR. Invocations of collectivity (*wir*), community (*Menschengemeinschaft*), partnership (*Zwiesprache*), or mutuality (*Wechselverhältnis*) were a constant throughout the history of the GDR. Yet, contrary to the bourgeois public sphere, which thematizes difference, the socialist public sphere brackets it through the rhetoric of consent, while it masks informal control both in official and everyday life. As a result, its exclusionary usage of "we," balanced by the compulsion to produce images of enemies (*Feindbilder*), appealed to a kind of civic republicanism but disallowed any discussion about what constituted it. Here exclusion became a mechanism of selection and delimitation, a means ultimately of exhausting, not producing consent. In fact, Bathrick's study highlights a string of personal fates that illustrate how the discourse of power became silenced through mechanisms of exclusion: Havemann is expelled from the party, loses his teaching position at the Humboldt University, and is subjected to house arrest; Bahro is expelled from the party, thrown into jail, and sent to the West; public appearances by Biermann are forbidden and he is expatriated; Heiner Müller is thrown out of the Writers Union and prevented from publishing, etc. While on the one hand each of these represents an exemplary case of sophisticated dissent that grew out of socialist commitment, the impact was next to nothing within the socialist public sphere or it was delayed for decades.

Not only did important events or texts that challenged the "master code" not receive a public airing in the GDR (productions of Müller's *Lohnrucker* in 1958 and *Umsiedlerin* in 1961; Brecht's *Maßnahme* and Müller's *Mauser* - both treating the question of revolutionary terror - were neither produced nor discussed; Kafka and Nietzsche were "belatedly" discussed and published, etc.), but as the society itself became increasingly complex, so too did critical discussion and literature gradually migrate into ever smaller and fragmented spaces of reception among a minority of specialists. Bathrick, who refers mistakenly, I believe, to its

“**public** significance” (216, his emphasis), demonstrates this paradigmatically in the case of the Nietzsche debate in the second half of the 1980s (Chapter 8), a debate long overdue and confined almost exclusively to literary scholars and philosophers in their professional journals. Robert Weimann, a knowledgeable observer of the literary scene, described in 1990 a parallel tendency among writers:

There was an abyss between what was written in literature and what was said in television or printed, for example, in *Neues Deutschland*. (There language was authorized and legitimated much differently than, say, in *Sinn und Form* or by Heiner Müller.) I had in mind precisely these contradictory communicative relations with this rupture between sender and receiver, between writers and a certain portion of readers. I am not referring only to institutionalized control mechanisms, to the ideology of those who dominate, but also to a large part of the population that was not at all interested in belles lettres.²⁸

Bathrick points to this tendency of marginalization and fragmentation as well but locates it within inner-party dissent, that is, on the level of theoretical debate among the political elite. He goes on to evaluate the function of internal political dissent within the official public sphere **not** for its theoretical contribution (revisionist discourse aimed in the first instance at legitimating within the SED a new political elite, not at forming an opposition) but rather as acts of a few heroic individuals who modeled through their behavior a different “way of knowing and doing” (83). This, in turn, becomes additional proof that the literary sphere was the only or the major space for effective critical discourse.

As a closed society the GDR’s official public sphere censored and repressed open discourse. When discourse did become public, it usually brought forth an eruptive reaction (e.g., Soviet tanks for the uprising of June 17, 1953, the punishing 11th Plenary of 1965, military mobilization for the Prague Spring in 1968, the Biermann expatriation in 1976). More typical, however, were the situations that were never allowed to become public either through party discipline or by turning them into something else, often into a counter discourse. This was the case after the uprising in 1953, when the reform circle around Rudolf Herrnstadt, Karl Schirdewan, and Wilhelm Zaisser was attacked as an inner-party faction of German Titoism, or in 1956 after the revelations about Stalinist terror, when reform socialists like Wolfgang Harich, Gustav Just, and Walter Janka were branded as counterrevolutionary.²⁹ In fact, in the long run these measures usually led to a multiplication of problems; a notable example is the genesis of the first independent artists’ circle in Leipzig, born through the exmatriculation of students at the Literature Institute and Art Academy in the wake of the Prague Spring.³⁰

Rather than the binary inside/ outside model, then, I propose that the GDR public sphere as a historical formation was characterized by processes which continually transformed the political into symbolic or performative gestures of affiliation or withdrawal. Neither a coherent structure nor an ontologically secure place, the GDR public sphere was constantly regrouping and reconstituting itself.

Socialist Public Sphere - *Die Literaturgesellschaft*?

The formative years of the GDR, those usually summarized as the period of consolidation of power or Stalinization, offer a useful field to work through some of the controversies and contradictions that were at play before the supposed convergence or modernization tendencies became apparent in the seventies. A typical, early cold-war approach to postwar German history views the emerging German states as a binary pair of modern and premodern structures. While the Western Zones under the tutelage of liberal democracies developed into a modern industrialized country with constitutional guarantees protecting individual citizens’ freedom and the balance of state power with social organizations, the Eastern Zone slipped into the Soviet orbit of state socialism with autocratic and hierarchical power structures, centralized control of all areas of life, and a bureaucratic apparatus for disciplining individual citizens. Without wishing to minimize the fates of particular victims subjected to the intrigues and rituals of the Stalinist system, nonetheless I want to review the GDR in the fifties that all too often is still described as a society comprised of undistinguishable people in a gray

everyday who, cowed into submission, lost all personal qualities.

The capitulation of the National Socialist leadership in May 1945 marked the end of a violent, illegitimate regime and an initial hiatus in a process of modernization that had begun already during the Weimar Republic and continued on its contradictory path through the Third Reich.³¹ While modernization in the two postwar Germanies branched off in different directions, both emerged as the product of a fascist formation in which social hierarchies were already being leveled, industrial capacity streamlined under the dictates of efficiency and productivity, and the state apparatus consolidated for the exercise of power. Faced with a combination of rural gentry and war-damaged industrial capacity, modernization in the east was accelerated by means of forced industrial nationalization and rural collectivization during the fifties, accompanied by the flight of traditional cultural and administrative elites as long as the borders to West Germany were open, that is, until August 1961. The resulting cultural impoverishment meant that the remaining intellectuals and artists, those who had opted for the construction of a new, “better” socialist Germany lost not only the traditional institutional structures for cultural negotiations but also the broader educated public as addressee. Confronted with politically instigated campaigns against formalism, cosmopolitanism, and revisionism, they lacked the necessary public support to counter effectively the party’s strategies of intimidation. On the other hand, the disappearance of the traditional educated middle class (*Bildungsbürgertum*) together with state programs promoting a political, administrative, and cultural elite recruited from the working class provided new avenues of mobility. State welfare mechanisms and formal liberalization of traditional legal constraints offered especially women (change in divorce and family law, later also abortion rights) and young people (access to education and early entry into the labor sphere) an unprecedented level of independence and access to positions of responsibility, albeit with the aim of expanding the pool of workers to serve the needs of the economy from the government’s point of view.³² Yet, as mobility, urbanization, secularization, and cultural change fed the collective dreams of constructing the new society, a parallel antimodern process of depoliticization was set in motion through a hypertrophied definition of the political. Every statement or opinion on any topic became ideologically relevant so that real political contestation shrunk, along with the intermediary public sphere of civil society (organizations, parties, media). This contradictory movement, already well established in the fifties, helps explain the form that an ever more elaborate network of semi official and private groups assumed in the following decades.

Within this contradictory movement the concept of *Literaturgesellschaft* (literary society), introduced by the cultural minister Johannes R. Becher, suggests a socialist variant of the bourgeois public sphere, that is, an ideal space that exposes both the claims and shortcomings of dominant power relations. As a referent for cultural policy in the 1950s, it offers a salient point of access because, like Habermas’s early bourgeois public sphere, it is a project for structuring discursive relations with its own assumptions, prospects, and history. Strongly influenced by Georg Lukács’s Hegelian aesthetics, Becher developed the concept to circumscribe the interdependency of literature and society in a series of essays he wrote between 1952 and 1957, including “*Verteidigung der Poesie*” (1952), “*Poetische Konfession*” (1954), “*Macht der Poesie*” (1955), and “*Das poetische Prinzip*” (1957).³³ The notion of *Literaturgesellschaft* derived from Becher’s metaphorical understanding of literary relations as a communicative network of authors, genres, works, themes, and aesthetic forms beyond temporal and spatial constraints. The inherent democratic nature of literary relations could assume in his view a function in building a socialist society during the transformation to communism because it represented the best vehicle for a people’s self-reflection (*Selbstverständigung*) and consciousness raising (*Bewußtseinsbildung*) in a transitional phase: “Literature is not only a social phenomenon, it also develops a *Literaturgesellschaft* in itself. . . . Only such a “*Literaturgesellschaft*” can form a true literature of the people, a national literature, a classical literature.”³⁴ Moreover, such a society would gradually diminish the social privilege of education and with it the class-bound distinction between high and popular culture. Contrary to the commodification of art in capitalist society, the *Literaturgesellschaft*

aims at the democratization of culture by making it accessible to all social classes.

The echo of German idealism - culture's contribution to the perfection of mankind - is not arbitrary, and sheds light on the sources of cultural policy in the GDR. Becher, an important Expressionist poet and an active communist in the Weimar Republic, returned to Berlin from exile in Moscow to cooperate with Walter Ulbricht in Germany's renewal. A deeply felt conviction in the need for unity among all those who had resisted fascism - democrats, socialists, and Christians - guided his first initiatives. Becher's correspondence between 1945 and 1950, for example, reflects his active attempts to establish or maintain contact not only with authors who shared his exile experience but also with those who had remained in Germany, even with those who had found some arrangement with the Nazi regime.³⁵

During the same period in his role of President of the "*Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands*" he pleaded for an inclusive principle that spoke to all those who shared the vision of individual and national catharsis, to be achieved by a return to and continuation of the best German traditions.³⁶ Becher was motivated by a concept of national culture with deep roots in nineteenth-century German humanism, the *Kulturnation* that saw in classical aesthetics and literature both a compensation for unsuccessful social revolution and a substitute for politics. Following the national debacle of the Third Reich, the pedagogical concept of art and culture derived from German classicism dovetailed with the humanistic thrust of antifascist reeducation supported by the political leadership. The *Literaturgesellschaft* in turn adapted this patriarchal, authoritarian approach into a voluntaristic vision of democracy by example. Literature, more precisely, the progressive tradition of bourgeois German literature and working-class literature as the paragon of humanism, was to exercise its socio-political influence on the reading public. In this simplistic view ideologically "correct" and artistically "valuable" literature could raise the people's consciousness.

It is no surprise that returning emigrés could identify with this project, and they were openly solicited by cultural officials like Becher to reestablish the discredited German **political** system by means of the appeal to humanistic, classical **cultural** ideals. In other words, culture became the substitute for values denied in the political sphere. Representing the best traditions of enlightenment, education, and social progress, they saw themselves as intellectuals speaking in the name of the common good of the people. For the Party cultural activity was primarily a pedagogical tool for mass consciousness-raising, and administrative decisions to implement this goal displaced the notion of democratic participation in culture on the one hand and sought to bind intellectuals to the Party on the other. This alignment of artists and intellectuals with the state's pedagogical agenda threw into question their autonomy. For leftists who had followed developments in the Soviet Union during the 1930s, summarized most succinctly by Stalin's phrase at the time that "writers are the engineers of the soul," the pedagogical, even pedantic relationship between intellectuals and "the people" offered them a privileged role.³⁷ Contrary to the traditionally polarized issue of intellectuals and power (*Geist und Macht*) in Germany, the progressives and leftists who returned from emigration to the Soviet Occupied Zone and the GDR did not fear a politicized *Geist* as the betrayal of their creativity or as an affirmative illusion of politics. Instead socialism promised them the emancipation from bourgeois individualism and the commodification of art, while the promise of access to **real** power extended by the Party in service to its pedagogical goals was seen as an invitation to participate in the dominant discourse in a fundamentally new role. The direct social function accorded to intellectuals as teachers of the people fused the political and cultural elites as the power holders and relegated "the people" to the status of an object, one not constituted through social conflict and antagonism but by the dictates of cultural policy. The new role also cemented traditional habits and privileges, exacerbated by the returnees' exile experience. Matthias Langhoff, the child of a prominent emigré, describes his memory of the intellectual community in these early years,

"... as if they were only there for a bit of time, a sort of domestic foreigner. And although they had returned from exile, they did not call themselves returnees. East Berlin became an international city that excluded its citizens. The world of these people was indeed an artificial

one, their home was a memory of Berlin before Hitler, about which no one was particularly keen; their present was the countries of exile that they had brought with in their baggage; their utopia was another country, a non-existent one they wanted to build. . . A ghetto of privileged people, a community of outsiders who resolved to create islands.”³⁸

To be sure the ideal of the artist and the intellectual as partners of the working class in the service of the party was not free from a mixture of megalomania and sentimentality. The notion of a pedagogical mission authorized by the vanguard of the working class nourished the self-understanding of a public role: the feeling that the people needed them as teachers to help overcome the mistakes of the past and convey the lessons of history. Yet, it also justified party discipline, and the relationship between the politicized intellectuals and those in power was more often than not threatened by conflict. One only has to recall Bertolt Brecht’s encounter with the strictures of “formalism” in the context of his *Lukullus* opera (1951/52), Hanns Eisler’s problems with his revision of the Faust material (1953) and its critique of the failure of revolutions in German history, the repercussions of Heiner Müller’s play *Die Umsiedlerin* about rural collectivization (1961), or the persecution of radical Marxist thinkers like the literary scholar Hans Mayer or the philosopher Ernst Bloch in the mid-1950s. This is only the tip of the iceberg, so to speak, but suggests that the *Literaturgesellschaft*, as envisioned by Becher, had more conflict potential than he acknowledged.

One of Bathrick’s major theses in *The Powers of Speech* argues that individual authors who gained international reputations “were able to attain a degree of ‘institutional’ status in their own right” despite party constraints and could use this status to articulate a more pluralistic public discourse (43). Although he mentions Brecht by name in this context of internationally established authors, a writer who died in 1956 already, the effect he describes refers to a development that gained momentum only in the late 1960s and thereafter. The institutional role of the writer and the intellectual in the 1950s was a process still in the initial stages of formation, as I indicated above, and the contradictory path it followed became the foundation for the later development Bathrick describes. The implementation of the *Literaturgesellschaft* was codified in the Party’s cultural policy and the various administrative offices established to execute it. In an abstract sense it coordinated all areas of cultural production, distribution, consumption, communications, supervision, and education. More concretely it was a series of changing policy decisions that sought to influence the way writers wrote and readers read. During the immediate postwar years the cultural situation in the Soviet Occupied Zone was fairly fluid, reflecting the “united front” policy of the 1930s for which Becher’s inclusiveness was symptomatic. By late 1948, however, the party had internally laid the groundwork for coordinating cultural policy with the dictates of the Cominform, the Communist Information Bureau responsible for transferring the Soviet model to its eastern European satellites, including in the domain of culture. Thus, key normative concepts such as partisanship (rather than autonomy), contact with the working people (rather than alienation), and socialist realism (rather than formalism) were adopted as guidelines for artistic production and evaluation.

The ideals invested in the *Literaturgesellschaft* may have concealed the power relations from the public but they did not resolve the conflicts that arose in the realm of cultural administration in the GDR. The attempts to institutionalize all phases of cultural activity led to a proliferation of offices and hierarchies in the state institutions dominated by the SED as well as within the other parties and related organizations. Their overlapping and opposing competencies were neither efficient nor always well-coordinated. Carsten Gansel, for example, traces nine major structural and personnel changes in the party’s cultural office between 1946 and 1961.³⁹ He goes on to summarize how the directives were rarely consistent in the specific case of the office responsible for literary book publishers:

Considering the fact that one can not speak of planning in the early fifties, that there was a constant struggle within the state agencies as well as the party apparatus about decision-making competencies, that cultural policy initiatives regularly changed, that subjective and party-political interests were as much at odds as were the divergent intentions of the publishers, the cultural office tried to assume coordinating tasks in this murky confusion and

to have a positive influence on the production of literature.⁴⁰

This is a rather different perspective on *Literaturgesellschaft* than Becher had envisioned but conforms nonetheless to its ideational core that literature goes beyond discrete texts to include their integration into a network of social relations. For the party and cultural functionaries it meant that social deficiencies could be compensated by an operatively understood literature offering readers agitation and information through patterns of identification with “positive” heroes. Among writers and intellectuals there was by no means unanimity about the best means to realize literature’s social potential, but most identified themselves openly as Marxist or communist supporters, and the critics among them adhered to a kind of agnostic, interrogating rationality that had little to do with Stalinist dogma but yet in its prudence was able to accommodate it. Becher is, in fact, a prime example, a high-level cultural representative who was famous for his refined political tactics but who physically and psychologically collapsed after he was forced to distance himself from his revered mentor Georg Lukács because of the latter’s involvement in the Hungarian revolt of 1956. With that the entire foundation of his *Literaturgesellschaft* had lost its philosophical grounding.⁴¹

Neither Lukács’s official disgrace nor Becher’s death in 1958 spelled the end of the *Literaturgesellschaft* as an ideal of the socialist public sphere. It lived on into the sixties both in the pedagogical conviction that the passive mass of people had to have its consciousness raised and in phrases like *literarisches Leben* (literary life), *die gebildete Nation* (the educated nation), and *Leseland DDR* (a country of readers). All of them variously sought to capture the hypertrophied relationship between writers and readers, between literature and a society in which other sites of discourse were unable to satisfy the needs of critical and/or imaginative activity. In a much quoted essay written in 1990 Monika Maron described the checkmate as follows: “All writers in the GDR, in so far as they were not apologists and opportunists of the Stalinist conditions, were carried along by the sometimes annoying admiration of the readers and their obsession with truth and heroes. And like almost every life-sustaining symbiosis in this country, the relationship between readers and writers was founded on scarcity.”⁴² The publicness of this “solidarity” of need emerges in an exemplary way in the string of relatively broad-based discussions around significant contemporary novels published in the sixties, from Erwin Strittmatter’s *Ole Bienkopp* (1961) to Christa Wolf’s *Der geteilte Himmel* in its prose (1963) and film (1964) versions, to Hermann Kant’s *Die Aula* (1964) and Christa Wolf’s *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (1968). With due regard for the role of manipulated opinion in newspaper editorials and letters to the editor, where these discussions often took place, in each of these cases public debate crystallized and produced contradictions that had an impact on social discourse beyond the isolated text. It is striking that in the course of the 1970s such discussions petered out entirely, the last being stirred up around Ulrich Plenzdorf’s controversial text *Die neuen Leiden des jungen W.* (1973), an intertextual parody of a Storm-and-Stress novel by Goethe. Instead this kind of exchange was increasingly privatized in the form of correspondence among writers or between authors and their readers (some of these found their way into print or became the occasion for an essay) or it became a fictional element of authorial self-reflection, for example in the public readings that conclude both Volker Braun’s *Hinze-Kunze-Roman* (1985) and Christa Wolf’s novella *Was bleibt?* (written in 1979, published in 1989). In other words the concept of *Literaturgesellschaft* was abandoned by the 1970s both as a policy and critical ideal because the “transitional” phase to communism was in the meantime becoming the stagnation of actually existing socialism. Parallel to this the democratization of cultural life envisioned by Becher had dispersed into a variety of leisure-time activities and entertainment offerings (of which traditional literature was but one) that could serve the needs of an increasingly stratified society seeking intimate rather than public modes of communication.

Socialist Public Sphere - *Die Nischengesellschaft?*

If the contradictions woven into the ideal of the *Literaturgesellschaft* were symptomatic for the uncertainties and convictions that accompanied the construction of socialism in the fifties

in the GDR, then the 1960s were witness to how even a Marxist-Leninist regime was subject to changes in the “post- heroic” phase. In the course of the decade the GDR not only achieved a high level of industrial complexity that challenged the claims to power of the monolithic regime, but also with the closing of the border to the West in 1961 the leadership was suddenly relieved of the immediate ideological and economic competition with the “class enemy.” This generated new social problems and a new basis for formulating consent. For example, a technological elite was emerging that challenged dogma in the name of efficiency. Especially in the crucial fields of state economic planning and systems research (known as *Kybernetik* in the GDR) the credibility of rational arguments over ideology began to take hold. Moreover, with the new and expanding professional elites institutions of the economy and state management gained more weight. Most importantly, the outlines of an informal social contract became visible that replaced the arbitrary rule of ideology, so that a certain level of consumerism and well-being were accepted in return for non-interference in the power structure.

Many socialist intellectuals and writers responded to the building of the Berlin Wall and to the *de facto* closure of the GDR borders as a welcome opportunity finally to commence the “open discussion” of problems and expectations that the party had until then always postponed.⁴³ The desire to construct socialism as the fundamentally “other” seemed to have a chance, and hopes for unfettered self-realization in a society characterized by non-alienated social relations fed their imagination. This decade has assumed in some post- Wall perspectives a special significance for its transitional importance as the GDR’s “high times” or “the best years” and “the fat years.”⁴⁴ The reference here is to the perspective that during the 1950s modernization was hindered by a Soviet-inspired ideological dogmatism obsessed with formalism and decadence, while the 1970s were mired in bureaucratic stagnation and strategies for compensating the economy’s downward spiral. In other words, the 1960s - although still fraught with censorship, delayed gratification, and hierarchical structures in the economy, society, and politics - were experienced as a period of self-reliance and responsibility that allowed new discourses to circulate. From another perspective the building of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 could also be seen as the beginning of the GDR as a socialist ghetto, and probably the majority of the GDR population perceived it correctly at some level as a sign of the regime’s weakness. The hiatus of 1965, when the party shifted back to more centralized control in all domains under the guise of industrially organized consumer socialism and total planning of social processes, confirmed such attitudes of disillusionment, which reached a nadir with the GDR’s military support of the Soviet Army’s entry into Czechoslovakia in 1968, marking the end of hopes for reform socialism in Eastern Europe.

A limited horizon and lack of freedom defined the contours of the public sphere in the GDR, but as in all societies consent emerged from the circulation of discourses that constructed their own “common sense” of the way events, relations, and experiences were lived. The GDR in the 1960s demonstrates that even while the majority was disadvantaged by the construction of public consent, many were still able to find sites of meaningful discursive interaction.

I am referring here to the increasing tendency to shift communicative processes into the private sphere in order to avoid the supervision that pervaded the official public sphere. Daniela Dahn points to an important distinction between control of media and the culture of talk in the context of this *Suböffentlichkeit*, as she calls it: “Anything printed or broadcast was strongly censored; what was said beyond this so-called public sphere was astonishing.”⁴⁵ She includes private family, circles of friends as well as colleagues in work collectives and organizations among those who enjoyed the openness of this kind of semipublic discourse. While official communication was constantly subject to anxieties about unregulated discourse, in these protected alternative sites participants expressed their wishes, complaints, and reservations.

Günter Gaus, the representative of the Federal Republic to the GDR after the 1972 mutual recognition treaty was signed, coined the apt phrase *Nischengesellschaft* (niche society) for this phenomenon of private spaces in which people conducted their “real” life beyond the

strategies of state control.⁴⁶ In a striking way it reproduces some qualities of Habermas's early bourgeois public sphere, where the autonomous spaces of salons and coffee houses provided at first the opportunity for a small elite to assemble and discuss matters of public concern or common interest. Gradually this private space of the bourgeoisie was able to protect itself against arbitrary state power through the guarantees of democratic freedoms and expanded to include in principle all members of the society. In both social formations - the early bourgeois public sphere and the *Nischengesellschaft* of the GDR - the lack of structures for political **conflict** led to intimate spaces that could mediate between private individuals and centers of power. Whereas for Habermas this transformation initiated the dynamic split between private and public that is constitutive of civil society, in the GDR the development of semiprivate autonomous spaces brought forth a dualism of the private and the official, a society of duplication where double opinions and double talk prevailed.

The informal spaces for discussion in this parallel discursive arena should not be confused with conspiracy or pre-political organizations. If anything, individual and state appeared to be decoupled from one another in these zones of indifference toward politics in order to enable consumerism, leisure-time activity, and quality-of-life pursuits. The spectrum of their functions ranged from typical phenomena in an economy of scarcity, i.e., alternate networks of supply and practical aid, to compensatory relations for the impoverished civil society, i.e., arenas where individuals could create a supportive environment of self-realization. Two East German sociologists (retrospectively) have questioned the validity of the appellation *Nischengesellschaft* because in their view it does not describe realistically either the uniformity behind the ideology of individualism or the actual process of atomization of social behavior which it tries to capture.⁴⁷ They are correct insofar as the *Nischen* were structurally unable to develop collective means of social and political intervention that challenged the state, even later in the 1970s and 1980s. Others, however, have pointed to these protean forms of civil society as a *Schule für Zivilcourage* (school for civic responsibility) that responded to the specificity of the GDR system.⁴⁸ In other words these exclusive spaces, characterized by non access, permitted oppositional interpretations of identity, interests, and needs to be articulated. Jens Reich, who became an important voice in the *Neues Forum*, described his *Freitagskreis* (a discussion group of intellectuals) as a kind of willed insulation against the official public sphere that at the same time counteracted intellectual isolation.⁴⁹ Adolf Endler, one of the elder members of the Prenzlauer Berg literary scene in the 1980s described the illegal but regular literary readings in private apartments that began already in the mid 1970s as "a large, developed, vibrant network, not only in the Prenzlauer Berg, which sustains and disseminates our work."⁵⁰ These islands of discourse represented at least for some, perhaps even for many, an authentic space, in contrast to the apparent public space of official *Öffentlichkeit*. In particular, for intellectuals they were often perceived as the only authentic space: "In recent years it was of course a matter of self-protection for people to withdraw into **private circles**, as for all practical purposes the whole of GDR society did. Intellectual life, if indeed anything of the sort existed - and of course there was some - took place in private circles and no longer in institutions."⁵¹

The GDR had reached a social and political crisis by the end of the 1960s, which in an important way explains the change in regime from Walter Ulbricht to Erich Honecker in 1971. The new regime's various initiatives unfolding in the 1970s in the cultural domain (retreat from dogmatic notions of Socialist Realism) and consumerism (housing, electronics, fashion, etc.) were compensatory strategies that no longer even attempted to regulate the disparity between modern and antimodern structural features. Democratic promises were simply sacrificed for consumer socialism, and the state closed its eyes to the side effects of increasing social stratification and the "life-style" differences that arose with it. Of course, these "private associations" intentionally remained marginal and subordinated to the socialist public sphere. Rather than politicizing their spaces, they sought to contain the reach of politics into the intimacy of the niche, for politics was by definition under state control. The pre-political space of the artists' and intellectuals' circles, of the various groups clustered around the semiautonomous churches, and of the slowly emerging citizens' groups were

understood as oases of morality, “authentic” and free from ideological manipulation. They provided thus a sense of solidarity and social relationship that complemented the very failures of socialism.

The state counterpart of these islands and oases consisted of the security police, the Stasi, founded on opposite notions of mistrust and betrayal and to that extent the very antithesis of *Öffentlichkeit*. The Stasi was established in February 1950 in order to protect the Party. Its main function was to maintain the Party’s power, which meant preventing any transformations in the society, even though officially there was no such thing as opposition in the GDR, only differences of opinion. Objectively there was no reason for an opposition to exist because, so went the logic, the GDR was a peaceloving nation. Hence, anyone opposed to the GDR was against peace as well and therefore a criminal.⁵² Nevertheless, the Stasi’s activities from the beginning were concentrated precisely against this phenomenon, in the earliest years in the form of conspiratorial political subversion and economic espionage. Only after the closing of the border to West Germany in 1961 did the state security apparatus expand significantly and orient its efforts toward the control of and access to knowledge.⁵³

The best means to this end was the implementation of a huge network of official and unofficial collaborators whose specialty became infiltrating and destroying (*zersetzen*) the oases or niches, the private and semi- autonomous spaces for communication. Gert Neumann, a dissident writer involved in such circles in Leipzig during the 1970s and 1980s, quotes a statement of “his” Stasi interrogators, exposing the cynical perversion of the *Nischengesellschaft* as a clinch between citizens and the Stasi: “*Wir reden mit allen Bürgern. Alle Bürger der DDR sind für uns potentielle Gesprächspartner.*”⁵⁴ Here the power of speech is turned against itself, demonstrating that structures of power could permeate down to the most intimate communication processes.

Conclusion: Post-Wall Transformations of the Public Sphere

The foregoing comments have focused on institutional structures and interpersonal behavior during the GDR’s early decades in order to contextualize later developments that led to systemic stagnation and the final collapse. They are intended to clarify some of the complexities during these foundational years because they in turn inflected both habits that contributed to the course of deterioration and responses to its aftermath. Peter Hohendahl was right to argue that “[t]o understand the nature of the clash between East and West, we have to reconstruct the structure of the socialist public sphere in East Germany.”⁵⁵ This socialist public sphere was the product of forty-five years of experience, and its collective history must be accounted for in the reunified Germany. In the past seven years the end of the GDR has been the object of a flood of studies and memoirs that have examined the exogenous and endogenous factors contributing to the rupture of 1989. These include inquiries into political and ideological blockages of the Cold War, into homegrown economic weaknesses and international market dependency, and into responses (or the lack thereof) to changes in the Soviet Union; analyses of reform groups within the party, of citizens’ movements clustered around the Protestant Church defined by a multiplicity of concerns such as peace, ecology, military service, human rights, Third World issues, women’s and gay rights, and of efforts on the part of the state security apparatus to restrain them; and discussions about the position of writers and artists and about the institutional responsibility of intellectuals.⁵⁶ An astonishing diversity of material was used in the attempt to understand how this socio-political construct became vulnerable to the point of implosion. But Hohendahl also warned that “Western commentators, especially, tend to assume the universal validity of their own structures and institutions and thereby deny the potential value of a socialist tradition” (48).

What is this value in post-Wall Germany? What does the tradition of the GDR’s socialist public sphere with all its qualifications and perversions offer to a reunified Germany? How do we, especially as western commentators, weigh the validity of experiences and insights derived from practices gathered in a very different social system for the rapidly changing reality of European and global integration? The post-Wall transformations of the public

sphere have been the object of intense commentary in the media, focusing on disappointed expectations, overwhelming difficulties in adjustment, nostalgia for a lost “golden age” of relative stability and simpler challenges (both in the East and the West), lack of identification with democratic processes, exhaustion of political energies, etc. Yet, what is often perceived as ingratitude or intransigence on the part of “Ossis” has little or no empirical basis. These general attitudes are derived more often than not from surveys based on unrefined questions, anecdotal information or interviews from a limited demographic pool, or statistics from a short period of time during which major structural changes have been implemented. Any prognoses are speculative, of course, but those that rely on a careful reading of past experience are more likely to contain a kernel of truth. I conclude, then, by pointing to three patterns that in my view derive from the specificity of the GDR experience and affect the transformations of the public sphere as it now constitutes itself in a reunified Germany.

First, notions of privacy and individualism thrived in the GDR despite ideological, philosophical, and literary ideals of collectivity. This was as much a reaction to state efforts to diminish personal autonomy through the bureaucratization of a planned society as it was a practical necessity in the face of scarcity in every domain. As a result, the same conditions that undermined any sense of responsibility for decision-making in the public sphere spawned an appreciation for individuality in the private sphere. The strong literary tradition of positive and problematic heroes in GDR literature, for example, can be best understood within the context of the claim to self-realization and self- emancipation promised by the socialist vision and frustrated by the socialist reality. Thus, not absolute differences but rather a sense for subtle, gradual differentiations was well-developed in the GDR and marked the texture of political opposition as well. The nascent social movements of the 1980s, for example, did not attempt to project new alternative systems, instead they concentrated on practical solutions to local problems. This corresponded to the fundamental understanding of their individualism, no longer defined by the Marxist notion of collectivity but measured by personal happiness or success. Moreover, the fact that there were not only parasites, that again and again individuals came forth to plead for equality and justice during the entire history of the GDR, reveals the inconsistency and ultimately the openness of the state configuration. At the same time it indicates how the distrust of consensus, always experienced as the product of official coercion, hindered any organized opposition. Undoubtedly some of the disenchantment of the new *Bundesbürger* has been the result of their uncomfortable confrontation with the pressures of conformity and the constraints of non-differentiation in the new Federal Republic.

Second, and notwithstanding the previous conclusion, the same condition of scarcity elicited from GDR citizens a real talent for spontaneous, collective self-organization. The fact that administration and distribution of resources was unpredictable in the GDR’s planned society meant that learning from experience had little value. Everyday activities were dominated by informal negotiation, not by formalized procedures. This became a kind of collective practice that allowed a wide margin for creative nonconformity in practical matters, yet it was unable to assert itself in official institutional spaces. The preference for self-organized, collective responses has inhibited the integration of citizens’ groups and oppositional intellectuals into the rule-based public sphere of the Federal Republic, giving rise to frustration on the part of new and old *Bundesbürger*. The former suffer from an experiential deficit required for manipulating the institutional flexibility of a liberal democracy, while the latter are suspicious of seemingly ubiquitous *Seilschaften*, the informal networks of interpersonal relations and negotiations that maintained the GDR system as long as it lasted. One area where strategies from the past have born visible results is the growth of autonomous interest groups that have arisen since 1989 after the state, union, and factory-sponsored “circles” (*Zirkeln*) “clubs,” and “cultural cabinets” (*Kabinette der Kulturarbeit*) collapsed. In the meantime thousands of new organizations have sprouted. The most original models are the self-managed artistic and cultural projects that have originated in urban centers, those like Tacheles, Kulturbrauerei, and Pfefferberg in Berlin (East) or Kraftwerk in Chemnitz. Often the energy of a few movers-and-shakers was enough to gain the support of local politicians who had little experience in the intricacies of communal administration and tended to regard the initiatives in any case as

a positive sign of democratization. Some of these partnerships between independent agents and local governments have become successful magnets for urban cultural life in the new federal states.

Third, the rupture of 1989 is a distancing experience that has endowed many citizens from the GDR with a special kind of insight into the various claims about the Federal Republic's virtues. The clash of old and new, the uncoordinated substitution of procedures and regulations, the vacuum produced when old structures collapse and new ones are not yet in place might be explained as typical transitional difficulties of an unprecedented social and political renewal, but they expose as well the endemic weaknesses and systemic rigidity that for West Germans have become part of a familiar, acceptable framework. Moreover, in forty years of socialist practice the East Germans developed a special sense for the incommensurabilities of institutional life. The often-cited ability to "read between the lines," for example, presumes a multilingual talent that can distinguish between strategic and authentic speech. The poet Wolf Biermann ironically characterized this proverbial method of reading the main party newspaper as follows: "It was by no means easy to read *Neues Deutschland* correctly. Naturally you had to read between the lines. But even between the lines there were lies."⁵⁷ The post-Wall continuity of reading between the lines might be precisely the East Germans' perspicacity in recognizing the West Germans' blind spots: they are not (yet) blinded to the illogic of their new, everyday "normalcy."

To account for the contradictions that result from the dissolution of the GDR's socialist public sphere into the liberal public sphere of the Federal Republic highlights the problem of understanding the residues and surplus accompanying the current transformations. Specific power arrangements shape and reshape the discursive spaces within which social groups from two very different societies now interpret their needs, invent their identities, and collectively formulate their political commitments. The existential experience of these contradictions, made so manifest in the confrontation of East and West, may be the most important legacy the East Germans have to offer the new Germany.

NOTES

1. I am referring here to the concept of *Öffentlichkeit* as defined by Jürgen Habermas in *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1962) and translated by Thomas Burger into English under the title *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989). For a more elaborate appreciation, see below.
2. This position has been articulated most forcefully and authoritatively by Wolfgang Emmerich, especially in his *Kleine Geschichte der DDR-Literature*, 3rd revised and expanded edition (Leipzig: Kiepenheuer, 1996). I have treated elsewhere at greater length the implications of this position, see Silberman, "Whose Literature Is This? Rewriting the Literary History of the GDR," forthcoming in Jost Hermand and Marc Silberman, eds., *Contentious Memories: Looking Back at the GDR* (Frankfurt/Main and New York: Peter Lang, 1997).
3. Daniela Dahn, *Westwärts und nicht vergessen: Vom Unbehagen in der Einheit* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1996), p. 14.
4. David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), winner of the German Studies Association book prize in 1996.
5. In a previously published review of Bathrick's study I delineate in detail the achievements, see *German Culture News* (Cornell University) vol. 4, no. 3 (May 1996), pp. 2 and 17. 6. Bathrick, p. 17. The reference is to Hayden White's influential *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in 19th Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).
7. Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1992), p. 128; also in *Social Text* 25/26 (1990), p. 71. Fraser here is distinguishing five meanings of "publicity", which for our present purposes can be equated with "public".
8. See, for example, Mary P. Ryan, "Gender and Public Access: Women's Politics in Nineteenth-Century America," in Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, pp. 259-88, as well as the editor's own introduction (p. 35). This volume is an important source for the American critique of Habermas's public sphere model.
9. For a discussion of the Marxist background on civil society, see John Keane, *Democracy and Civil Society* (London/New York: Verso, 1988), pp. 52- 55.
10. Some important distinctions between public sphere and public opinion can be found in Wolfgang R. Langenbucher et al., eds., *Kulturpolitisches Wörterbuch im Vergleich* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1983), see the entry "Öffentlichkeit" (pp. 542-46).
11. Peter Uwe Hohendahl, "Recasting the Public Sphere," *October* 73 (Summer 1995), p. 45.
12. Habermas in the "Preface" to *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, p. xviii.
13. Since the publication of Jürgen Habermas's seminal study on *Öffentlichkeit* in 1962, there have been numerous and adequate summaries of the major points, so that I will not repeat the background here. See Bathrick's summary in *The Powers of Speech*, pp. 46-47; Craig Calhoun, "Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere," in Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, pp. 1-48; and Habermas's own brief re-presentation, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article," *New German Critique* 3 (Fall 1974), pp. 49- 55.
14. The article referred to is Robert Weimann, "Kunst und Öffentlichkeit in der sozialistischen Gesellschaft: Zum Stand der Vergesellschaftung künstlerischer Verkehrsformen," *Sinn und Form*, vol. 31, no. 2 (1979), pp. 214- 43.
15. The notion of counter public sphere was articulated by Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: Zur Organisationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarischer Öffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1972). English translation by Peter Labanyi et al. under the title *Public Sphere and Experience: Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
16. See, for example, Uta Grundmann, Klaus Michael, and Susanna Seufert, eds., *Die Einübung der Aussenspur: Die andere Kultur in Leipzig 1971-1990* (Leipzig: THOM, 1996), especially the postword, pp. 160-61.
17. Christoph Tannert goes one step further and questions whether even descriptors like "zweite Kultur," alternative or underground culture can be applied to these formations; see "'Nach realistischer Einschätzung der Lage...': Absage an Subkultur und Nischenexistenz in der DDR," in Philip Brady and Ian Wallace, eds., *Prenzlauer Berg: Bohemia in East Berlin?* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1995), pp. 108-109, reprint in Ulrike Poppe, Rainer Eckert, Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, eds., *Zwischen Selbstbehauptung und Anpassung: Formen des Widerstandes und der Opposition in der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1995), pp. 353-76.
18. See Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp

1981), where he revised the definition of public sphere from an arena to deal with certain public issues to one for discursive interaction, shifting to a procedural rather than substantive view of the public sphere. The English translation by Thomas McCarthy was published under the title *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Boston: Beacon, 1983).

19. Jürgen Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," in Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 421-61 (here pp. 454-55).

20. There is a lack of agreement on what exactly triggered the toppling of the Honecker leadership in the crucial days of October 1989. The terms of the "exit" (that is, the exodus via the embassies in Prague and Budapest in September and October) vs. the voice arguments are elaborated by Christian Joppke in *East German Dissidents and the Revolution of 1989: Social Movement in a Leninist Regime* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), p. 139.

21. Quoted in Joppke, p. 141.

22. Michael Rohrwasser, *Der Stalinismus und die Renegaten: Die Literatur der Exkommunisten* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1991).

23. Ulrich Plenzdorf, Klaus Schlesinger, and Martin Stade, eds., *Berliner Geschichten*. "Operativer Schwerpunkt Selbstverlag". Eine Autoren- Anthologie: wie sie entstand und von der Stasi verhindert wurde (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), p. 8.

24. Marianne Streisand (Germanist at the Humboldt University, Berlin), quoted in Robert von Hallberg's anthology of interviews with literary scholars and intellectuals, *Literary Intellectuals and the Dissolution of the State: Professionalism and Conformity in the GDR* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 68.

25. Plenzdorf, Schlesinger, and Stade, eds., *Berliner Geschichten*, p. 19.

26. See, for example, statements by Petra Boden (p. 113), Richard Pietraß (p. 182), Helga Schubert (p. 191), and Gerhard Wolf (p. 291) in von Hallberg, *Literary Intellectuals and the Dissolution of the State*.

27. Sigrid Meuschel, for example, argues persuasively and at great length that the party's lack of legitimacy negated any trace of civil society and, therefore, of discursive activity in the political sense, citing at crucial points in her introduction (pp. 9-13) the ground breaking study by Ferenc Fehér, Agnes Heller, and György Márkus, *Dictatorship over Needs* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); see Meuschel, *Legitimation und Parteiherrschaft: Zum Paradox von Stabilität und Revolution in der DDR* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1992). Bathrick too refers to Fehér's notion of "dictatorship of needs" (p. 62) but restricts its validity to the 1950s and 1960s.

28. From an interview with Weimann conducted by Colin B. Grant in 1990, originally published in *Weimarer Beiträge*, vol. 37, no. 8 (1991), here cited from the reprint in Appendix II of Grant, *Literary Communication from Consensus to Rupture: Practice and Theory in Honecker's GDR* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1995), p. 207.

29. For background, see Helmut Müller-Enbergs, *Der Fall Rudolf Herrnstadt: Tauwetterpolitik vor dem 17. Juni* (Berlin: LinksDruck, 1991) and Walter Janka, *Schwierigkeiten mit der Wahrheit* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1990).

30. This becomes apparent in a number of the interviews included in Grundmann, Michael, and Seufert, eds., *Die Einübung der Aussenspur*.

31. Ralf Dahrendorf elaborated within the context of the formation of the Federal Republic the thesis concerning the Third Reich's modernity as its point of departure, see *Gesellschaft und Demokratie in Deutschland* (Munich: Piper, 1965). Jeffrey Herf's *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) provides an important extension and revision of the thesis, especially from the view of cultural life.

32. The extent to which this liberalization or modernization marked individual lives in the fifties can be followed in the oral history interviews conducted by Lutz Niethammer, Alexander von Plato, and Dorothee Wierling, eds., *Die Volkseigene Erfahrung: Eine Archäologie des Lebens in der Industrieprovinz der DDR* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1991).

33. See Johannes R. Becher, *Bemühungen I und II. Gesammelte Werke, Vol. 13- 14* (Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau, 1971). 34. Johannes R. Becher, *Macht der Poesie: Poetische Konfession, II. Teil*. In Becher, *Bemühungen II*, p. 206.

35. Johannes R. Becher, *Briefe 1909-1958*. Volume 1 (Berlin und Weimar: Aufbau, 1993).

36. On Becher's unrealized plan for a journal called *Die Tradition*, see Werner Mittenzwei, "Nachkriegsentwürfe zwischen Erfahrung und Utopie: Johannes R. Becher, Bertolt Brecht, Georg Lukács, Thomas Mann," in Claudia Keller, ed., *Die Nacht hat zwölf Stunden, dann kommt schon der Tag: Antifaschismus, Geschichte und Neubewertung* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1996), pp. 140-48.

37. The resonance of Stalin's technologicistic definition of the writer could be heard in Günther

Weisenborn's keynote speech at the First German Writers Congress in 1947 where he referred to writers as "architects of the soul" and the congress as a "parliament of the spirit"! Quoted in Carsten Gansel, *Parlament des Geistes: Literatur zwischen Hoffnung und Repression 1945-1961* (Berlin: Basisdruck, 1996), p. 63.

38. Matthias Langhoff, "Wer keine Seele hat, muß das Land der Griechen mit den Füßen suchen oder Vom Fluch, den Abschied nicht loszuwerden. Eine Rede" (Berliner Lektionen 1996), *Theater der Zeit* 6 (November/December 1996), p. 26.

39. Gansel, pp. 27-29. These shifts begin with the SED's "Abteilung Kultur und Erziehung" (1946-50), restructured in Spring 1950 and later that same year reduced in size and assigned new management personnel, in 1952 renamed "Abteilung für Schöne Literatur und Kunst" and divested of education, which became an independent office, in 1953 renamed "Abteilung Kunst, Literatur und kulturelle Massennarbeit", in 1957 reconfigured with education under the revised title of "Abteilung für Volksbildung und Kultur" and provided with a new oversight committee, "Kommission für Fragen der Kultur beim Politbüro"; based on recommendations from this committee, education and culture were again separated into two separate offices and remained so until 1989, while in 1960 the "Abteilung Kultur" was again restructured, and once again augmented after the Wall was built in 1961.

40. Gansel, p. 153.

41. See Carsten Gansel's comments in Johannes R. Becher, *Der gesplittene Dichter: Gedichte, Briefe, Dokumente*. Ed. by Carsten Gansel (Berlin: Aufbau, 1991).

42. Monika Maron, "Die Schriftsteller und das Volk," *Der Spiegel*, February 20, 1990, p. 70.

43. For positions of prominent authors on the construction of the Berlin Wall, see Matthias Braun, *Drama um eine Komödie* (Berlin: Chr. Links, 1995), 17-19, where he describes the background to the production and censored performance of Heiner Müller's play *Die Umsiedlerin* in October 1961, soon after the Wall was erected.

44. See, for example, the introduction by Ludwig to an exhibition catalogue on everyday GDR culture, Andreas Ludwig and Jörg Engelhardt, eds., *Alltagskultur der DDR: Begleitbuch zur Ausstellung "Tempolinsen und P2"* (Berlin: Be.Bra Verlag, 1996), p. 12, and the introduction by Ina Merkel to the catalogue of an exhibition on GDR consumer culture of the 1960s, Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst e.V., ed., *Wunderwirtschaft: DDR-Konsumkultur in den 60er Jahren* (Köln, Weimar und Wien: Böhlau, 1996), p. 6.

45. Dahn, *Westwärts und nicht vergessen*, p. 180.

46. See Günter Gaus, *Wo Deutschland liegt: Eine Ortsbestimmung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1983), pp. 156-233.

47. Marianne Schulz and Jan Wielgohs, "DDR-Identität zwischen Demokratie und DM," in Thomas Blanke and Rainer Erd, eds., *DDR. Ein Staat vergeht* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1990), pp. 123-136 (here p. 129).

48. See Walter Süß, "Revolution und Öffentlichkeit in der DDR," *Deutschland Archiv* 23 (1990), pp. 907-21 (here p. 910).

49. Reich uses the metaphor of an "oyster" to describe the situation; see Jens Reich, *Rückkehr nach Europa: Bericht zur neuen Lage der Nation* (Munich: Hanser, 1991), pp. 7-9.

50. Adolf Endler, *Tarzan am Prenzlauer Berg: Sudelblätter 1981-1983* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1994), p. 188.

51. Christa Ebert (a scholar of Russian literature) quoted in von Hallberg, *Literary Intellectuals and the Dissolution of the State*. p. 122.

52. Ulrike Poppe, Rainer Eckert, Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, "Opposition, Widerstand und widerständiges Verhalten in der DDR: Forschungsstand - Grundlinien - Probleme," in Poppe, Eckert, Kowalczyk, *Zwischen Selbstbehauptung und Anpassung*, pp. 15-16, where they develop this idea based on the definition of "Widerstand" in the *Kleines Politisches Wörterbuch* (Berlin: Dietz, 1967).

53. In his discussion of writers and the Stasi, Joachim Walther divides the surveillance of literature into three periods, 1950-1963, 1963-1976 (during which the employees and structural subdivisions ballooned), and 1976-1989. See *Sicherungsbereich Literatur: Schriftsteller und Staatssicherheit in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1996), pp. 150-67 on the middle period.

54. Statement in Herbert Witt, ed., *Poetik des Widerstandes: Versuche einer Annäherung*. Symposium am 25. und 26. Oktober 1991 in Leipzig (Leipzig: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 1992), p. 91.

55. Hohendahl, "Recasting the Public Sphere," p. 45.

56. Symptomatic for this explosion of background material is the volume edited by Jörg Fröhling, Reinhild Meinel, and Karl Riha, eds., *Wende- Literatur: Bibliographie zur Literatur der Deutschen Einheit* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1996). Equally symptomatic is the eighteen-volume collection of documents and commentaries assembled by the Enquete Commission of the Bundestag: Deutscher Bundestag, ed., *Enquete-Kommission "Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in*

Deutschland: Anträge, Debatten, Berichte (Baden-Baden and Frankfurt/Main, 1995).

57. Oliver Schwarzkopf und Beate Rusch, eds., *Wolf Biermann: Ausgebürgert*. Fotografien von Roger Melis. Mit abschweifenden Anmerkungen und wichtigen Nichtigkeiten von Wolf Biermann (Berlin: Schwarzkopf und Schwarzkopf, 1996), p. 178.