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DAZWISCHEN – BETWEEN THE GDR AND A UNITED GERMANY

By

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Dazwischen – Between the GDR and a United Germany

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Michael G. Levine

My dissertation, *Dazwischen: Between the GDR and a United Germany* investigates how Germans, especially the citizens of the former East Germany, come to terms with the history and culture of the GDR in a post-unification context. I examine how the concepts of *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* developed in the wake of World War II to describe the struggles involved in coming to terms with the Nazi past were taken over in the immediate aftermath of German unification in 1989. While suggesting certain continuities and similarities between the two periods, the use of these concepts in the post-1989 context tends, in general, to conceal more than it reveals. As a way of addressing this problem and of offering an alternative to prevailing frameworks, I use the term *Dazwischen*, drawn from a number of works discussed in my dissertation. The novels *Das Provisorium* by Wolfgang Hilbig, *Schlehwrens Giraffe* by Bernd Schirmer, and *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen* by Jens Sparschuh, and the film *Good Bye, Lenin!* by Wolfgang Becker describe how the protagonists, authors and readers from

the former GDR negotiate their new identities in a unified Germany, how they often feel suspended and trapped in this transitional experience, and how they nevertheless use the feeling of being neither here nor there as a “place” from which to reevaluate and critically analyze their GDR past and unified German present.

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## Introduction

My dissertation entitled *Dazwischen – Between the GDR and a United Germany* investigates how Germany and Germans, especially the citizens of the former East Germany, come to terms with the history and culture of the GDR. My primary works for this project include Wolfgang Hilbig's *Das Provisorium* (2000), Bernd Schirmer's *Schlehwins Giraffe* (1992), Jens Sparschuh's *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen* (1995, 2012), and Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003). My research indicates that at least initially, historians, philosophers, journalists, and politicians tended to equate the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent demise of the GDR with the capitulation of Germany on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1945 and the end of the Third Reich. While this equation was to some extent warranted, in recent years it has become increasingly clear that terms such as *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* used in the aftermath of the Second World War and again in the immediate aftermath of the GDR to describe the task of coming to terms with the past is no longer adequate. Particularly with regard to the former GDR, a new language and way of thinking needs to be developed, one that deals more specifically with the post-1989 context. It is the goal of this dissertation to develop such a language and in the process to think in new ways about Germany's ongoing engagement with the former GDR; what it was and what it might have been, but also with what it might still become as a new sense of German identity emerges.

Through my analysis of the post-World War II terminology used by Adorno, Habermas, Hamacher and LaCapra, as well as through a brief historical comparison I



want to point out that the Third Reich and the GDR are not comparable and that the terminology used to deal with the Nazi past cannot be applied to the GDR. Then, with the help of my primary works, I will examine how the GDR past is portrayed in a united Germany; how the protagonists view the GDR and how they deal with its past. How, I ask, can one describe the process that East Germans were and are undergoing after the fall of the Berlin Wall?

My four chosen primary works are distinct in their content, their protagonists all try to make sense of the GDR as its own state and within a united Germany in relation to their own existence in the GDR and in a united Germany. It is also important to note that while the narratives are set in the short span of time before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall, their dates of publication are actually much more recent. This time difference allows for historical perspective on the author's part. Before further examining my primary works, it is necessary to analyze the terminology used after World War II to deal with the Nazi past – namely *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* – and explain why it is problematic to apply the same language to a post-1989 context.

In 1952 the *Westdeutsche Neue Presse* first used the word *bewältigt* and starting in the summer of 1955 the term *unbewältigte Vergangenheit* appeared in the title of a lecture, establishing itself through public discourse and thus, became a catchphrase.<sup>1</sup> Since then the terms *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* (working through the

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<sup>1</sup> Eitz, Thorsten and Stötzel, Georg. "Vergangenheitsbewältigung." *Wörterbuch der "Vergangenheitsbewältigung": Die NS-Vergangenheit im öffentlichen Sprachgebrauch*. New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2007. 602-603 Print.

past) and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past) have been used almost interchangeably in German post-1945 political, historical, literary and intellectual discourses.

Initially used in the years after 1945 to describe efforts by Germans to confront their role in the Third Reich as well as in the Holocaust, *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* were carried over and used somewhat differently in the years following the fall of the Berlin Wall. These terms were used to speak about efforts by former East Germans to address their own particular relationship to the Nazi past and their role within the GDR government and *Stasi* (state security). While the use of the same terms in both cases may suggest certain continuities between them, between, that is, efforts to come to terms with the legacies of the Third Reich and the GDR and the role German citizens played in each, it is also necessary to accentuate important differences. Even though both political systems were totalitarian, the roles, involvement and support of their respective citizens differed drastically.

Unlike the Third Reich, in which Germans had elected Adolf Hitler as their leader knowing his agenda, East Germans never elected their leader/government to then establish the East German state. In fact, the GDR was founded in October 1949, one year before the first elections. With the overnight building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the subsequent closing of the border to West Germany, East Germans were imprisoned in their own state. Moreover, travel restrictions drastically limited the

freedom and choices East Germans had as opposed to Germans living in the Third Reich.

The terms *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* used to speak about the post-1945 period are closely related, if not in name, then at least in meaning to the notion of working through [Durcharbeiten] first introduced by Sigmund Freud in his 1914 essay “*Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten*”. In 1959, Theodor Adorno posed the question “What does Working Through the Past Mean?” in a same-titled essay. Taking up this question in a 1992 essay “What Does ‘Working Off the Past’ Mean Today?,” Jürgen Habermas seeks to repose it in the specific context of the demise of the GDR. In this essay he analyses the historical discrepancy between the Third Reich and the GDR, taking into account the building of the Berlin Wall, the intensification of the Cold War, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, German reunification in 1990 and the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, while comparing the political systems of the Third Reich and the GDR. Although both states had a secret police force – Gestapo and Stasi respectively – that warrant a comparison between the Third Reich and the GDR, it must at the same time be noted that both states differ in their intellectual foundations.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, during the Nazi’s 12-year reign of power they administratively murdered millions of people and started a second 6-year world war. In comparison, the GDR existed for 40 years and was able to achieve a sense of normalcy.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the end of the GDR came from within while the Nazi regime

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<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Habermas. *A Berlin Republic: Writings on Germany*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997. 26. Print.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

ceased to exist through a forced capitulation. Now, between 1945 and 1989 West Germans were already exposed to the process of ‘working off the past’ – *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung*. Based on this assumption, Habermas argues that this should serve as a starting point for the East Germans to ‘work off’ *their* past.

Having just established that both systems cannot be compared and having listed the numerous differences between both dictatorial states, why then should the mechanism for working off/working through their pasts be the same? Even though both totalitarian regimes share some similarities, there are far more differences that necessitate new terminology and new ways of thinking. Given the 20 years that have elapsed since Habermas’s intervention, how might one now talk about the GDR past and, moreover, the way it has been talked about in the past two decades?

From my analysis and discussion of my primary works it is clear that the protagonists have neither come to terms with their past nor are they working through it. Although the terms *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* are mentioned their prevalence and importance to the protagonists decrease with time, meaning that the later the work was written or directed the less these terms factored into the protagonists’ state of mind.<sup>4</sup> Instead, they find themselves in a transitional state, a space of in between – *Dazwischen*. This temporal, spatial and mental betweenness – *Dazwischen* – allows for reflection and reevaluation of the GDR past by the protagonists on behalf of the authors, director,

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<sup>4</sup> Wolfgang Hilbig’s protagonist C. in *Das Provisorium* is more preoccupied with *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung/Vergangenheitsbewältigung* than Jens Sparschuh’s Hinrich Lobek in *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen*, for example.

readers and viewers. At times this will lead to profound disorientation – *Orientierungslosigkeit*- questioning and uncertainty. However, it is precisely this term of *Dazwischen* that presents a departure from the previously mentioned and prevailing terminology to establish itself as a new terminology and way of thinking in reference to the GDR past.

*Dazwischen* is at once a process and a framing device for the authors, readers (specifically former East Germans), and protagonists to process the events of 1989/1990 onward. As a process, it highlights the incompatibility of the former West and East Germany, which then further contributes to the instability of the ongoing German reunification process. Moreover, *Dazwischen* is a descriptor for the specific, yet inherently critical and self-critical, and contradictory by nature. In the primary works, this encompasses various complementing as well as opposing terms to varying degrees: literature/language and censorship, linguistic ambiguity and language manipulation, capitalism and censorship, colonization/colonialism and capitalism, GDR identity and history and *Ostalgie*, and reality and fiction. The interconnectedness of these terms is governed by the *Dazwischen* and throughout the novels and film all the protagonists more or less are in a state of suspension, a *Dazwischen*. However, it is not the individual themes but precisely this *Dazwischen* that allows them to navigate the transitional times and places surrounding the events of 1989 and 1990. It also provides a trajectory of how one dealt and deals with the GDR past and its demise in 1989/90. It is the objective of this dissertation to show and

highlight the ambiguous terms represented by the *Dazwischen* and how the term itself evolves.

### Organization of my project

The organization of my primary works does not follow their publication dates, but rather the temporal setting of their context moving from a pre-1989 setting toward a German Reunification 1990. Thus, *Das Provisorium* (2000) is discussed before *Schlehwains Giraffe* (1992) and *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen* (1995, 2012) with *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003) being the final work. Beginning with Hilbig's text I trace the remnants and (dis)continuities of the Third Reich and the GDR and how they have affected the protagonist, author and reader. Furthermore, I will begin to examine the various states of suspension – *Dazwischen* – and how they come about and continue to affect the protagonist until his return to his hometown. Next, I examine Schirmer's text and how language, ambiguity and censorship lead to a (re)(e)valuation of the GDR before moving on to Sparschuh's text, where the same (re)(e)valuation takes place on the level of the protagonist and his (former) GDR identity. Here, Hilbig's criticism of the FRG's handling of the Third Reich and Holocaust is transformed into a criticism of the its current political and economic system. The final portion of my dissertation discusses Becker's film and how it encompasses the majority of the previously mentioned themes to (re)construct a GDR and rewrite the events of 1989/1990.

My first chapter discusses Wolfgang Hilbig's semi-autobiographical novel *Das Provisorium*, which shows the struggle of protagonist C., an author. After being granted a visa to West Germany, he faces many struggles: his role as a writer in the GDR and West Germany, his inability to write in either country, the confrontation with a larger and capitalist book market, availability of forbidden books about the Holocaust, consumerism and alcoholism. Interestingly, Wolfgang Hilbig faced that same struggle and thus, his novel is highly self-reflexive. Hilbig's and C.'s struggle is located in a temporal and spatial *Dazwischen*, which he continuously perpetuates by traveling between various East and West German cities and by self-medicating with excessive amounts of alcohol. Nevertheless, C. is able to contemplate the implications of the *Dazwischen*. In doing so, he is able to criticize the GDR's censorship of literature and the West German's censorship of literature through freedom of the press and capitalism. It also establishes a connection to the Nazi past by constant reference to book boxes labeled Holocaust and Gulag. Additionally, having two of his multiple residences in Nuremberg and Munich, cities that have important historical connections to the Nazis and the Third Reich, C. constantly references Germany's National Socialist history, which he uses to implicitly connect the GDR past. In the novel's end, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, C. arrives at the Leipzig train station and simultaneously remains in and preserves the *Dazwischen* as a critical space, because while he stands between the East and West entrance the sun illuminates the letters of the German company AEG., which employed forced laborers during the Third Reich.

The same criticism of censorship of literature through capitalism is made in my second chapter, which discusses Bernd Schirmer's *Schlehwains Giraffe*. In this novel, the protagonist's Doppelgänger Ralph B. Schneiderheinze is an unsuccessful and struggling author, whose works among those of other former GDR authors has suddenly been affected by the newly capitalist book market, in which authors have to produce materials for the sake of selling it and thereby selling themselves and the entire literary industry. Another interesting aspect of language and literature in regards to a *Dazwischen* is the intertextuality, ambiguity and manipulation thereof. By extension, *Good Bye, Lenin!* also uses these themes in a visual way. Both, Schirmer and Sparschuh, use intertextuality to draw attention to the status of their text as being a work of literature by use of other literary works. In the same way, Becker uses historical footage to draw attention to his film being a film. In doing so, these works make the reader aware that he or she is reading or watching a work of fiction. Of lesser importance compared to *Das Provisorium*, but still thematized, is Germany's past, here specifically the GDR's dark past and the role of perpetrators, victims and followers. The *dunkle Vergangenheit* is an ambiguous term that can refer to Germany's Nazi past, Holocaust and GDR past, specifically the role of the Stasi. As previously mentioned, there are certain similarities between the Third Reich and the GDR and the more removed the protagonists are from the 1989/1990 period the more the emphasis shifts towards the GDR past. Within this shift, it also becomes apparent that there is no longer a singular dichotomy of *Täter* (perpetrator) and *Opfer* (victim), but rather an examination and questioning of *Mitläufer* (follower) –



those who neither directly supported nor opposed both totalitarian systems. Schirmer's novel discusses this topic at length and in depth. When and how does one become a *Mitläufer*? Is the fact of being a member of the ruling party without ever actively participating or the mere act of buying consumer goods, whose purchase helps the state's economy, a display of being a *Mitläufer*? What is clear is that it still is a grey area in need of further examination. For now, a *Mitläufer* itself is a figure of *Dazwischen*. However, my primary works only marginally comment on the *Mitläufer* and therefore, are not sufficient sources to examine the role of the Stasi.<sup>5</sup> Even the omnipresent giraffe has a dark past, but it is a more prominent marker for colonialism, which is also heavily thematized in Sparschuh's novel and Becker's film.

Although the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent German reunification started as a movement initiated by the citizens of the GDR, it was not long until West Germany took over the entire process in what resembled colonization. In fact, colonialism, and more accurately post-colonialism, highlights the importance of the role of language, place and identity.

Rather 'place' in post-colonial societies is a complex interaction of language, history and environment. It is characterized firstly by a sense of displacement in those who have moved to the colonies, or the more widespread sense of displacement from the imported language, of a gap between the 'experienced' environment and descriptions the language provides . . ." (391).<sup>6</sup>

Of course, the postcolonial context needs to be adapted to the post-1989 German context. Specifically, East Germans did not move to a colony, yet they were displaced,

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<sup>5</sup> My conclusion will discuss the topic of the Stasi in post-1989 literature.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted from an introduction of The Post-Colonial Studies Reader.

because their country became a colony. “Place is thus the concomitant of difference, the continual reminder of the separation, and yet of the hybrid interpenetration of the colonizer and the colonized” (391)<sup>7</sup>. Yet, the GDR remains the place where there are remnants of the old state amidst the new one, which of course keeps the connection of the colonized alive.

Furthermore, the experienced environment of (post)-colonialism and the colonizer stands in stark contrast to the GDR’s erstwhile political and economic system. However, instead of completely subscribing to the new systems, democracy and capitalism respectively, the primary works either question them and/or use them to their advantage to remember the GDR. Here, *Ostalgie* serves as a tool to create a *Dazwischen* not as a fond wish for a return of the GDR.

My third chapter, which discusses Jens Sparschuh’s novel *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen*, shows protagonist Hinrich Lobek struggling to accept the united Germany’s economical and societal state. At first, he mostly does not participate in life outside his apartment and passively rejects change. Only after reading his daily horoscope, he begins to participate in society again. Yet, he, at once, resists and uses the new system to his advantage for work. He resists by designing his GDR inspired room fountain, but uses this ostalgie room fountain to increase his sales and further his career. Thus, he becomes critical of the new system and self-critical in his use of that system. In the end, similar to Hilbig’s protagonist, he retreats to a train station leaving his fate unresolved.

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted from an introduction of The Post-Colonial Studies Reader.

My final chapter, analyses Wolfgang Becker's film *Good Bye, Lenin!*. The film highlights many of the previous themes, for example the intertextuality on a visual level, calling attention to it being a film, and capitalism and *Ostalgie*. Here, the protagonist, Alex, uses the means of capitalism to reconstruct an ostalgie version of the GDR. In doing so, he places himself in a *Dazwischen*, which allows him and the reader introspection as well as an objective outside perspective.

In the end, all works keep the existence of their *Dazwischen* more or less intact, which points toward it being a framing device as well as a process needed to describe the current state of many former GDR citizens in a united Germany. All protagonists construct a *Dazwischen* and thus, it is a continuous critical and self-critical space, from which they examine, question, evaluate and criticize the current societal conditions and personal identities.

## Chapter I

### In Transit: Wolfgang Hilbig's *Das Provisorium*

“Ja, ich war so dazwischen, zwischen den beiden Ländern. Ich merkte, die DDR gehört nicht mehr zu mir, der Westen aber auch nicht.“ Wolfgang Hilbig in a Spiegel Interview

Wolfgang Hilbig's semi-autobiographical novel *Das Provisorium*, published in 2000, is a dense and multifaceted literary work representing the struggle of the protagonist C., the author and the reader, to orient themselves spatially, temporally and mentally. This struggle for orientation leads to a profound state of betweenness – “Zustand des Dazwischen” (Besslich, Grätz and Hildebrand 248), which is also apparent on an authorial and structural level, which in turn also affects the reader. Thus, *Das Provisorium* presents an overarching picture of experience, struggle, disorientation, and betweenness that the protagonist, author and reader, especially a former East German reader, try to navigate and possibly escape.

Although Hilbig's literary works have yielded him numerous scholarships and awards, among them the coveted Georg-Büchner-Preis in 2002<sup>8</sup>, academic scholarship on his work, specifically *Das Provisorium*, remains surprisingly sparse. Yet, a short overview of published scholarship will reveal a need to go beyond the

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<sup>8</sup> ""Leben Habe Ich Nicht Gelemt." Der Schriftsteller Wolfgang Hilbig, 61, Über Den Georg-Büchner-Preis, Der Ihm Am Übernächsten Samstag in Darmstadt Verliehen Wird, Über Vergeudetete Jahre Und Den Traum Der DDR-Regenten Vom Dichtenden Arbeiter." Der Spiegel 2002, 1.

traditional reading of Hilbig's novel. Alan Corkhill, Gabriele Eckart and Daniela Langer discuss the protagonist's as well as Wolfgang Hilbig's own double existence as a worker and a writer. Corkhill's article essentially focuses on C.'s inability to write anything during his stay in West Germany, which Corkhill attributes to C.'s rootedness in the GDR<sup>9</sup>, which consequently turns him into a "lonely outsider" (qtd. in *ibid.*). The autobiographical aspects of *Das Provisorium* are the central topic of Gabriele Eckart. In her reading of the novel, she establishes ties between Wolfgang Hilbig and the protagonist C. to emphasize the double existence of worker and writer.<sup>10</sup> Daniela Langer discusses the same double-existence in her essay, but at the same time also explains the struggle for recognition and publication in the GDR.<sup>11</sup> Their focus on the author's and the protagonist's double-existence also leads them to point out the narrative technique of free indirect speech, or *erlebte Rede* in German. For Langer, this technique allows for a subjective perspective and introspection.<sup>12</sup> "Fusion and an ambiguous juxtaposition of authorial and figural voice" (Corkhill 241) are the effects of free indirect speech according to Corkhill. Eckart interestingly sees this narrative technique as an authorial distancing mechanism, causing disorientation in the reader.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Hilbig's narrative technique needs further explication than what

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<sup>9</sup> Alan Corkhill. "Self-Imposed Difference? The Writer as Outsider in Wolfgang Hilbig's Novel *Das Provisorium*." *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 40.3 (2004)241 Print.

<sup>10</sup> Gabriele Eckart. "Autobiografie als radikale Selbstkritik in Wolfgang Hilbigs Roman *Das Provisorium*." *Germanic Notes and Reviews* 35.1 (2004)38 & 41 Print.

<sup>11</sup> Daniela Langer. "Das 'Ich' als 'Provisorium': Zeit- und Wirklichkeitsverluste als Konstituens der Person und als übergreifendes Strukturelement in der Prosa Wolfgang Hilbigs." *Habitus und Fremdbild in der deutschen Prosaliteratur des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*. Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2006. 51. Print.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* 58.

<sup>13</sup> Eckart. 36.

Corkhill, Eckart and Langer have discussed in their articles, because it is part of the structure of betweenness.

In addition to the aforementioned scholars there are others who have focused on the narrative technique, but more importantly on the *Provisorium* – stopgap – and the suspended condition of C. Although Christine Cosentino points out C.'s "Zustand des >>Dazwischenseins<<" (Cosentino 122) and his "haltlose[r] Schwebezustand" (Cosentino 124), she attributes these conditions to his rampant alcoholism and the granting of his visa, which in turn allow him to remain suspended. Similarly, Hyacinthe Ondoia mentions "das Motiv des Zwischenraums bzw. des Übergangs, das den ganzen Roman durchzieht" (Ondoia 201) and "den Zustand der Schwebe, der im ganzen Roman vorherrschend ist" (Ondoia 202). Her analysis of Hilbig's novel also states the problematic of living a double-existence and being an outsider, but it also explores the problematic of East Germanness in this state of suspension. Ondoia draws the conclusion that East German identity is subject to transition as a result of engagement with the past and experiences of the new capitalist present.<sup>14</sup> However, Ondoia does not go far enough in her analysis of the betweenness and East German identity, because she focuses on the transition away from the *Dazwischen* rather than it being the process needed to analyze and define what it means to be East German in West and a united Germany. Charlotte Misselwitz offers one of the more comprehensive analyses of Hilbig's novel, combining narrative technique,

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<sup>14</sup> Hyacinthe Ondoia. "Eine deutsch-deutsche Migration?: Fremdheitserfahrung un Wolfgang Hilbigs Roman *Das Provisorium*." *Migration heute und gestern*. Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2010. 217. Print.

disorientation, the state of *das Provisorium*, origin and East German identity.<sup>15</sup> Yet, it lacks in-depth explorations of connections between disorientation, identity and betweenness. Overall, each scholar has pointed toward and highlighted important individual aspects of Hilbig's novel but has failed to address the larger issue of betweenness, which encompasses the author, protagonist and reader alike. Betweenness in its spatial, temporal, mental and structural state is the driving force behind and within the novel. It allows Hilbig to express the social conditions in Germany before, during and after 1989 as well as the (dis)continuities of 1945 and 1989 through his protagonist C., which consequently lets the reader explore the same conditions within and around him. Thus, betweenness is central to the reader's reading and personal experience, which may either serve as tool to overcome them or as the outcome itself.

*Das Provisorium* opens on an evening in mid-September 1989 in Nuremberg, the beginning of significant historical changes for the Eastern Bloc, specifically for East Germany, and ends in the spring 1990 after the fall of the Berlin Wall at the main train station in Leipzig. Although the novel's timeframe only covers a few months frequent analepses of the protagonist's life and experiences extend the narrated time and firmly ground the novel in a temporal *Dazwischen*. In fact, it is the novel's own title – *Das Provisorium* – that is indicative of the temporality of the author's and protagonist's legal status in West Germany, the reader's potential East German

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<sup>15</sup> Charlotte Misselwitz. "Die ostdeutsche Identität treibt um. Ostdeutsches Schreiben nach 1989 zwischen Fiktion und Autobiographie am Beispiel der Roma." *Autobiographisches Schreiben nach 1989. Analysen von Erinnerungen und Tagebüchern ehemaliger DDR-Schriftsteller*. Düsseldorf: Janos Stekovics, 2003. 38, 39, 42 & 43. Print.

identity and the GDR as a country. So, how is this temporal betweenness portrayed in the novel? What does the reader learn about its effect on himself and the protagonist? And where does this leave the reader and protagonist at the end of the novel?

Betweenness in conjunction with disorientation is established from the outset of the novel. In fact, after a first reading of *Das Provisorium* the reader may feel disoriented and lost due to a lack of spatial, temporal and structural markers. During the novel's 320 pages there are no chapters, subheadings or any other structural markers to allow the reader to orient himself. Moreover, hyphenation, ellipses, and open-ended sentences and paragraphs add to the disorientation. Equally lacking are temporal markers. There are occasional references to holidays, months, dates, and years, but there is no clear timeline. Indeed, reconstructing the novel's temporal coordinates reveals a frame story that is interrupted by flashbacks. Framed by the two cities Nuremberg and Leipzig as spatial markers, the novel opens a space of *Zwischen* - of at once representing West and East, departure and arrival, 1945 and the Nazi rallies during the Third Reich and 1989 and the Monday Demonstrations in Leipzig during the final days of the GDR. This provides the author, protagonist and reader with the opportunity to explore and analyze the (dis)continuities between the Third Reich and the GDR. It is only at the end that the reader gains an understanding of the novel's structure with C.'s arrival at the main train station in Leipzig:

In der Mitte der breiten rechteckigen Plattform vor den Bahnsteigen stellte er die Tasche klatschend ab. Die Uhren links und rechts, auf der Ost- und Westseite . . ., zeigten verschiedene Zeiten an (doch es mußte etwa um neun sein); . . . In dem halbrunden Tor weit hinten am anderen Ende des Bahnhofs



ging nun ein Licht auf, das halbrunde Tor war von Licht erfüllt wie eine aufgehende Sonne. Und unter dem Dach des Bahnhofs zogen sich Strahlen herüber, der Schmutz auf dem Glas des Kuppeldachs leuchtete auf und erfüllte die Halle mit Licht. Es waren neun Strahlen, die man da oben sah, es war eine magische Zahl. Und in der aufgehenden Sonne am Ende des Bahnhofs tauchten drei Buchstaben auf, die sich dunkel in der leuchtenden Scheibe abzeichneten, . . . AEG (Hilbig 317-320)

Even in his return, or arrival, to what is now the former East Germany C. is suspended between East and West, between two different realities. In Leipzig's train station, C. positions himself in the middle of the platform between the east and west entrances glancing at the clocks above them which are out of sync in the same way East and West Germany are out of sync after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Yet, the estimated time of nine o'clock is mirrored by the nine rays of sunshine of the rising sun.<sup>16</sup> This image of the *aufgehende Sonne* and *die magische Zahl* (the magical number) nine points toward a new beginning and a (re)birth for C. and Germany. However, the sun also enlightens dark three letters – AEG – that are reminiscent of Germany's *dunkle Vergangenheit* (dark past). AEG is a German company that is well known for employing forced laborers during the Third Reich, a fact, which the now defunct company continues to hide in their online presence. Ironically, AEG had to declare bankruptcy during the late 1980s and like many GDR companies after 1989 was dissolved and stricken from the commercial register during the mid-1990s. Here, the reader is confronted with three separate historical periods that are intertwined: German Reunification, the Third Reich and Holocaust, and the GDR. In fact, in addition to dealing with the GDR past East German readers now also have to

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<sup>16</sup> The rising sun outside a train station is also a theme in Jens Sparschuh's novel *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen*.

confront the Nazi past, a history that was largely neglected by the GDR and the Eastern Bloc. Of course, C.'s confrontation with Germany's *dunkle Vergangenheit* is doubled by having lived in the GDR and as such it becomes a *doppelte dunkle Vergangenheit* (doubly dark past). Having been denied any access to materials related to the Third Reich and confrontation therewith in the GDR, C. immediately begins to collect books without considering the potential physical and psychological repercussions:

Die Kartons enthielten, so sah er es, den geballten Schrecken des 20. Jahrhunderts. Schon kurze Zeit nach seinem Eintreffen in Westdeutschland hatte er begonnen, alle verfügbaren Bücher zusammenzutragen, die diesen Schrecken beschrieben, dokumentierten und reflektierten. Diese Bücher, sagte er sich, waren das unabdingbare Wissen dieses Jahrhunderts, sie enthielten das einzige *wirklich notwendige Wissen des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Und er sammelte diese Bücher manisch, mit einer fast unzählbaren Gier, er umstellte sich mit ihnen, er schüttete sich mit ihnen zu, er mauerte sich mit ihren Reihen ein, Und dann stellte er fest, daß er zwischen diesen Stapeln und Haufen keine Luft mehr bekam, und in einer nächtlichen Panik-Aktion verstaute er die Bücher in die beiden Kisten. Er sperrte sie ein und beschriftete die Kisten. Anschließend kam er sich vor wie der Wachmann eines Kazett's. Und manchmal träumte er von den Kartons: sie standen in der Nacht wie dunkel glühende Öfen, ein schwaches Leuchten ging von ihnen aus, einen schwefeligen Dunst verbreitend. Er schwitzte im Schlaf, er merkte, wie ihm der Atem die Funktion versagte; er sprang auf, machte Licht und trat vor die Kisten hin. Da standen sie und rührten sich nicht. Mit einem schwarzen Filzstift hatte er auf ihre Deckel geschrieben: *Holocaust & Gulag*.<sup>17</sup> (Hilbig 153-154)

The inaccessibility to Nazi-related materials also meant an inability to confront and deal with their crimes. Of course, C.'s visa removes these limitations and as soon as he arrives in West Germany, his addictive personality takes over and he begins to collect these books, which contain “*das einzige wirklich notwendige Wissen des 20.*

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<sup>17</sup> The terms Holocaust and Gulag are also important for the *Historikerstreit* (historians' quarrel), which debated the controversy of the comparability of the crimes of the Nazis with those of the Soviet Union.

*Jahrhunderts*” [original emphasis] (Hilbig 153) (the only truly necessary knowledge of the 20<sup>th</sup> century). This emphasized phrase highlights the importance and interconnectedness of German *Geschichte* – history and story, specifically that of the Third Reich and its aftermath. As stated in my introduction there are certain similarities between the Third Reich and the GDR,<sup>18</sup> yet because the majority of GDR citizens did not have access to the history of the Third Reich and it was not discussed, it remained a suspended history and story. Therefore, any attempt at *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* could not even begin in the GDR. As a result, the sudden exposure to and confrontation with the knowledge within these books becomes so overwhelming that C. constructs a GDR-like structure with them. “[E]r umstellte sich mit ihnen, er schüttete sich mit ihnen zu, er mauerte sich mit ihren Reihen ein“ (Hilbig 153). Not only does he reposition (*umstellen*) the books around himself, he also adjusts himself (*sich umstellen*) to them. Next, he metaphorically pours the books onto himself (*zuschütten*) and he also fills himself up (*sich zuschütten*) with them in the same way he fills himself up with alcohol. Lastly, he builds a literary wall with the books (*einmauern*) and in doing so he erects (*sich einmauern*) a wall around himself in the same the GDR erected the Berlin Wall in 1961. In the end, the books from which he expects to gain knowledge and freedom

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<sup>18</sup> For example, both regimes were essentially dictatorships with a secret police force to spy on their citizens and suppress any potential opposition.

become the bricks to his own prison, which in turn cause him to have difficulty breathing<sup>19</sup> so that he stores the books in boxes.

Yet, even stowed away in boxes their history continues to have an impact on him because the book boxes at once represent the Holocaust and his personal history in the GDR. In his dreams, he sees the boxes as “dunkel glühende Öfen“ (Hilbig 153) (darkly glowing ovens), which clearly represent the ovens used to kill Jews in the concentrations camps. However, these ovens are also reminiscent of C.’s work as a boilerman. To underscore the evil nature of the crimes perpetrated by the Nazis he can smell the sulfur in the air in his dreams, which once again takes his breath away. Furthermore, the smell of sulfur<sup>20</sup> is associated with the devil. Therefore, C. is trapped in a *Teufelskreis* (vicious cycle) of history and his story.

In addition, the books represent the interconnectedness between authorship, and censorship, capitalism and history, and C.’s addictive behavior:

Da waren sie, diese Bücher, für die er sich drüben im Osten fast ein Bein ausgerissen hätte, und er las sie nicht. Da kam er nun aus diesem Bücherkommunismus, aus dieser DDR, die sich nie genug mit dem Lesehunger ihrer Leute hatte brüsten können, für ihn aber hatte es dort nur Frustration und Erniedrigung gegeben wegen der Bücher, die ihm dauernd fehlten. Als er in den Westen kam, hatte er vom ersten Tag an Bücher gekauft wie ein Wahnsinniger, . . . niemand verstand die Triebhaftigkeit, die Besessenheit, mit der er Bücher kaufte, Bücher sich von Verlagen besorgte, Bücher stahl und sich auf jede andere nur denkbare Weise beschaffte; niemand begriff das, obwohl kein Mensch das wirkliche Ausmaß seiner Gier kannte; . . . Und dann erkannte er, daß die Bücher hier im Westen nichts mehr wert waren. (Hilbig 179-180)

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<sup>19</sup> C.’s breathing difficulty when confronted with West German products, books in his case, is mirrored in Jens Sparschuh’s protagonist Hinrich Lobek, when he is at a sales conference and chokes on a piece of Black Forest ham.

<sup>20</sup> Sulfur is also used as a preservative for dry fruit and wine and one can make the connection that by drinking alcohol C. attempts to preserve himself.

The unavailability of western books in combination with the GDR's strict censorship created a void that C. is now trying to fill. However, C.'s sudden freedom and the overabundance of uncensored media<sup>21</sup> result in a conflict. On the one hand, he buys, obtains, and steals all these books with *Triebhaftigkeit* (compulsion), *Besessenheit* (obsession and obsessiveness) and *Gier* (greed, lust), yet he does not read them. So, there is a psychological and sexual component in that his handling of the books highlights his addictive behavior and his sexuality, both of which he is unable to satisfactorily fulfill, because since their publication the books have lost their worth and value in West Germany.

Another important aspect of the books and book boxes labeled *Holocaust & Gulag* is their function in a capitalist society, in which they at once represent the attempt to confront the Nazi past and a commodity. While sitting in one of Nuremberg's busiest shopping streets he observes the hustle and bustle of West Germans salesmen and consumers, which mirrors the compulsiveness of C.'s book habit. Of course, being in a city that hosted the Nazi rallies C. sarcastically comments that "*Shopping macht frei, so steht es in attraktiven Lettern über all diesen Eingängen zu lesen ...* (Hilbig 263). This word play on the slogan *Arbeit macht frei*, which appeared on the entrance gate at Auschwitz and other concentrations camps, suggests that true personal, political and economic freedom in a capitalist society is an illusion. There is a constant and never ending exchange of goods, of selling and

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<sup>21</sup> The changing book market and the overabundance of books is also a topic in Bernd Schirmer's novel *Schlehwins Giraffe*.

buying to the point where the goods lose their value and their worth: “[D]ie Bücher [waren] hier im Westen nichts mehr wert“ (Hilbig 180). This loss of worth and value extends from the books to the authors of them, and authorship in general. „In dem Land, in dem er sich aufhielt, eignete er sich nicht zum Schriftsteller, dachte er“ (Hilbig 24). The country C. is referring to here is West Germany and his inability to be a writer is not directly linked to his newfound freedoms, most importantly freedom of speech, opinion and press, but rather to them being corrupted under capitalism.

Die erklärte Pressefreiheit war, das war nicht mehr zu übersehen, heruntergekommen zu nichts anderem als zu der Freiheit, irgendeine Denkbare, gleich welcher Art, so aufzubereiten, daß sie sich zum Verkauf eignete. Alle Tatsachen, und auch die Nicht-Tatsachen, alles, was sich irgendwie zeigen oder verbalisieren ließ, mußten verkäuflich gemacht werden, und dazu waren alle Bilder und Zeichen recht. (Hilbig 68)

The freedom of the press specifically has become nothing more than the freedom to sell one's thoughts and (non)-facts in any possible way. Through this salability the production of books and by extend the profession of author has become worthless, so much so that during a stay at an addiction rehabilitation facility C. requests to have his occupation not only stricken, but erased: “Ich bitte Sie, sagte C. das Wort *Schriftsteller* zu streichen. Es war Hochstapelei, es war ein Irrtum. . . . Ohne Beruf“ (Hilbig 53). However, this bureaucratic formality cannot erase C.'s occupation in real life and so he will continue to struggle with his authorial identity.

Even without reading the books and being an author C.'s understanding of the 20th century's history in regard to the Nazi, the GDR and his role within it become

clear: both totalitarian systems were founded on lies, a lie that he cyclically perpetuates for the GDR and himself.

Er erinnerte sich daran, daß er das 20. Jahrhundert einmal das Jahrhundert der Lügen genannt hatte. – Das ganze Jahrhundert sei ein einziger Zug von Lügen gewesen, hatte er zu Hedda gesagt, in Form einer Lüge und beladen mit Lügen sei dieser Zug vorwärtsgefahren, durchgefahren, vorübergefahren, mit einer Lokomotive als Führungssymbol ... und die restlichen Jahre des Jahrhunderts würde er noch so weiterfahren. . . . Und der Zug habe die Viehwaggons durch das Land geschleppt, Viehwaggons voller Menschen, kaum noch als Menschen erkennbar, Richtung Auschwitz, Workuta, Majdanek, Magadan, unter einem Himmel, der ein Gespinst aus Lüge war. (Hilbig 255)

C. begins to realize that the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and by default his story is a lie. Moreover, these lies are spread by *Zügen*. A *Zug* in the most direct translation is a train, which C. obviously associates with the trains that transported Jews to the concentration and extermination camps. Of course, many people – at least initially – believed that the trains transported the Jews for resettlement in the East thereby transporting lies. In a more in depth interpretation a *Zug* is force that moves or pulls something forward or backward.<sup>22</sup> That train and force used to be the Nazis and it is now the GDR. Although, C. had the metaphorical and real opportunity to get off the train upon his arrival in West Germany, he chooses to continue to ride the train of lies between Leipzig, Berlin, Frankfurt and Nuremberg. In doing so, he not only keeps the connection between the GDR and the Third Reich alive, he also perpetuates the GDR in its existence as well as his own miserable existence. Even more, C. keeps his own life suspended locally and temporally – he remains a *Provisorium*.

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<sup>22</sup> [http://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Zug\\_Wagenreihe\\_Kolonne\\_Kraft](http://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Zug_Wagenreihe_Kolonne_Kraft)

Yet, C. is not the first or only temporal *Provisorium*, to which the novel points. The other ever-present *Provisorium* is the GDR. Although its founding on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1949, the introduction of a separate currency and the building of the Berlin Wall on August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1961, allude to a separate German state, the West German Basic Law remained provisional until the German Reunification on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1990. Moreover, West Germany only recognized the GDR constitutionally. Officially, it refused to recognize it according to international law. Thus, within a German political and historical context the GDR, and consequently every East German citizen, was a *Provisorium*. Trying to escape the provisional state of the GDR proves to be very difficult for C., because he has lived there for 36 years<sup>23</sup> and describes himself as a typical product of the GDR:

Er war, sagte er sich, ein typisches Produkt der DDR, physisch und psychisch, bis in die Hirnzellen und Nervenstränge, bis in seine unbewußten Reaktionen hinein war er ein Ergebnis des Provisoriums, das sich DDR nannte ... und damit konnte man nicht leben! – Und weil man damit nicht leben konnte, riß man jeden, der einem in den Weg lief, zwanghaft in das Nicht-Leben hinein. Er gehörte zu den menschlichen Vorläufigkeiten, aus denen sich die DDR zusammensetzte, die überhaupt erst die Voraussetzung für ihre Existenz darstellten; es waren Leute, die unablässig auf ihre Eigenheiten und ihr *Selbst* pochten, auf die gleiche Weise, wie der Regierung dieses Landes der Begriff >>Souveränität<< als Dauer-Sprechblase aus dem Rüssel hing. In diesem Land war man nichts weniger als souverän. (Hilbig 269)

Like many East Germans who were born and spent the majority of their lives in the GDR, C. has been shaped by this country and its ideology. Despite its provisional existence, the GDR progressively shaped him by first affecting his thinking

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<sup>23</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, Jürgen Habermas states that during its 40 year existence the GDR achieved some sense of normalcy and by default, this is also true for the majority of its citizens. Thus, most of the GDR citizens developed a unique GDR identity.



(*Hirnzellen*), then his emotions (*Nervenstränge*), and last his behavior (*unbewußte Reaktionen*). His disbelief in being easily identifiable as a GDR citizen contradicts with his assessment of not having lived (*Nicht-Leben*) and merely existed in the GDR. Moreover, he continuously describes himself as a *menschliche Vorläufigkeit* (human preliminary/proviso) and a *menschliches Provisorium* (human stopgap) whereas the GDR saw itself and its citizens as sovereign. Yet, the opposite was true. Both, the GDR and its citizens, were at once a *permanentes Provisorium* (permanent provisional state) and a *provisorische Permanenz* (provisional permanence). As such, it affects C. profoundly on a personal and professional level:

. . . er war ein Gespenst in den ostdeutschen Städten, ein Zufall, eine vorläufige Figur; vielleicht hatte niemand bemerkt, daß er gar nicht mehr dort war. Er würde darüber schreiben müssen . . . wenn er konnte, wenn er eines Tages wieder schreiben konnte! Aber er hatte immer öfter den Verdacht, daß er nur in jenen Städten selbst schreiben konnte . . . (Hilbig 36)

He describes himself as a ghost (*Gespenst*), a chance/an accident (*Zufall*) and a preliminary figure (*vorläufige Figur*). These vague descriptions are also echoed by his choice of adverbs, adjectives, and conjunctions, which express uncertainty, doubt, and impermanence – *vielleicht* (maybe), *öfter* (more often), and *wenn* (if). In connection with his suspended existence C. is also disconnected from his writing, which is expressed by the use of the modal verb *können* (can, be able to), the subjunctive II and frequent ellipses within and at the end of paragraphs. The combination of these grammatical and syntactic structures further emphasizes his uncertainty about his existence and his suspended writing.

In fact, the psychological influence, which the GDR had on C., is closely linked to temporality.

Nach und nach entglitt ihm die Wirklichkeit . . . er stand draußen, die Wirklichkeit nahm ihn nicht an, er war außerstande, die Wirklichkeit auf sich zu beziehen . . . er wußte nicht, wie er es hätte erklären können. Die Wirklichkeit lag hinter einer Mauer, er trug andauernd eine Mauer vor sich her. Und da diese Mauer nicht aus Beton war, sondern nur eine Empfindung, ein Bewußtsein, oder nur eine Empfindung unterhalb seines Bewußtseins . . . da diese Mauer selbst unwirklich war . . . schien es um so weniger möglich, sie abzubauen. Er konnte die Mauer nicht abschaffen, er konnte, wenn er seinen Zustand verändern wollte, nur sich selbst abschaffen . . . (Hilbig 35)

For C. the physical wall is no longer an obstacle with his visa, but it was quickly replaced by a psychological wall<sup>24</sup>, which in the post-1989 era is often referred to as the *Mauer im Kopf* (wall in one's head). This imagined wall becomes an insurmountable obstacle between the GDR and the reality C. is living in, which is highlighted by the high number of repetitions of the words *Mauer* and *wirklich*. However, instead of trying to overcome or get rid of (*abschaffen*) of the wall, he contemplates *sich selbst ab[zu]schaffen* – to abandon, abrogate or remove himself.<sup>25</sup>

In an effort to escape the GDR's influence, to overcome the wall and his stagnant life C. begins to drink alcohol in excessive amounts. During his stay in West Germany he voluntarily checks himself into a rehabilitation clinic near Munich for his

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<sup>24</sup> The influence and reach of the GDR outside its borders is exemplified in this quote: “Sie sind ein Bürger der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik und unterliegen den Gesetzen Ihres Landes auch im kapitalistischen Ausland. Treten Sie dort in einer den Gesetzen und Moralvorstellungen Ihres Landes entsprechenden Form auf“ (Hilbig 100).

<sup>25</sup> C. recalls moments in his life in the GDR when he received rejection letters from publishers. After these rejections, he turns on the gas only to notice much later that he forgot to close the windows (Hilbig 162). The references to suicide and suicide attempts never come to fruition.

alcoholism. Here, he meets the only other East German during his entire stay in West Germany, who confirms the influence of the GDR on its citizens: „Vor zwanzig Jahren bin ich gekommen, ungefähr. Es kommt nicht so genau darauf an, wie lange man hier ist. Drüben kams drauf an, wie lange man noch da war“ (Hilbig 52). Moreover, the GDR's influence in general, and specifically on time, increases with the building of the Berlin Wall. For example, C. repeatedly refers to the GDR as stealing time from him: „Was machen die mit meiner Zeit! dachte C.; . . . Was machen diese Kreaturen mit meiner Zeit? Mit der Zeit, die mir gehört ...“ (Hilbig 64). And finally, he recognizes his failure to escape the GDR's influence:

Dieses Land da drüben hatte seine Zeit geschluckt! Dieser Vorhof der Realität. Dieses Land, tiefend von Schwachsinn, verkrüppelt vor Alter, zermürbt und verheizt von Verschleiß und übelriechend wie eine Mistgrube, dieses Land hatte ihn mit Vergängnis gefüttert und seine Reflexe gelähmt, es hatte ihm die Lust aus den Adern gesogen; dort war sein Gehirn verkalkt, wie die Mechanik einer alten sklerotischen Waschmaschine. Er war diesem Land zu spät entwichen . . . (Hilbig 151)

Consequently, it is C.'s failure to depart the GDR before it shaped him and his movement from one temporal stopgap to another, that leave him weakened, helpless, disoriented and in a state of betweenness. Thus, a reader must arrive at the novel's end in order to overcome disorientation and betweenness.

Disorientation – *Orientierungslosigkeit* –, whether spatial or temporal, is one of the novel's central themes, which is established from the beginning:

Und er kannte sich auch nicht in der Zeit aus, er war orientierungslos in bezug auf die Zeit, die er schon hier war. . . ., und er war hier in einer gegenwärtigen Zeit, in einer täglich aufs neue gegenwärtigen Zeit, mit der er klarkommen mußte. Wenn ihn jemand fragte, hatte er oft genug erwidert, er sei seit einem guten Jahr hier ... und gleich darauf war ihm aufgefallen, daß es schon zwei

Jahre waren. Oder gar mehr . . . es war, als ob er sich weigerte, aufzuwachen und sich Gewißheit darüber zu verschaffen, seit wieviel Jahren er schon hier in Nürnberg existierte. (Hilbig 17-18)

C.'s temporal disorientation here demonstrates the struggle and inability to come to terms with his decision to accept the visa to West Germany and to remain in West Germany after its expiration date, but also with reality and the present situation. He questions his existence in the *gegenwärtiger Zeit* – the present, but also his presence (*Gegenwärtigkeit*) in the present. Indeed, his temporal disorientation started with the receipt of his visa limited to the time period between October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1985 and December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1986.<sup>26</sup> Essentially, this visa presents another *Provisorium*. As soon as C. activates his visa and arrives in West Germany he begins to have a sense of finitude and becomes preoccupied and obsessed with time, namely the time left on his visa: „. . . stets hatte er nur an das Ende seines Provisoriums gedacht ...“ (Hilbig 268). Actually, he frequently refers to his life and situation as being *vorläufig* – provisional –, *vorübergehend* – temporary –, or as a so-called *Übergangszeit* – transitional time. Again, such a temporality other than the time it takes to read the novel does not exist for the reader. In fact, the novel causes the temporal betweenness and disorientation of the reader through the use of various past tenses and flashbacks. Yet, the reader is located in a defined present time and he or she still has the opportunity to overcome his or her temporal disorientation by redefining him- or herself in the present time and/or using the *Dazwischen* as the definition.

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<sup>26</sup> Wolfgang Hilbig. *Das Provisorium*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2000. 101. Print.

Intrinsically bound up with temporal betweenness is spatial betweenness. As previously mentioned, the novel opens up in Nuremberg, West Germany and ends in Leipzig, the former GDR. It is also interspersed with frequent travel episodes to other West German and European cities. In addition, C. maintains multiple apartments in multiple cities in both German states. And even when he is in his apartments in Leipzig and Nuremberg, as both cities are places where C. spends most of his time, he still manages to find yet another place of residence, for example his girlfriend's Hedda's place or his mother's residence. C. is constantly on the move and cannot remain in any place, East or West Germany, for an extended period of time. However, it is this roaming and spatiality that allow him to investigate and question his identity as an East German. By constantly exposing himself to other locales and people he can see himself or be seen as a GDR citizens and by extension as a worker and/or writer. Although the reader may not have the same spatial betweenness as the novel's protagonist, it certainly projects onto him and causes him to question his origin and identity as well. Additionally, the use of the initial C. instead of a full name or an unnamed narrator prompts questioning and warrants connections to many motifs in the novel. The letter C is an incomplete circle and can be described to a boomerang, which always returns to its origin, which C. does in the novel by traveling from city to city, but returning to Leipzig in the end. Similarly, the reader has to finish the novel for the beginning to make sense. Also, while C. questions his identity and

contemplates to *sich selbst abschaffen*, Grimm's Dictionary describes the letter C as *überflüssig* (dispensable).<sup>27</sup>

Throughout the entire novel C. only refers to himself as a citizen of the GDR three times. The first time he refers to himself in this way during his stay is in the rehabilitation clinic while sleep talking and writing an imaginary letter to extend his visa: „... sondern auch in der Form, daß ich mich als ein Individuum erkenne, welches Sie als einen *Bürger* der DDR bezeichnen würden“ (Hilbig 56), but even here the subjunctive merely suggest the possibility of C. being an East German citizen. The second instance actually references the letter, which granted him his visa and in which he points out that in order to identify himself as a writer and a citizen of the GDR he has to go outside its borders:

Es gehe ihm darum, seine Identität zu erkennen, seine Identität als Schriftsteller, wozu ... auch die Identität als Bürger des Landes gehöre, in dem man schreibe. Nun läßt sich aber Identität nicht nur von innen heraus entwickeln, nicht nur aus dem geschlossenen Innenraum, sie bedarf auch der Anschauung und des Vergleichs von außen. (Hilbig 83-84)

Here, C. states that his identity as writer is closely linked to him being a GDR citizen and in order to objectively look at his identities he needs extrospection. In addition, there is a third identity – that of a worker. Now, being in West Germany he has suspended two of his identities without realizing that they are all interconnected:

Lange hatte er sich darüber beklagt, daß er eigentlich zwei verschiedene Lebensformen leben müsse – und nichts davon richtig -, die eines Arbeiters und die eines Schriftstellers ... jetzt war auf einmal beides zum Teufel. Beide

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<sup>27</sup>

<http://woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/?sigle=DWB&mode=Vernetzung&hitlist=&patternlist=&lemid=GC00001#XGC00001>

Lebensformen hatten keine Zukunft mehr, er war komplett in die Irre gelaufen ... (Hilbig 183)

His identities as a *schreibender Arbeiter* (writing worker) and a *arbeitender Schreiber* (working writer), which proved difficult to sustain in the GDR, are now both non-existent in West Germany and constitute his existential crisis as GDR citizens outside the GDR.

Another instance actually supports the statement from his letter for the visa application. While C. is in Paris for a reading he wanders around the city and clearly recognizes himself as a citizen of the GDR:

. . . mitten in diesem von trauriger Nässe beherrschten Babylon war er plötzlich wieder zu einem Individuum seiner Herkunft geworden. Zu einem DDR-Bürger, ganz ohne Abstriche, er war wieder, was er gewesen, und er war verloren ... so deutlich und ausweglos hatte er seine DDR-Identität nie gespürt, auch dort in diesem Land nicht, das vielleicht schon zu existieren aufgehört hatte. Und er konnte nicht anders, als diese Identität für *minderwertig* halten. Gegen jede empirische Vernunft, er trug dieses Gefühl in seinem altwerdenden Körper herum, und er konnte nichts dagegen machen . . . (Hilbig 151)

The setting of a sad and rainy Paris, which he describes as Babylon, reminds him of the GDR and his GDR identity. Of course, Babylon is the city and empire that rose as quickly to fame as it disappeared. Interestingly, the name Babylon as it appears in the Bible in Hebrew means confusion, which perfectly describes C.'s identities. However, as soon as he recognizes his GDR identity he feels lost and inferior in the same way the books have lost worth and value. Hilbig similarly describes this feeling in a Spiegel interview: "Ja, ich war so dazwischen, zwischen den beiden Ländern. Ich merkte, die DDR gehört nicht mehr zu mir, der Westen aber auch nicht." ("Leben Habe Ich Nicht Gelernt." Der Schriftsteller Wolfgang Hilbig, 61, Über

Den Georg-Büchner-Preis, Der Ihm Am Übernächsten Samstag in Darmstadt Verliehen Wird, Über Vergeudetete Jahre Und Den Traum Der DDR-Regenten Vom Dichtenden Arbeiter." 172). This feeling of loss and inferiority may also point toward the reader's feeling while reading the novel and possibly to an East German audience at large. In post-1989 Germany anything East German, ranging from currency to consumer products to identity itself, was devalued and deemed inferior or even worthless. Thus, an identity of betweenness and being between identities - of neither being a *Gesamtdeutscher* – unified German – nor an East German, seems to be a solution.

In fact, C.'s search for identity reveals a certain comfort of not having an identity, of neither being West German or East German. „Man konnte diesen Typus nicht einordnen, dem Dialekt nach kam er nicht aus Nürnberg. Eher vielleicht aus dem Osten, doch wie kam man aus dem Osten hierher nach Nürnberg, es paßte da etwas nicht ins Bild" (Hilbig 12). He is „völlig orientierungslos" (Hilbig 16), „blind und orientierungslos" (Hilbig 76) and „[e]r fühlte sich überhaupt keiner Welt mehr zugehörig" (Hilbig 24). His question of „Wohin soll ich gehen?" (Hilbig 21) remains unanswered and emphasizes C.'s spatial betweenness.: „. . . daß er sich nicht dazu äußern konnte, wohin er nun eigentlich wollte, in den Osten oder in den Westen. Und daß er es scheinbar tatsächlich nicht wußte" (Hilbig 164). Furthermore, it leads to constant travel between various German cities:

. . . von Leipzig nach Berlin, von Berlin nach Frankfurt, von Frankfurt zurück nach Nürnberg ... um am Morgen gleich wieder nach Leipzig zu flüchten, und so fort, und so immer weiter bis zum Ende ... bis zu welchem Ende? Bis sein Visum zu Ende war, aufgebraucht, bis sein Provisorium vorbei war . . . (Hilbig 245)



After ignoring the expiration date of his visa, C. stays in West Germany, but not without further questioning his identity and belonging. In fact, he remains in a state of suspension, because in order to grasp the arrival in West Germany one has to be homesick: “. . . das rührende Schauspiel auf dem Münchner Bahnhof hatte etwas wie Heimweh in ihm geweckt. Und Heimweh brauchte man, um seine *Ankunft* im Westen endlich zu begreifen” (Hilbig 28) [original emphasis]. C. witnesses the arrival of a GDR citizen in Munich and despite the person’s exuberant display of emotions and damnations of the GDR – “*Nieder mit der DDR . . . Nieder mit der DDR!*” (Hilbig 26) [original emphasis] and celebrations of West Germany – “*Es lebe der Kapitalismus*” (Hilbig 28) [original emphasis] he does not feel homesick, rather something *like* [my emphasis] homesickness. Therefore, C. has indeed not psychologically arrived in West Germany yet. The reader, however, can longer make such an observation, because in a unified Germany there is no choice of being West or East German anymore. Yet, the novel still opens the possibility of nostalgia and longing for East Germanness.

Two other factors that greatly influence the protagonist’s betweenness is his previously mentioned addiction to alcohol as well his relationship to women. Certainly, alcohol not only affects his relationship to his surroundings, but also with himself. As an addictive substance and being consumed in large quantities it is mind and body altering. It serves as an escape mechanism for reality and it in fact allows C. to remain in his state of betweenness. Although he checks himself into a rehabilitation clinic he relapses shortly thereafter and continues to spend most of his

stipend on alcohol. In fact, Wolfgang Hilbig admitted this in a 2002 Spiegel Interview: “Ich hatte ein Stipendium. Das waren 20000 Mark, glaube ich. Ich wusste garnicht, wohin mit dem Geld. Jetzt konnte man alle Sorten Whiskey durchprobieren” (172-173). His final binge drinking leaves him broke and beaten up as well as without his girlfriend Hedda. Upon seeing himself on a poster he realizes the effects of his alcoholism:

Das Bild auf den Plakaten war das Bild eines Toten ... es war nicht möglich, daß das ehemalige Leben dieses Leichnams seine Geschichte gewesen war, seine Geschichte, die hinter ihm lag ... Und ich muß die Geschichte beenden, es hat mit ihr keinen Zweck mehr, dachte er. Ich muß mit dieser Geschichte sofort aufhören. (Hilbig 301)

C.'s confrontation with himself leads to a self-reflexive realization of *Geschichte* - history (*die Geschichte*), his story (*seine Geschichte*) and this story (*diese Geschichte*), of which neither has a purpose nor he can continue to live or write.

Another interweaving aspect of C.'s *Geschichte* is his relationship with women, specifically, his mother, his girlfriend Mona in Leipzig and his girlfriend Hedda in Nuremberg, which also act as metaphors for his relationship with the GDR. At this point, it is important to mention that the feminine personal pronoun in German is *sie* (she) and the personal pronoun for the German Democratic Republic (*die Deutsche Demokratische Republik*) is also *sie* (she). Over the course of the novel, his relationships with the women in his life fall apart. First, his relationship with his mother is strained, because as a pubescent teenager he was condemned to fill his father's space, who went missing during World War II, in his mother's bed. The

constant repression of his erection leaves him feeling impotent.<sup>28</sup> Then, his relationship with Mona falls apart due to the geographical separation, especially after his visa expires and he can no longer travel to Leipzig. C.'s relationship to Hedda ends in September 1989 and coincides with the beginning of the end of the GDR leaving C. questioning his relationship to her and the GDR:

Warum war er so gleichgültig? Hatte er sie denn wirklich nicht geliebt? Vielleicht hatte er es nur nicht gespürt? Er hatte es nur nicht gewußt, weil er sich nicht auskannte? Sicher hatte er sie geliebt, nach seinen Möglichkeiten, die vielleicht gering waren, zu gering vielleicht, doch es war Liebe in ihm gewesen, das wußte er jetzt. Er würde es sich nicht ausreden lassen, trotz seiner Unfähigkeit hatte er sie geliebt ... Warum hatte er das nicht bemerkt? Warum war er so allein, warum gab es in ihm keine Antworten? Warum vergaß er ihren Geburtstag, warum vergaß er sie anzurufen ... dafür war es zu spät, es war vorbei – o dieser unberechenbare September! (Hilbig 313-314)

This line of continuous “why” questions and answers, some of which are rhetorical or remain unanswered, is the first time he actually confronts himself about his failures. It also coincides with the failing of the GDR. Because the personal pronoun *sie* can either refer to Hedda or the GDR, a sober C. actually realizes now that he had loved the GDR and Hedda the entire time. However, neither his relationship with Hedda nor with the GDR could be salvaged at that point and neither can the reader salvage his relationship to the GDR. However, the possibility for reconciliation between C. and the GDR, and the reader and the GDR exists within the final paragraphs of *Das Provisorium*. The reader arrives along with C. in his hometown Leipzig on the dawn of a mid-September morning in 1989, unlike C.'s arrival, the reader remains suspended as the missing punctuation at the end of the novel

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* 220.

suggests. Here, C. closes the *Teufelkreis* for himself, but opens it for the reader. Whether Hilbig left his novel intentionally or inadvertently as a fragment remains to be proven, but it certainly asks the reader to reflect on it and return to its beginning, thus encouraging further engagement with the novel. Only at the end does the beginning begin to make sense.

## Chapter II

### Wiederverwenden – Wiederverwerten: Bernd Schirmer's *Schlehweins Giraffe*

*“Mit einem Bein leben wir noch im alten Leben und mit dem anderen schon im neuen.”*

(Schirmer 125)

Bernd Schirmer's novel *Schlehweins Giraffe*, published in 1992, is one of the earliest post-Wende works offering the reader a glimpse into the not so distant fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification. Although not hailed as the big *Nachwenderoman* and largely neglected by German scholarship *Schlehweins Giraffe* is an impressive and powerful social and literary commentary on the pre- and post-1989 events which most other fiction written about this time has failed to address. The novel opens up with the first-person narrator's account of how he came to take care of a giraffe, namely Schlehwein's giraffe, which its owner bought for 50 DM from a local zoo that had to close due to lack of government funding and an overabundance of existing zoos in the area. After Schlehwein commits a criminal act he needs not only to leave the country, but also to find a caretaker for the giraffe, who turns out to be the narrator. From then on, the novel switches between present day narration and reflections on pre-1989 life as well as the events of 1989/1990. This temporal alternation allows the first-person narrator to connect his, his friends' and the giraffe's past lives with their present situation in a unified Germany. Even though the novel's content seems rather obvious and simplistic, a closer look reveals the importance of language and linguistic structures. Indeed, language in *Schlehweins*

*Giraffe* is not only indicative of the historical events and subsequent manifold changes to East Germany and its citizens, but as an unstable and dynamic entity it is, on the one hand, the site of struggle and conflict, which are taking place in the novel, and, on the other, part of the solution to them. Language here is not just words on a page, which describe the events surrounding 1989, but a communication tool that brings into focus these struggles and conflicts. Seemingly irrelevant descriptions and innocent word choices or linguistic structures - for example stuttering, “speaking names,” metaphors and a *Kommasetzer* job actually trace, evaluate and reevaluate the post 1989 political, social, economic and cultural changes. Thus, language, as the reader encounters it in the novel, is transforming right in front his or her eyes, which in turn transforms how the reader interprets it. *Schlehwains Giraffe* and its language are self-reflexive and self-conscious, and, as such, ask readers to become aware of it and its potential. What really matters is not what is said, but how it is said, how it is written and how it changes.

Jill Twark’s analysis of *Schlehwains Giraffe* provides a valuable starting point for my own reading of the novel. In a 2001 article “‘Ko . . . Ko . . . Konolialismus,’ said the giraffe: Humorous and Satirical Responses to German Unification” and her 2007 book *Humor, Satire, and Identity: Eastern German Literature in the 1990s* Twark examines the role of the giraffe, who according to her reading is “an allegory for post-unification Eastern Germans” (Twark 47). In her analysis of the giraffe, Twark

attributes her stuttering as resembling Erich Honecker's speech<sup>29</sup>, but does not further examine and analyze stuttering. Why does the giraffe stutter? What does stuttering signify? The narrator, by contrast, represents the depressed yet authentic Eastern German voice.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, Twark interprets him as a victim, who is only able to gain control over his liminal world by playing with language.<sup>31</sup> While this is partially true, the narrator gives away his collected new words because he has no use for them. So, one has to ask here why he is giving the words away. Although I agree with her examination of the use of linguistics and the text functioning as a comma and being self-reflexive<sup>32</sup>, the analysis of linguistic devices in relation to the novel's content, characters, and genre require further and more thorough examination. In addition, Twark interviewed Schirmer in 1999<sup>33</sup> and does in fact incorporate some of his replies, but yet again fails to draw a more thorough connection to *Schlehwains Giraffe*, especially between its author and the protagonist as well as the relationship between authorship, literature and censorship.

This relationship is, according to Twark's interview with Bernd Schirmer, personal, but also points towards the individual struggles in the GDR as well as the changes of those struggles in a united Germany. A careful examination of the interview in reference to *Schlehwains Giraffe* reveals interesting parallels between

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<sup>29</sup> Jill E. Twark. *Humor, Satire, and Identity: Eastern German Literature in the 1990s*. Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007. 48. Print.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.* 47. Print.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.* 47. Print.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.* 53, 55. Print.

<sup>33</sup> Jill E. Twark. "'So larmoyant sind sie im Osten gar nicht: Gespräch mit Bernd Schirmer'." *GDR Bulletin* 26 (1999) 39-53. Print.

Bernd Schirmer, the narrator, and Ralph B. Schneiderheinze, who the narrator describes as his Doppelgänger throughout the novel. Indeed, the author, the narrator, and Schneiderheinze are one and the same person. Having studied German and lived in the Berlin district called Prenzlauer Bernd Schirmer and his protagonist share the same background. Moreover, Schirmer freely admits to his literary works being somewhat autobiographical: “Meine Arbeiten sind alle auf irgendeine Art autobiographisch. Aber sie sind natürliche keine Autobiographie schlechthin. Es ging mir immer auch um die gesellschaftliche Bedingtheit. Aussagen, die ich mache, sind gleichzeitig immer Aussagen über die Befindlichkeit in dieser speziellen Gesellschaft” (Twark 40). Schirmer wrote *Schlehwains Giraffe* not only as an author, but as a member this specific society – namely a former GDR citizen and now also as a citizen of the newly united Germany. Rather than giving an account of the events in 1989 and 1990 or writing a memoir about living in the GDR, Schirmer saw it as his duty to write differently about the GDR:

Natürlich habe ich die Wende sehr intensiv erlebt. Aber einfach nur zu schreiben, was ich erlebt habe, das stand bereits in den unmittelbar nach der Wende doch recht freien, publizistischen Medien. Da brauchte ich nicht die Literatur noch dazu. Man mußte dann doch versuchen, etwas Besonderes zu finden, um die Leser zu verleiten, neu hinzusehen, und ich habe das einfach durch diesen Einfall bei *Schlehwains Giraffe* versucht, mit diesem etwas fabelhaften Tier eine Verfremdung zu schaffen und mich literarischer Mittel wie der Groteske und des Märchenhaften zu bedienen, um meine Erkenntnis oder Wahrheit an den Mann zu bringen. (Twark 40)

He certainly achieved something “different” with *Schlehwains Giraffe*. But *Schlehwains Giraffe* is so much more than different, satirical, grotesque or a mere fable. The alienation through characters, content and language and linguistics



Schirmer uses in his novel make the reader hyperaware of them. To that extent the novel educates the reader, specifically a West German reader, and allows East German readers to explore their past, their present and potentially their future, which readers confirmed through feedback:

Also das habe ich bei Lesungen gemerkt oder in Briefen, die mir geschrieben worden sind. Das ist doch für manche sehr heilsam gewesen. Sie sind einfach dadurch mit manchen Dingen leichter fertig geworden, in dem sie gemerkt haben, es geht nicht nur ihnen so. Und ihr Schicksal ist wert genug gewesen, literarisch behandelt zu werden. Das ist im Osten so gewesen. Im Westen war es eigentlich ein Stück Aufklärung, ein gewisses Aha-Erlebnis, würde ich sagen: so larmoyant und so verbiestert sind die im Osten als gar nicht. (Twark 41)

Here, it is clear that *Schlehwains Giraffe* contributes to what is frequently referred to as *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* or *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, terms outlined by Adorno, for East Germans and a form of enlightenment for West Germans. Indeed, the novel only makes this possible by exposing struggles through language, so that a revaluation of the events surrounding 1989 can take place, rather than only remembering and retelling what happened, which is also often referred to as *Ostalgie*.

*Schlehwains Giraffe* plays out the conflicts of said revaluation. And because of the aforementioned intertwined roles of the author, narrator, and his Doppelgänger, the novel as literature and literature and language within the novel are essential to this revaluation. How do literature and language take place? How has literature changed outside and inside the novel? How does the reader encounter these changes? The protagonist's first encounter with literature is at a bookstore where he notices the following: "Es waren vorwiegend Bücher, die ich nicht kannte. Die

Autoren, die mir geläufig waren, fehlten. Sie standen auch nicht in den Regalen” (Schirmer 16). Neither East German literature nor former East German authors, as ambiguously referenced by *sie*<sup>34</sup>, are present in the bookstore. In the same way East German products were no longer wanted immediately after the fall of the Wall, East German authors and books were no longer wanted:

Ich war wieder für mich allein und dachte über die Schriftsteller nach, deren Bücher nicht mehr angeboten wurden, weil sie keiner mehr kaufen und keiner mehr lesen wollte, weil die Zeiten über sie hinweggegangen waren. Ich hatte plötzlich eine Vision. Ich sah all die Schriftsteller, zweihundert oder dreihundert, vor ihren zweihundert oder dreihundert Schreibmaschinen sitzen und neue Bücher schreiben. Sie schwitzen, sie schreiben in fieberhafter Eile. Sie arbeiteten die Vergangenheit auf, sie suchten hektisch zu bewältigen, die Vergangenheit.“<sup>35</sup> (Schirmer 19)

These frantically writing authors try to write history and to work on and come to terms with the past in order to write their next book and make a living. After having to conform to strict literary guidelines, censorship and a relatively small book market, East German authors were suddenly facing unprecedented literary freedom. However, this supposed freedom from censorship brought with it other, and possibly even tougher restrictions: a tough capitalist book market and competition from a much larger and already adapted group of authors. Essentially, a different form of censorship, one that is impossible to circumvent, replaced the censorship imposed by the GDR: a free market economy.

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<sup>34</sup> The pronoun *sie* here is the plural and could either reference the previously mentioned books or authors or both.

<sup>35</sup> *Vergangenheit aufarbeiten* and *Vergangenheit bewältigen* refer to Adorno’s 1959 essay *Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit*.

In the interview with Twark, Schirmer confirms both forms of censorship: “Ja, die Selbstzensur. Man beschränkt sich selber und sagt, das kannst du sowieso nicht machen, das mußt du umschreiben, das mußt du per Sklavensprache<sup>36</sup> an den Mann bringen” (Twark 42) whereas Schneiderheinze’s supposed criticism of the GDR was hidden to such an extent that no one could detect it: “Er hat immer kreuzbrave Bücher geschrieben, die er allerdings für sehr kritisch hielt. Er glaubte ständig, den Bogen zu überspannen, nur merkte es keiner, denn seine Kritik war so maßvoll, so versteckt und verschlüsselt, daß sie nicht wahrgenommen wurde” (Schirmer 55). Here, both authorial figures admit to having been restricted and restricting themselves while writing in the GDR. Indeed, Bernd Schirmer confirms this: “An die Stelle der Zensur in der DDR ist die Rolle des Marktes, ein vielleicht noch widerwärtigere Zensur, getreten” (Twark 40). This new form of censorship affected many East German authors and as one of them “Schneiderheinze ist weg vom Fenster” (Schirmer 55). However, while he may not be present in the fictitious book market in *Schlehweins Giraffe*, he remains present throughout the novel. Therefore, his character needs further examination. During his pre-unification authorship Schneiderheinze’s books remained conformist and he even practiced self-censorship: “Um die Zensur scherte er sich nicht, er praktizierte sie selber, falls du verstehst, was ich meine” (Schirmer 55). Not only does he not care about censorship – *sich nicht um die Zensur scheren* – but he practiced it himself. Here, the word choice in the quote must be examined. *Sich nicht um etwas scheren* means not to care about something,

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<sup>36</sup> Schirmer here references Bertolt Brecht’s concept of *Sklavensprache*.

but *scheren* (to shear, crop) is also related to *Schere* (scissors), which connects Schneiderheinze's name, because *Schneider* (taylor) or *schneiden* means to cut. Thus, in the true sense of his name Schneiderheinze practices self-censorship – *sich scheren*.

Unfazed by the GDR censorship as well as the new economic censorship Ralph B. Schneiderheinze continues to write and gives a reading of his latest work, a fairy tale<sup>37</sup>, which, in essence, is an allegory of the events surrounding and following the fall of the Berlin Wall, but also a cautionary tale for East German writers and their literary works. There is a rich prince, a metaphor for West Germany, and poor girl, a metaphor for East Germany. After a display of the prince's wealth and a marriage proposal, the girl agrees. However, she only agrees after her two sisters advise her to do so, because her status could only improve through this marriage. Additionally, she insists on the condition that they (the couple) would only take the best and most beautiful from their old lives into their new ones. However, the girl mistakes a kiss from the prince as consent. Shortly after the wedding things take a turn for the worse and the prince takes everything from the girl:

Und Rouge durfte sie auch nicht mehr auflegen. Und sie mußte alles so machen, wie er es wollte. Sie mußte die Speisen so kochen, wie er wollte. Sie durfte nicht mehr von früher reden, von ihrem Häuslein und ihrem Gärtlein. Wenn jemand von früher redete und von ihrem Häuslein und Gärtlein und wie es früher war, so war das er, und es war alles schlecht. Sie mußte sich kleiden, wie er wollte, und sie mußte sich auskleiden, wie er wollte. Sie mußte in allem ihm zu Willen sein, es war schon nichts mehr von ihr übrig und geblieben, und nachdem er ihr die Ehre und ihren Stolz und ihre Würde und ihre Freude und ihren Willen und ihre Erinnerung genommen hatte und ihr Gärtlein und ihr Häuslein, nahm er ihr auch noch ihre Schönheit, er fand sie häßlich. (Schirmer 144)

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<sup>37</sup> Bernd Schirmer. *Schlehweins Giraffe*. Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn, 1992. 142-145. Print.

The prince literally and figuratively strips the girl of her possessions, looks, and identity similarly to West Germany's colonization of East Germany after 1989 by stripping it of its identifying features (consumer products, currency, etc.). Having been robbed of everything the girl murders the prince and is thrown into jail. Despite being in jail she proclaims her freedom: "Sie kam in den Kerker und hinter Gitter, aber sie war frei. Sie war frei" (Schirmer 145). In the end, and even though without her little house and garden and behind bars, she feels free, because she is able to reclaim her will, her honor, her pride, her joy, her beauty and her memories. Since this fairy tale comes at a late point in the novel and seems to have been inserted rather artificially one has to question its purpose. Because of their simplicity and clear demarcation of good versus evil and right versus wrong fairy tales are usually intended for children. Here, it clarifies and highlights the following: on the one hand, it retells and describes the relationship between West and East Germany and East and West Germans surrounding and following German reunification. On the other hand, it clearly draws a black and white picture about German unification, whereas such a simplification neither does justice to what really happened nor does it offer the happily ever after fairy tale ending.

The subsequent discussion led by a literary critic solicits the following statement from him:

Er könne sich, sagte er, mit dem Märchen nicht anfreunden, da er mit dem Märchen nichts anfangen könne. Das Märchen sei falsch. Es sei ihm alles zu kraß und zu grell gewesen. Das Leben habe auch seine schöne Seiten, die dargestellt werden müßten, vor allem im Märchen. (Schirmer 145)

What is criticized here is the simplification of what happened during and after 1989. Neither is there one West German version nor one East German version of the historical events. In order to gain a complete and comprehensive picture one has to look at both sides together, because the fall of the Berlin Wall and German Reunification affected East and West Germans alike. So, the critic may be right in his statement, but he also inadvertently questions the genre of Schneiderheinze's text. To be classified as a fairy tale certain elements are missing, such as fantasy characters or magical elements. Therefore, Schneiderheinze's story would be better classified as a parable. And as such it points the reader to the novel itself, which is in fact a fable. Then, the critic ends the discussion with a larger lesson that literature is supposed to fulfill: "Man müsse den Menschen Mut machen. Das in erster Linie sei die Aufgabe der Literatur" (Schirmer 146). The protagonist provides this courage (*Mut*) for Schneiderheinze. Throughout the novel the protagonist collects new words, but being unemployed he has no use for them. So, he decides to give these new words to someone, who can use them - an author, Ralph B. Schneiderheinze: „Ich übergab ihm nur die Wörter, die ich gesammelt hatte. In einem geschlossenen Umschlag. Fassen Sie es nicht falsch auf, sagte ich“ (Schirmer 146). These new words are the linguistic courage for Schneiderheinze to produce encouraging literature. They provide the tools necessary for Schneiderheinze to overcome his personal struggles as an author in order to write about them and to essentially reevaluate and reevaluate the history of 1989 onwards.

This reevaluation and revaluation is deeply anchored within the novel through its content and language. One of the recurring themes is recycling or, in German, *Wiederverwertung*, which is an interesting linguistic construct consisting of multiple linguistic units that carry their own meaning. As such it not only points out the struggles and changes language is undergoing, it is also undergoing the changes itself. Thus, *Wiederverwertung*<sup>38</sup> is a re-valuation of the change of East and West Germans and united Germany at large. Another German word that is often used for recycling is *Wiederverwendung*. Here, the German words *Wendung*, *Wende*, and *wenden* translate to turn, change, and to turn. Moreover, the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification are often referred to as *Wende*. So, *Wiederverwendung* is a re-valuation of these events in Germany. By using the recycling, or *Wiederverwertung* and *Wiederverwendung*, theme the novel, calls for re-valuation of the 1989/90 events as well as a re-valuation of a united Germany and what it means to be German thereafter. This re-valuation utilizes language and literature, because a re-valuation cannot consist of a mere retelling and reinterpretation as historical or personal accounts often do, but needs to acknowledge what happened as well as the associated struggles and conflicts while simultaneously offering avenues to come to terms with it, which *Schlehwains Giraffe* does.

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<sup>38</sup> Here, *wieder* is a separable prefix and corresponds to the English prefix 're.' *Verwertung* (utilization) consists of the components *ver* and *Wertung*. *Ver* is an inseparable prefix and in combination with nouns it indicates a change towards something over time, a change of someone or something, or that someone or something is provided with something ([http://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/ver\\_](http://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/ver_)). *Wertung* and the associated verb *werten* and noun *Wert* mean valuation, to value, and value.

As the central figure of *Schlehwains Giraffe* the protagonist brings out these struggles and conflicts while at the same time being caught in them. Moreover, at the end of the novel he also opens the possibility of overcoming them. As the narrator, he advances the interconnectedness of recycling and language. Recycling, or *Wiederverwertung*, is a metaphor for overcoming the interpersonal challenges and obstacles following German reunification and the *Mauer im Kopf*. Interestingly, the narrator used to have a job as a comma editor: “Sie lachte, als ich sagte, daß ich ein Kommasetzer bin. . . . Kommas sind wichtig. . . . Man kann mit den Kommas den Sinn verändern” (Schirmer 73) as well as a recycling collector: “In den letzten Jahren hatte ich beruflich vorwiegend mit leeren Flaschen zu tun. Recycling. Falls dir das etwas sagt. Wiederverwendung von Glas und Papier, um die Natur zu entlasten“ (Schirmer 27). Although his job as a comma editor seems to be more related to language, because it works more closely with language, it is actually more restricted than his job as a recycling collector. As a comma editor he edits sentences and could potentially change their meaning. However, it is restricted in that he was unable to change words and had to work with texts that were already given to him. Thus, his job as a recycling collector offers more potential for language manipulation. Besides the obvious collection of glass and paper, the protagonist collects and recycles words. Even though they are described as new words, they have indeed just taken on a new meaning in post-1989 Germany. They have been linguistically recycled:

Ich schreibe alle neuen Wörter auf. Ich habe auf meinen Zetteln schon sehr viele Wörter stehen, die es zwar schon früher gab, aber die keine besondere



Rolle gespielt haben. Erst in letzter Zeit haben sie eine überraschende und mitunter sogar überragende Bedeutung bekommen, wobei sie häufig ihren Sinngehalt eingebüßt oder gewandelt oder sogar gewendet haben. Umdenken, einklagen, Seilschaft, Altlast, Warteschleife, Wendehals, herunterfahren, abwickeln, abschmelzen, Treuhand, filetieren. Ich sammle diese neuen Wörter. (Schirmer 18)

These words, just like the “leeren Flaschen” are not new. They are vessels that have been previously used, emptied of their old contents – and meaning, in order to be filled with new ones. In fact, they are representatives of the past, present and future language. Although these words look *dasselbe*, they are not *dasselbe*, but rather *das gleiche*.<sup>39</sup> For example, the word *Wendehals*, which is a compound noun of *Wende* (change, turn) and *Hals* (neck), had no distinctive meaning in German before 1989. However, it is the name of a bird species (wryneck) whose name is derived from the mythological Greek nymph *lynx* and the Latin *torquilla* (to turn) and refers to the bird’s ability to turn its head 180 degrees. After 1989, *Wendehals* became a derogatory term used to describe people, most often former GDR politicians and GDR supporters, who quickly changed their attitude and mindset to accommodate to a united Germany. Indeed, the giraffe a *Wendehals*, because she is later exposed as having been servile to the GDR regime by having licked Erich Honecker’s hand. By reusing and recycling these words and assigning new meanings language turns back on itself and changes words from having one meaning to one word with two meanings. Moreover, by writing them down Schirmer recycles these words yet again and continues linguistic recycling within and on the page.

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<sup>39</sup> *Dasselbe* refers to one and the same thing, whereas *das gleiche* refers to 2 things or concepts that are the same.

The word manipulation that the narrator's recycling job outlines is taken even further in a word game devised by him and his on-and-off wife, Kristina, in which they create neologisms<sup>40</sup> through compounding. The premise of the word game is this:

Wir hatten uns ein hübsches Spiel ausgedacht. Wir setzen Wörter zusammen, die nicht zusammengehörten. Aus zwei zusammengesetzten Wörtern mußte ein dreifach zusammengesetztes Wort entstehen, wobei das zweite Wort seine Sinnarme nach vorn, zum ersten Wort, und nach hinten, zum zweiten Wort ausstrecken mußte, woraus sich dann ein verblüffender oder komischer neuer Sinn ergab, kannst du mir folgen? Ich will es dir an Beispielen verdeutlichen. Aus Wendeltreppe und Treppenwitz machten wir Wendeltreppenwitz, aus Zeitungsschau und Schaufenster Zeitungsschaufenster. (Schirmer 78-79)

These new words, specifically the middle word of the 3-part compound noun, essentially have the same function as a comma and the text itself. In fact, the common noun of both compound nouns extends its *Sinnarme* (appendages that connect and provide meaning), which is a new word itself, to create a new word. This middle noun, just like the comma, separates as well as unites the first and last noun from one another. By extending its arms new words are formed and new meaning is given in the same way East and West Germans were extending their arms to reach across the Berlin Wall on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1989. In this function, the middle noun and its *Sinnarme* are an allegory for the *Wende*, which itself was a pause in history<sup>41</sup> as well as a uniting event for both Germanies. At the same time, this word game and these 3-part compound nouns also highlight the struggle and conflict in trying to unite both Germanies. Whereas the new compounds are certainly combinable they do not make sense. Thus, they force the reader to pause and think what the

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<sup>40</sup> *Ostalgie* is a neologism.

<sup>41</sup> Twark. 53. Print.

compound nouns and the game itself could mean. As words “Wendeltreppenwitz” or “Zeitungsschaufenster” can be combined, because the German language allows different nouns to be combined regardless of their making sense. None of the 3-part compound words from the word game makes sense, however they show the struggle of trying to combine previously existing words, or looking at the larger picture, trying to combine two different countries with two different people. Therefore, this word game is a hint of how German reunification should have been approached. Rather than making a compound noun by simply combining two separate single word nouns, the game consists of forming a 3-part compound noun by combining 2 compound nouns. Thus, a simple unification of West and East Germany to form a united Germany is not desirable, but rather a new version of a united Germany. To be more specific, not a simple reuse, but an adaptation of East and West Germany to establish a new Germany are necessary.

Interestingly, the Edition Schwarzdruck edition from 2000 includes illustrations of these 3-part compound nouns by Undine Schneider and among them are some that were not mentioned by the narrator. Of particular interest are *Mauerfallbeil* and *Treuhandgreiflichkeit*.

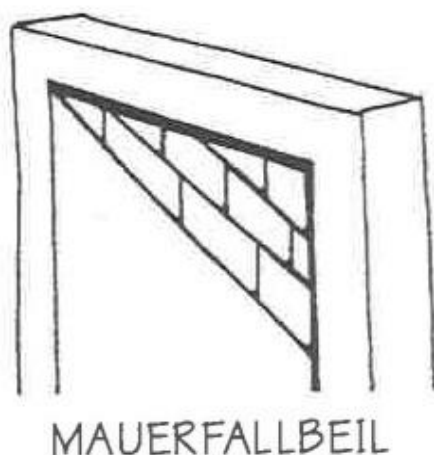


Figure 1: *Mauerfallbeil*

The illustration for *Mauerfallbeil* (Fig. 1) is placed at a point in the novel, when the characters learn of the fall of the Berlin Wall and Schlehwein states: “Das war’s dann, sagte Schlehwein, das ist das Ende” (Schirmer 2000; 77). *Mauerfallbeil* consists of *Mauer* (wall), *Fall* (fall, end), *Beil* (ax), *Mauerfall* (fall of the Berlin Wall), and *Fallbeil* (guillotine). The illustration combines all these meanings and shows the wall as the guillotine. As such, the fall of the Berlin Wall is a literal and figurative beheading of the GDR. The compound noun and illustration for *Treuhandgreiflichkeit* alludes to the colonization and privatization of GDR property. *Treuhand* is the shortened name of the institution in charge of expropriating and privatizing so-called *Volkseigene Betriebe*<sup>42</sup> and a *Handgreiflichkeit* is an act of violence.

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<sup>42</sup> publically owned companies



Figure 2: *Treuhandgreiflichkeit*

In combination with the illustration (Fig. 2), which shows a right hand belonging to West Germany and coming from behind to grip East Germany tightly. In fact, the effort to restructure the East German economic landscape by the *Treuhand* caused many companies and firms to go bankrupt and/or be sold to West German owners. *Treuhandgreiflichkeit* also establishes a connection to questions of private property ownership of GDR citizens after 1989.

At the center of the new Germany are people, because it is people, in this case East Germans specifically, who not only bear the burden of reunification, but also are those who face the associated struggles and conflicts, which *Schlehwins Giraffe* and its characters effectively demonstrate. One of the first named characters the reader encounters is Carl-Ernst Schlewein, who contrary to what the novel's title may suggest and aside from the narrator's reflections, remains absent. However, as the owner of the giraffe, Schlewein's past and his absence are worth investigating,

because they are not only related to the giraffe, but also the present relations in the newly united Germany. The narrator reveals the reason behind Schlehwein's abrupt departure and abandonment of the giraffe only toward the end of the novel. During German reunification negotiations questions of property ownership based on the *Bodenreform*<sup>43</sup> by West Germans on GDR territory arose. As a result, many East Germans lost their property. In fact, Schlehwein's property in the Oderbruch region was affected by this. He viewed it as colonialism: "Wissen Sie, Schlehwein hat ja das, was jetzt hier passiert, für eine Art Kolonialismus gehalten" (Schirmer 108). To avoid expropriation and West German colonialism, he burnt the Registry of Deeds. However, in doing so, he committed arson and is now a wanted criminal, which, nevertheless, cost him his property and the giraffe (Schirmer 116-117). Comically though, he fled to Africa, known for being colonized by white men, leaving the giraffe behind in Germany. Moreover, by fleeing to Africa Schlehwein mimics the German colonialism of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as well as West German colonialism he is criticizing.

As the other title character, the giraffe herself personifies the struggles and conflicts largely through her own story and use of language. At first, she is struggling to remain alive waiting in the zoo either to be put to death or to be sold. Then, she is given away to be taken care of while waiting for Schlehwein to bring her to Africa: "Ich hole dich nach, sagte Carl-Ernst Schlehwein, ich bereite schon alles vor, ich

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<sup>43</sup> *Bodenreform* was the redistribution of property in the Soviet occupation zone after the end of World War II. This reform expropriated property owners, who owned more than 247 acres of land, as well as war criminal and former NSDAP members. The dispossessed property was redistributed during GDR times.

werde dir schreiben, ich hole dich nach” (Schirmer 16) leaving her depressed and suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Her stuttering as one of the symptoms of PTSD is reflective of suspended speech and as a struggle to voice language. Stuttering, in fact, is essentially a pause in the flow of language. It draws attention to what is trying to be said. In the giraffe’s case, on the one hand, it is *Kolonialismus* (colonialism): “Sie sagt immer Kolonialismus. Sie setzt mehrmals an und sagt Ko, dann spuckt sie und sagt Ko-ko-ko” (Schirmer 6). In addition, the “Ko-ko-ko” could reference a *Kokosnuss* (coconut) or *Kakao* (cocoa), which also point toward exoticism as *Kolonialismus* does. Moreover, because colonialism in German is misspelled it makes the reader pause, which in turn makes him or her think about it. The misspelling points towards the disguised colonialism from West Germany after 1990 as previously outlined through Schlewein’s conflict. The other sentence the giraffe stutters it is a form of *Ostalgie*: “Es lebe die dtsch demkrtsch Replik” (Schirmer 111). The words are literally stuck in her throat (neck) (*im Hals stecken bleiben*), which indicates a hesitation and/or unwillingness to utter them. At first, it looks as though the giraffe is giving a celebratory shout-out for East Germany – “Long live the German Democratic Republic”, but her stuttering of some of the words draws attention to the individual words. The chopped words of “dtsch” and “demkrtsch” point to East Germany only being a part of Germany and its political system just being a *Scheindemokratie* – a quasi-democracy. The chopped word “Replik”, on the one hand, points again to the quasi form of government that in reality never functioned as such. On the other hand, “Replik” can also be interpreted as a copy or an answer.

Thus, the giraffe's language<sup>44</sup> here either points out the phoniness of the former GDR or toward an incomplete or faulty replication of the GDR. Nevertheless, language here brings into focus an important aspect that needs to be carefully attended to: the GDR was neither a true democratic nor a true republic and any copy of it, for example in the form of memories, is not reflective of its true past. Moreover, as the novel's title figure, the stuttering giraffe represents the grotesque – a pause - as well as a constant. At first, she stands out. Not only is she a giraffe living a normal life as a regular pet in Berlin, but she also stutters and enjoys watching TV. However, as grotesque and humorous as this is, the giraffe is also a reassuring constant appearing in 24 of the 25 chapters. Furthermore, the giraffe appears almost always either in the first sentence or first paragraph of each chapter. Even after Kristina, the narrator's on and off again wife, asks "Und wie werden wir die Giraffe wieder los?" (Schirmer 152) the narrator answer: "Überhaupt nicht, habe ich gesagt, die werden wir nie wieder los" (Schirmer 152). Thus, the giraffe, as humorous and grotesque as she is, signals a calming omnipresence to the reader. In the same way the narrator and Kristina cannot get rid of the giraffe, East Germans cannot simply get rid of their background. After all, the GDR achieved a sense of normalcy<sup>45</sup> during its 40-year existence and East Germans formed a GDR identity, which today still separates former East and

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<sup>44</sup> Despite having a voice box, giraffes are mostly non-vocal animals and the few sounds and noises they emit resemble snorts or humming. The giraffe's stuttering in this novel, I suggest, is due to the long neck, which does not allow for sufficient airflow to form long coherent words.

<sup>45</sup> Jürgen Habermas. *A Berlin Republic: writings on Germany*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997. 25. Print.



West Germans. As part of recent German history, the GDR and everything associated with it will be present in one form or another and therefore, one has to acknowledge and learn to live with its ghostly presence.

The giraffe is one part of this ghostly presence and as such her past life needs to be examined more closely, because she has a *dunkle Vergangenheit* – a dark past. Kleingrube, one of the narrator's friends and an archivist, is immediately suspicious of the giraffe. Despite his unemployment, he continues his archival activities at home, which satirically resembles the work of the Stasi. The Stasi and former SED party members are part of his obsession to uncover the injustices, perpetrators, *Mitläufer* (followers),<sup>46</sup> victims and opportunists:

Der auf dem Bildschirm Recht und Gesetz predigte, um die Herrschaft der Greise zu zementieren, überführt nun die Greise als Kriminelle. Wahlfälscher sitzen in Aufsichtsräten. Stasi-Beamte tun Dienst beim Bundesnachrichtendienst. Aber er, Kleingrube, wird sie alle überführen. Er weiß alles von allen. Er ist schon ganz heiser. Er hat alles gesammelt, er hat Duplikate angefertigt, und er hat alles mitgenommen, als sie ihn entlassen haben. Er war nie in der Partei. Die ihn entlassen haben, waren alle in der Partei. . . . Er wütet gegen die Mitläufer, die, wann immer sich eine günstige Gelegenheit bot, auch mal voranliefen und sich mit Orden behängen ließen, und nun wollten sie auf einmal alle Widersacher und Systemkritiker und Dissidenten gewesen sein. Doch er wird sie entlarven. Er wird sie alle entlarven. (Schirmer 50-51)

The irony here is that “Wahlfälscher” (ballot riggers) and “Stasi-Beamte” (State Security officers), jobs that in a true democratic state would have landed them in prison, are now using their acquired knowledge to work in appropriate positions. Whereas many East Germans lost their jobs after 1989/1990 these former high-

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<sup>46</sup> I will refer to *Mitläufer* as followers according to the translation of <http://www.dict.cc/deutsch-englisch/Mitläufer.html>.

ranking officials recycled the same (*die gleichen*) abilities to work in similar positions in a united Germany without ever having been brought to justice for their crimes. These injustices validly display the sentiment shared by many East Germans after 1989, especially once the Stasi files were opened in 1991. Unlike denazification after 1945, there was no organized process trying to get rid of GDR sentiments among the former GDR population. In fact, most GDR products disappeared solely because lacking demand and economic conditions no longer supported their production. The opening of the Stasi archives also opened the door for questioning about *informelle Mitarbeiter* (confidential informants)<sup>47</sup>, perpetrators, followers and victims. What made people followers? Perpetrators? Victims?

Aber, sage ich, wir sind doch alle mitgelaufen, wir haben alle mitgemacht, mehr oder weniger, die Bäcker haben Brötchen gebacken, und die Fleischer haben Schweine geschlachtet und haben das System gestützt, denn wenn sie keine Brötchen gebacken und keine Schweine geschlachtet hätten, dann wäre das System schon eher zusammengebrochen, ich habe, wenn du so willst, auch das System gestützt, indem ich Flaschen zur Wiederverwertung angenommen habe, wir alle, ob bei der Wettervorhersage oder im Recycling, haben das Leben und somit das System in Gang gehalten. (Schirmer 51)

So, even if one simply performed their job and wanted to make a living as stated by the altered proverb “die Bäcker haben Brötchen gebacken”<sup>48</sup> one was a *Mitläufer*. Thus, if one was not directly opposing the GDR one was a follower. This in turn is also true for the giraffe, who despite remaining silent about her past becomes one of the followers:

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<sup>47</sup> Confidential informants were mostly ordinary GDR citizens, who supplied information under a cover name to the Stasi without officially being employed by it.

<sup>48</sup> *Seine Brötchen verdienen* is a common German proverb, which means to earn a living.

Ich sah ruhig richtig hin, und ich erkannte, daß die Giraffe einem alten Mann die Hände leckte, und dieser alte Mann nun wieder war kein Geringerer als der Generalsekretär der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands und Vorsitzende des Staatsrates der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, dessen Namen ich hier nicht nennen möchte. (Schirmer 134-135)

The “Generalsekretär der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands und Vorsitzende des Staatsrates der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik“ (Schirmer 134-135) is, as most German readers will know, none other than Erich Honecker. The fact that the giraffe licked Erich Honecker’s hands, which is a pet’s sign of affection, also points out that many East Germans had and still have a certain affection for the GDR. While some aspects of the GDR, such as the Secret State Police, were negative, others were positive and well liked, for example extended maternity leave and the now famous *Ampelmännchen*<sup>49</sup>. However, the hand-licking is also a sign of subservience, servility and obedience, which at the same time, also highlights the problematic of perpetrator, followers and victims as well as the struggles many GDR citizens encountered.

Wir hatten zwei Möglichkeiten. Wenn wir logen und sagten, was sie gern hören wollten, zementierten wir womöglich das System. Also sagten wir die Wahrheit, es war unsere feine, unverfängliche Art des Widerstandes, und so wurden wir alle, ohne es zu ahnen, zu informellen Mitarbeitern. . . . Wir sind alle Täter gewesen, Kleingrube hat recht. Wir sind alle mitschuldig, ich will es dir leichtmachen, du kannst jetzt reden, du kannst dich erleichtern. (Schirmer 82)

Neither possibility presented a real solution and actually placed GDR citizens in a political *Dazwischen* – a political suspension. Opposing the GDR could have serious consequences, for example imprisonment, but supporting the system meant

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<sup>49</sup> *Ampelmännchen* are pedestrian street crossing signs in the form of a little man.

being a follower, a confidential informant, or a perpetrator. Based on the preceding quotes anyone who worked in the GDR, which officially had a policy of full employment and claimed virtually no unemployment, or anyone, who spoke to Stasi agents or GDR politicians and came in contact with GDR politicians are followers and confidential informers. Therefore, every character in the novel – even the giraffe – is guilty, everyone except for Schlewein, who actively opposed the GDR government with his artwork. For that matter, every GDR citizen including those that are reading the novel now was in some way a perpetrator, a follower and a victim, which is highlighted by the use of the personal pronouns *wir* (we) and *du* (you, singular). Moreover, it shows the internal struggles of how to live in the GDR. This even includes Kleingrube. Indeed, his “speaking name” becomes a self-reflexive and self-fulfilling prophecy, because it not only points toward his work, but also toward his own struggle with the GDR past, his demise and guilt. As an archivist Kleingrube collects vast amounts of information as he digs through history and materials. Moreover, according to the German proverb “Wer anderen eine Grube gräbt, fällt selbst hinein”<sup>50</sup> he also digs his own grave:

Er soll bei der Durchsicht seiner persönlichen Unterlagen auf stark belastendes Material gestoßen sein. . . . Während er der Konfirmation im üblichen Alter von vierzehn teilhaftig geworden war, hatte er die Jugendweihe im Alter von achtzehn Jahren nachgeholt, um zum Abitur zugelassen zu werden. (Schirmer 148)

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<sup>50</sup> In German, *klein* means small and *Grube* means pit. *Grube* is also directly related to *Grab* and *graben*, which respectively mean grave and to dig. This German proverb corresponds to the English “Harm set, harm get.”

Having partaken in the *Jugendweihe*<sup>51</sup>, Kleingrube is a follower. He thereby also proves his own point that: “Niemand habe eine reine Weste. Niemand, hörst du, niemand!” (Schirmer 136).

Among those without a *reine Weste* are Jens-Peter Bröckle and his wife Lydia. He worked as a historian in a museum, but is now, just as the majority of the novel’s characters, unemployed. Moreover, in the same way Kleingrube’s name outlines his internal struggles and conflict with GDR history and foreshadows his downfall, Bröckle’s “speaking name” is not only a commentary on the GDR’s political and economical status in the second half of the 1980s, but it is yet again self-reflexive and a self-fulfilling prophecy. The name Bröckle derives from the German verb *bröckeln*, which means crumble or disintegrate in English. Here, the process of crumbling refers to history at large and the GDR and Bröckle specifically. As a historian specializing in revolutions, Bröckle made a controversial statement following the events during the fall 1989, which are also frequently referred to as a *friedliche Revolution*<sup>52</sup>: “Jens-Peter Bröckle [ist] in große Schwierigkeiten geraten, weil er öffentlich erklärt hat, daß die Wende keine Revolution gewesen sei“ (Schirmer 41). Whether the *Wende* was a revolution or not is still a highly contested debate among today’s historians, it is a debate that cannot be resolved in this chapter. However, what Bröckle’s statement reflects, despite its potential validity, is the sensitivity surrounding the fall of the Berlin Wall. Even before reunification on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1990, the GDR currency and

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<sup>51</sup> *Jugendweihe* is a coming of age celebration that marking the passing from teenager to adulthood. Teenagers, who did not participate in this initiation, faced extreme disadvantages and repression.

<sup>52</sup> peaceful revolution

many GDR consumer products were no longer produced or had already disappeared. Thus, to say that the *Wende* was not a revolution would be to minimize or even devalue the efforts and achievements of East Germans during their escape via the Czech Republik, Hungary and Austria, their refuge in West German embassies in Budapest and Prague and the Monday demonstrations in Leipzig.

However, pity, charity and belittlement of East German efforts before, during and after the fall of the Berlin Wall were voiced. In the novel, these voices are the narrator's West German uncle Alfred and Schlehwein. Onkel Alfred "hatte panische Angst vor dem Osten gehabt. Er hatte uns immer bedauert. Und in seinem Mitleid hatte er immer Pakete geschickt, mit Kaffee, Schokolade, Onkel Bens Reis, Seife, vor allem Seife" (Schirmer 96-97). The coffee, chocolate, and Uncle Ben's rice with its brand logo of a black man highlight the exotic status and colonial power of West Germany. Although most of these commodities were not readily available, soap was. So, what is implied here by sending soap? That East Germans are dirty? That they need to cleanse themselves – *sich rein waschen*? Whatever uncle Alfred's intention was, it was ill informed. In fact, his commentary during his first Berlin visit reflects the aforementioned belittlement: "Das habt ihr gut gemacht, sagte er. Und friedlich. Eine friedliche Revolution. Das ist die Hauptsache" (Schirmer 96). Schlehwein takes it even further and is of the opinion that the fall of the Berlin Wall would not have happened without the media, specifically, television: ". . . und wenn das Fernsehen die Montagsdemonstrationen nicht übertragen hätte, hätten sie, Montag für Montag, wahrscheinlich in dieser Form gar nicht stattfinden können, die friedliche Revolution

als Ergebnis einer Medienmanipulation, . . . “ (Schirmer 107). Although it is arguable that media may have encouraged East Germans to continue their protest it, nonetheless, was the people that walked the streets and demanded freedom. Moreover, the state controlled the East German media and limited what became accessible to the viewer. West Germany could not exert any influence over East German media and most international media outlets were banned as protests intensified and became more violent. They only became aware of the extent of events once the Berlin Wall had come down on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1989. Though these two voices are in the minority in the novel, they demonstrate the uneducated and ignorant opinions and judgments regarding the events of 1989/1990. Through careful and thorough examinations of documents, eyewitness accounts, and interviews with eyewitnesses of that time period, historians will evaluate the fall of the Berlin and German Reunification.

Despite having made this controversial statement, Bröckle was elected to serve on a commission on GDR history. It was this commission's task to decide the fate of history and its markers:

Die Geschichte störte sie und daß sie überhaupt geschehen war. Am besten wäre gewesen, sie wäre überhaupt nicht geschehen. Aber da sie nun einmal geschehen war, sollte wenigstens nichts mehr an sie erinnern. Die Straßennamen sollten weg und die Schiffsnamen und die Denkmäler. Bröckle konnte sich allenfalls damit anfreunden, die Denkmäler zu wachsen zu lassen von Efeu. Dieser Vorschlag erschien ihm brauchbar, ja sogar schön, denn so blieb die Geschichte bestehen, unaufdringlich, leicht entrückt zwar, aber dennoch vorhanden, auf poetische Weise fast und dem Vergessen nicht gänzlich anheimgegeben, die Denkmäler waren in ihrer Häßlichkeit nicht erkennbar, denn sie waren natürlich häßlich, sie wurden verdeckt, aber waren noch zu ahnen. Die anderen grollten und geiferten, ihre Vorschläge waren martialisch. Sie wollten am liebsten jedes Denkmal sprengen, denk mal. Sie

wollten die Denkmale, wenn Geschichte schon nicht gänzlich unabweisbar sei, vor die Tore der Stadt verpflanzen und einen steinernen Tierpark von geschichtlichen Ungetümen anlegen, Marx neben Lenin, Brecht neben Engels, Denkmal neben Denkmal, denk mal. (Schirmer 41-42)

The removal of names commemorating East German or communist leaders went as far as renaming an entire city: Karl-Marx-Stadt to today's Chemnitz.<sup>53</sup> The removal of memorials, such as Lenin's statue in the film *Good Bye, Lenin!*, or the growing of ivy over them are merely a band aid for still present memories. So, the idea to constrain these statues and memorials to a *steinernen Tierpark* (a zoo of stone statues) would just replace the physicality of history, but not eliminate them. This also connects to the giraffe, which was relocated from a bankrupt zoo and now walks around Berlin, is everpresent in the novel and the narrator cannot get rid of. Here, the narrator even challenges the reader to think about the implications of destroying or (re)moving the memorials. In a pun, he uses the words *denk*, the singular imperative form of *denken* (to think) and *mal*, a shortened version of *einmal* (once), which form the noun *Denkmal* (memorial), but also the imperative phrase *denk mal* (think about it). Indeed, the efforts to erase and disintegrate history are much harder when they are not tied to politics and economy, such as memorials and memories. Moreover, to blow up memorials or get rid of consumer products does not get rid of the memories of said memorials and consumer products.<sup>54</sup> So, while Bröckle's career as a historian may crumble, history and memory usually remain.

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<sup>53</sup> In Jens Sparschuh's *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen*, the protagonist struggles with the renaming of his street overnight and feels expelled without having been expelled.

<sup>54</sup> In fact, since reunification many GDR museums have been established throughout Eastern Germany to preserve the GDR's memories, life and consumer culture.



Bröckle's attempt to reestablish himself after having won the lottery by opening a tavern<sup>55</sup> named "Zur Alten DDR" (Schirmer 148) fails, or even has to fail, not solely because of Bröckle's self-fulfilling prophecy, but because it is an attempt to resurrect a part of the GDR. Simply put, his business venture comes about at the wrong place and the wrong time. His tavern shows the struggle of East Germans to gain a foothold in the newly adopted West German economic model of a free market economy. However, Bröckle's venture and the tavern's name *Zur alten DDR* – to the old GDR partially foreshadows their demise. *Zur* actually has a double meaning in that it can either mean "to" as a toast the old GDR or "back to" as a call to return to the GDR. In either of its meanings, "To the old GDR" or "Back to the GDR", a return or celebration of the GDR is doomed. This implied *Bröckeln* becomes visible through the tavern's amenities:

In Bröckles Wirtshaus gab es nur altgewohnte, einheimische Ostbiere, Wernesgrüner, Radeberger, Köstritzer, die in alten Ostgläsern mit breiten Henkeln serviert wurden. Als ich trank, fing meine Lippe an zu bluten, denn mein Glas hatte eine Scharte. Auch die Teller waren alte Ostteller, etliche waren angeschlagen. Zur Auswahl gab es drei Speisen, Bockwurst mit Kartoffelsalat, Steak Hawaii mit Pommes frites und Goldbroiler. Dazu jeweils Schälchen mit Rohkost, bestehend aus Weißkohl und Rotkohl. Es war alles wie früher, und uns war sehr wohlig zumute. Auf den Tischen echte Kunstblumen, aus Sebnitz. An den Wänden keinerlei Werbeplakate, dafür die alten Losungen, teilweise noch im Original. Arbeite mit, plane mit, regiere mit. (Schirmer 148)

Bröckles "Zur Alten DDR" already shows its frailty through the chipped glass as well as the irony of the "echte Kunstblumen", which also points towards the artificiality of the GDR. The GDR's *Mangelwirtschaft* (shortage economy) as displayed

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<sup>55</sup> The opening of a tavern suggests the recurring motif of alcohol and drinking to forget the past, which is also present in Hilbig's *Das Provisorium* and Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!*.

by the limited beer brands and dishes is a concept doomed to fail, because it does not represent a match to the capitalist society, in which everything is abundantly available everywhere. So, the chipped glasses and dishes and the resulting narrator's bleeding lip are a metaphor for the failed attempt to resurrect the GDR. It is one thing to preserve what was already present, but to reestablish an already failed system so shortly after its collapse – "Zur Alten DDR" – is asking for trouble. This trouble came in the form of a group of bald and leather-wearing men, who destroyed everything in the restaurant. Thus, trying to hold on to or even wanting to reestablish part of the GDR has to fail. In the end, like the GDR and as his "speaking" name predicts, Bröckle's job as well as his restaurant crumble.

*Schlehwins Giraffe* seems to only focus on the negative aspects of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the events thereafter by showing failing characters and their struggles and conflicts. However, by showing these failures, struggles and conflicts the novel draws attention to them and allows the reader to confront them. Toward the end of the novel opens a possibility to escape their *Dazwischen* – their state of suspension with its last two sentences: "Aber es hat frisch geschneit, und wenn wir uns umdrehen, sehen wir unsere Fußspuren und wundern uns ein wenig. Mal sehen, wie alles weitergeht" (Schirmer 152-153). There is an uncertainty in the last two sentences expressed by *wundern* (to wonder) and *mal sehen* (we will see) that is also aptly illustrated in the novel's 2000 edition by big question mark after the sentence. While the accompanying giraffe and the protagonist's and Kristina's glances backwards still suggest a hold on the past the fresh white snow as a metaphor for a

new beginning points to the possibility of moving forward - a moving forward not only for the novel's characters, but also for the reader.

### Chapter III

#### Vertrieben – Vertreiben: Jens Sparschuh's *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen*

“Ohne auch nur den Fuß vor die Tür zu setzen, hatte ich mein altes Heimatland verlassen (bzw. – es mich).” (Sparschuh 35)

Jens Sparschuh's novel *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen. Ein Heimatroman.* was originally published in 1995 and has received some attention albeit not as much as Thomas Brussig's *Helden wie wir*, which was published the same year and is often hailed as the big *Wenderoman*. The novel opens with the protagonist-narrator, Hinrich Lobek, reading his daily horoscope, which promises him a better future. Having been unemployed for 3 years and living at home with his dog, Freitag, while his wife, Julia, has successfully transitioned to living in a united Germany, he decides it is finally time to move on and applies for a job with PANTA RHEIn,<sup>56</sup> a company selling *Zimmerspringbrunnen*, room fountains. When Freitag drinks all the water from one of the room fountains, causing it to break, Hinrich seeks to fix it only to invent in the process – totally by accident - a new breakthrough design for the fountains. The surprisingly profitable model has the shape of the former GDR and is tellingly named ATLANTIS. With this new model his sales take off and he is offered the position of sales manager (*Vertriebsleiter*) for all of former East Germany. At the same time his marriage further deteriorates and a last attempt to save it fails. The novel ends with

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<sup>56</sup> PANTA RHEI comes from the Greek πάντα ῥεῖ, which means “everything flows” and is also a philosophical concept by Heraclitus. The lower case “N” references the German river Rhine (Rhein). This also connects to the Meyer's poem *Der Römische Brunnen*, which PANTA RHEIn's boss Boldingier recites during the annual sales conference.

Hinrich and Freitag leaving a train station glancing toward the rising sun in the east, a sun flushed with shame (*schamrot*), which is also the closing scene of Wolfgang Hilbig's *Das Provisorium*.

With the exception of a few articles, academic scholarship on the post-1989 German novel has largely neglected Sparschuh's *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen*. Daniel Sich's and Wolfgang Gabler's articles focus on the novel's humor, the aspect of *Ostalgie* and the protagonist's failure to come to terms with it all. While there is some truth to these readings, they are rather simplistic and only focus on the novel's superficial elements. What they fail to explore in depth are the protagonist's speechlessness and alienation. Although Jill Twark's reading explores these issues to some extent, she also sees the novel's protagonist as a failure. Christian Neumann offers a more comprehensive analysis in which he interprets the *Zimmerspringbrunnen* as objects through which the protagonist escapes his isolation. In addition, he acknowledges the existence of a "Lücke zwischen subjektiver Wahrnehmung und objektiver Realität" (Neumann 105) and the protagonist's preference for a kind of "Niemandland zwischen einer Vergangenheit . . . und einer Gegenwart" (Neumann 107). In the end, Neumann comes to the conclusion that former East Germans "sich in einer Sphäre des Zwischen [befinden]" (Neumann 112), which the protagonist seems to have worked through but with an open end as the novel concludes. According to Neumann, the "Sphäre des Zwischen" (112) is final for East Germans. This *Zwischen*, however, is also a surprisingly powerful place that

allows Hinrich,<sup>57</sup> and through him the author and the reader, to evaluate and critique the former West and East as well as the newly united Germany. This critique centers, on the one hand, on the colonial and capitalist domination of the former East Germany and imposed capitalist economy by West Germany, and, on the other hand, the compensatory *Ostalgie* that developed there. While the *Zwischen* is, on the one hand, a locus of extreme disorientation and *dépaysement*, it opens, on the other hand a tenuous space of self-criticism and introspection.

The first half of the novel illustrates just how lost Hinrich is so long as he holds on to his East Germanness, while the second shows him gaining insight into what it means to integrate West Germanness in a united country. In this regard, he becomes the colonized and the colonizer, the submissive and the dominator, the one criticizing both capitalism and *Ostalgie*, while at the same time also perpetuating *Ostalgie* through capitalism.

The novel opens with Hinrich Lobek, Sparschuh's first-person narrator, reading his horoscope in the weekly paper HALLO-BERLIN. Looking to the stars, he seems finally to find the impetus to turn his life around after having lived in an existential no-man's-land for 3 years:

**Liebe:** Rosige Zeiten sind in Sicht. Das Glück läuft Ihnen nun nach. Sie erleben eine unvergessliche Woche.

**Beruf:** Ein Plan entwickelt sich etwas ungewöhnlich. Kein Grund zur Beunruhigung. Treffen Sie Entscheidungen jetzt!

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<sup>57</sup> Hinrich as a name, whose origin is explained in a later footnote, links to several other German words: *Hinrichtung/hinrichten* (execution/to execute and to arrange/prepare), *richten* (to adjust, point, fix, judge, set/make right) and *richtig* (true, correct, right). These connections highlight the novel's and Hinrich's efforts to judge, adjust and set the events of 1989/90 right.

**Allgemeines:** Bleiben Sie gelassen. Durch überlegtes Handeln können Sie gewinnen. Es kann nur besser werden!<sup>58</sup> [original emphasis] (Sparschuh 7)

The horoscope's prediction for love promises rosy times (*rosige Zeiten*). However, in a literary context it means auroral. Referring to the dawn, it thus also prefigures the novel's end, which will fulfill the initial promise only to the extent that the rise is given a surprisingly shameful cast: "Drüben, im Osten, ließ sich schüchtern die Sonne blicken. . . . Immerhin, sie war schamrot! " (Sparschuh 158). While the beginning prefigures the end, the end in its own pointedly ironic turn enables the reader not only to reread the beginning but also to direct renewed attention to questions of reading and rereading that will have been implicitly at stake from the very first. Such activities as reading the weekly paper, keeping a detailed journal in a manner reminiscent of the protagonist's record keeping while allegedly working for the *Kommunale Wohnungsverwaltung* (KWV),<sup>59</sup> reciting poetry, and citing a wide range of literary and philosophical texts, remind the reader of the novel's self-consciously fictive composition, its status as a work of and about post-Wende literature. The novel's self-reflexivity and the inherent ambiguity of its language invite the reader to question the novel. The multitude of literary references, ranging from Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer's poem "Der römische Brunnen," Joseph Victor von Scheffel's cycle of poems

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<sup>58</sup> All quotes are taken from the 2012 edition of Jens Sparschuh's *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen*. This edition, however, still follows the pre-1996 German spelling rules. All translations from German to English of quotes are my own.

<sup>59</sup> Although the protagonist never explicitly admits to having worked for the Stasi, his current actions (for example, keeping a detailed *Protokollbuch*) and the novel's latent ambiguity regarding his past life, provide enough circumstantial evidence to speak for his Stasi employment.

“Waldeinsamkeit,”<sup>60</sup> poems with the same name by Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff, and Heinrich Heine. Self-reflexivity and ambiguity are also prevalent literary themes throughout German literature, especially in Romanticism. On the one hand, this intertextuality elevates the novel from the mere story of a struggling East German seeking to fit into a united Germany to one placing it into a larger (German) literary context and tradition. On the other hand, it highlights the novel, and by extension the author, protagonist, and readers, becoming acutely self-conscious and aware of its literary status and ambiguity (*Zweideutigkeit*). In doing so, *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen* provides the aforementioned opportunity to be critically examined and questioned beyond its seemingly simplistic and humorous plot. In fact, the novel’s first two sentences emphasize its intertextuality by referring to Hinrich reading a weekly Berlin paper and him calling his dog Freitag, an easily identifiable reference to Defoe’s novel *Robinson Crusoe*.

Defoe’s novel and the eponymous title character, whose original last name is Kreutznaer and of German origin,<sup>61</sup> serve as one of the underlying themes by emphasizing Hinrich’s self-imposed isolation and the colonial aspects of German reunification. Additionally, Robinson Crusoe is the son of a merchant (*Verkäufer*) and becomes a navigator engaged in trade.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Hinrich becomes a traveling salesman (*Vertreter*). Contrary to Crusoe, Hinrich starts out as a naïve, simple and helpless character believing in his horoscope, because “[d]ie Sterne lügen nicht! (Das

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<sup>60</sup> *Waldeinsamkeit* in Sparschuh’s novel is the name of a room fountain.

<sup>61</sup> Daniel Defoe. *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. 1. Kindle File.

<sup>62</sup> Daniel Defoe. *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. 1. Kindle File.



können sie nämlich gar nicht; sie wissen ja auch nicht, was die Wahrheit ist ...) . . . [R]ichtig falsche Tips gaben sie einem im Grunde genommen nie“ (Sparschuh 9). The irony of his horoscope’s inability to provide him with completely incorrect (“richtig falsch”) information and its universality, which promises him rosy times and good luck, is lost on Hinrich. Despite these generalizations, reading the horoscope empowers him to leave his weak emasculated existence as an unemployed East German in a united Germany and eventually employ West German attributes, such as persistence and cunning marketing strategies, in addition to pre-existing East German ones, such as passivity and silence. After being marked “schwer vermittelbar” (Sparschuh 15) by the federal employment agency, he further retreats into his apartment. His days as a homemaker are spent with his dog Freitag, taking him for walks, watering flowers or remaining in his *Hobbyraum*, where he devotes himself to his fretwork. In fact, the apartment at large, and the *Hobbyraum* specifically, are, in the beginning, his retreat from reality. Eventually, however, he has to admit the following to his island companion, Freitag: “Es wird Zeit, mein Lieber, daß wir unseren hübschen kleinen Robinson-Club hier auflösen“ (Sparschuh 144). The term “Robinson-Club” refers not only to the colonial aspects of German reunification but also to a certain tourist company of the same name that provides resort-style vacations around the world. Essentially, the apartment has become a resort-style island. Within it, the *Hobbyraum* is the space in which he can exhibit his masculinity and indulge in dreams of domination – albeit only in a highly circumscribed domestic setting that includes only his wife and dog. Thus, for example, with regard to the

latter he makes the following rather pathetic claim: “Im Hobbyraum war ich nicht sein Herrchen, sondern sein Herr!” (Sparschuh 18). With regard to the former Hinrich makes the following equally pathetic observation: „Als sie [Julia] ihren Ellbogen auf dem Tisch abstützte, waren einige der Papiere, die ich ausgelegt hatte, verrutscht. Sofort nahm sie den Arm herunter und schob die Papiere wieder in ihre Ausgangslage. Da fühlte ich mich, das erste Mal seit Jahren, von ihr wieder ernstgenommen . . .“(Sparschuh 55). Here, for the first since Hinrich’s unemployment, Julia respects him, his activity and his masculine space. However, the respect is limited to the *Hobbyraum* and therefore, still fragile and embattled in other spaces. For example, most of the other rooms in the apartment are Julia’s feminine territory: the bathroom from which she emerges into the hallway wrapped in only a towel to answer the phone, and the kitchen from which she yells at Hinrich after Freitag trashes it. As soon as Hinrich emancipates himself from his self-imposed island exile, from a home that is less than a safe haven and refuge than a place of solitary confinement, as soon as he seeks employment his domestic life and especially his marriage to Julia fall apart.

Indeed, his inability to establish a connection with female characters, almost all of whom appear to transition seamlessly to a united Germany,<sup>63</sup> contributes to this sense of collapse. When the novel begins Julia, now employed by a former West German firm, has already made this transition whereas Hinrich has been unemployed

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<sup>63</sup> Throughout my research for this dissertation it has become apparent that East German female and male characters differ in how they process the fall of the Berlin Wall, German Reunification and the subsequent events. However, this is a topic that deserves its own research project.

since German Reunification. This also provides Julia with a more distant and objective perspective on the GDR, which Hinrich readily records in his logbook:

Eintrag ins Protokollbuch: >> Neuerliche Lektüre der J.: ein Buch unter dem Titel: >Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Zeit<. Unklar ist, ob eine unverhohlen provokatorische Absicht vorliegt, wenn seitens der J. besagtes Buch stets so auf dem Nachttisch platziert wird, daß mir der Titel unbedingt ins Auge springen muß. – Es stellte sich übrigens bei einer Routinekontrolle des Nachtschränkchens heraus, daß es sich da insgesamt um 7 (in Worten: sieben) Bänder handelt! (Sparschuh 57)

The reference to Proust's seven-volume novel *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Zeit*, is ambiguous and hints at various ironic and sarcastic possibilities. First, Hinrich's horror at a seven-volume edition – highlighted and clarified by the written numerical value and the written number in parentheses as well as an exclamation mark – displays the discrepancy between the novel's title and the process of reading it in search of lost time. Hinrich sees the irony in spending time reading a seven-volume book that is about searching for lost time only because he has not read it. However, the most important ironic and sarcastic references are a critique of the GDR made by Hinrich's wife and his colleague. In fact, Julia makes this snide remark: "... äußerte die J. sinngemäß: >Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Zeit müßte Pflichtlektüre für alle Ex-DDR'ler werden.<" (Sparschuh 57). According to Julia, the time spent in the GDR is lost time. This mockery, belittling and devaluing the GDR that is also existent in other post-1989 novels is pursued by Hinrich's West German colleague, Strüver:

Aber schließlich, er war der Westmensch; da hatte er wahrscheinlich gleich automatisch ein paar Jährchen von den 40 Jahren DDR-Leben abgezogen, denn richtig gelebt hatten wir ja nicht. . . . >>Das war ja kein Leben bei euch! Die Zeitungen waren keine Zeitungen! Die Wahlen keine Wahlen. Die Straßen keine Straßen. Nicht mal die Autos waren Autos.<< (Sparschuh 110)

Strüver devalues the GDR by negating its general life, its newspapers, elections, streets, and cars. However, his comments set Hinrich to thinking about life there: “Innerlich mußte ich ihm in allen Punkten recht geben. Aber, was zum Kuckuck war es dann, was wir die ganze Zeit getrieben hatten? Wer weiß. Man muß es schon selbst erlebt haben, um es nicht zu verstehen ...“ (Sparschuh 110). Although Hinrich does not openly express his agreement regarding Strüver’s comments, he starts to question his life and time in the GDR. At the same time though, he criticizes Strüver’s comments by acknowledging the complexity of life in the GDR and that only former GDR citizens can relate to it, because they lived through it. Yet, they do not understand the GDR and how they lived in it, because the GDR (German Democratic Republic) at root was not democratic. The government rigged the elections and censored the newspapers. It is safe to assume that the majority of GDR citizens knew of these non-democratic methods, but did not protest against them until 1989. *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Zeit* is therefore not only a novel by Proust, but also an accurate description of life after the GDR. Julia then readily uses this to assert her power over Hinrich, who continues reading Marxist literature, and to put him down. Only when he begins the process of seeking employment can he begin to assert his masculinity again. Indeed, up to this point, Julia had been the sole breadwinner and as such the dominant partner in the marriage. However, the more Hinrich immerses himself in his new work the more he neglects his duties as an unemployed homemaker, which hastens the demise of the marriage. Nevertheless, this has to happen in order for Hinrich to make ATLANTIS. Hinrich describes the turn of events in

his romantic life as “[d]ie >>Nach-Julia-Ära>> hatte begonnen“ (Sparschuh 86). The post-Julia era marks a new beginning for Hinrich. Now, his *Hobbyraum* also changes from a retreat to sovereign territory, in which Hinrich rules as opposed to the rest of the apartment. More importantly, it is the location where he builds ATLANTIS. Hence, the *Hobbyraum* is the physical manifestation of *Zwischen* for Hinrich, a space of isolation and empowerment. However, before Hinrich can utilize his space, he needs to come to the realization that his existence within his apartment is that of a prisoner – *ein Gefangener in den eigenen vier Wänden*<sup>64</sup>:

Aber inzwischen (genauer: nach über drei Jahren erzwungenen Hausmannsdaseins) wurde das Leben in den häuslichen vier Wänden für mich zum täglichen Überlebenstraining. Seit ich regelmäßig auch tagsüber zu Hause saß, merkte ich: Neubauwohnungen sind nichts anderes als Zellentrakte. (Sparschuh 11)<sup>65</sup>

In addition to the sense of feeling trapped and emasculated by this “erzwungenen Hausmannsdaseins,” an impending rent increase further endangers his existence.<sup>66</sup> In fact, he recognizes his long-term unemployment, which he prefers to reference as being a homemaker, as survival training, because the apartment complex, *Neubauwohnungen*,<sup>67</sup> resembles prison tracts. To simultaneously escape his prison and secure his *Hobbyraum*, Hinrich decides to take his horoscope’s advice and apply

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<sup>64</sup> *Ein Gefangener in den eigenen vier Wänden* translates as a prisoner in his/her own 4 walls.

<sup>65</sup> This state of being a prisoner in his/her own 4 walls is reminiscent of Franz Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* and Christiane Kerner’s confinement to her bedroom in Wolfgang Becker’s *Good Bye, Lenin!*.

<sup>66</sup> Jens Sparschuh. *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen. Ein Heimatroman*. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2012. 11. Print.

<sup>67</sup> *Neubauwohnungen*, or *Plattenbauwohnungen*, are apartment complexes marked by extreme uniformity and were built to address the housing shortage after World War II.

for a job with the company PANTA RHEIn as a salesman for *Zimmerspringbrunnen* – room fountains.

Although West Germany imposed itself on the former GDR during German reunification in what is frequently compared to colonialism, Hinrich seeks out his first exposure to West Germany. Because of the GDR's political system and the practices to protect it, such as spying and employing unofficial spies among its own citizens, any job application by former GDR citizens after 1989 raises the question of how to incorporate, if at all, one's previous work experience. In fact, Hinrich's past is not completely revealed until much later in the novel and the reader is left wondering about allusions to the Stasi regarding his log book, his language and behavior toward Julia: „Eintrag ins Protokollbuch: >>Observationsobjekt J. verlässt gegen 7:15 Uhr die eheliche Wohnung (lila Lippenstift ...!)“ (Sparschuh 8) and „Julia irritierte das. Sie fühlte sich von mir stumm beobachtet. Eintrag ins Protokollbuch vom 13.4.: >>Infame Vorwürfe! – Julia, sehr erregt (das entschuldigt aber nichts), behauptet heute: ich würde ihr nachspionieren und wörtlich! - >in einem Protokollbuch< (!!!) jeden ihrer Schritte verzeichnen“ (Sparschuh 16). Though Hinrich's occupation during the GDR was with the KVV, his meticulous record-keeping and language here clearly point to the same activities used by the Stasi and his having had some exposure if not direct involvement as either an unofficial spy or an employee.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, the ambiguous language and the late revelation of Hinrich's actual GDR work experience as a “Sachbearbeiter bei der Kommunalen Wohnungsverwaltung” (Sparschuh 135)

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<sup>68</sup> In comparison to an actual Stasi file, the language here is too emotional and too descriptive.

contribute to the novel's self-conscious irony. Rather than simply stating Hinrich's former profession/activities as a local housing administrator, a Stasi agent or an *informeller Mitarbeiter* (IM),<sup>69</sup> the focus is on Hinrich's actions surrounding his former employment. Although he claims to be relieved once the local housing administration office is handed over to another company and he subsequently loses his job, he continues his trained activity of documenting and keeping records. However, instead of observing renters, he now observes his wife. The abbreviation of Julia's name, her degradation to an object of observation (*Observationsobjekt*), and the mentioning of the purple lipstick highlight this taunt and jibe. When Julia confronts Hinrich about her suspicion of him spying on her and entering the information into a logbook, the sarcasm and mockery of the Stasi turns into criticism of East Germans and their silence regarding Stasi activities during the existence of the GDR. It is safe to assume that the majority of GDR citizens were aware of Stasi activities, but chose not to act on it out of fear for consequences to their professional and personal lives. Moreover, the Stasi's extensive net of informal employees made it highly likely that a friend, relative, or even a close family member (Hinrich) was relaying information to the Stasi. Thus, most of GDR citizens chose to remain silent – a choice that Hinrich also exercises now to hide his involvement with the Stasi. For the PANTA RHEIn application, he has to submit a resume, which he needs to tailor based on the job requirements and his previous work experience. After thinking it over, Hinrich

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<sup>69</sup> A *informeller/inoffizieller Mitarbeiter* (informal/unofficial employee) was a GDR citizen that was hired by the Stasi to spy without officially being employed by the Stasi.

changes the sentence on his resume from „>>Bin seit meiner Schulzeit überzeugter Vertreter der sozialistischen Ordnung<<“ (Sparschuh 19) to „>>Langjährige Erfahrungen im Vertreterbereich<<“ (Sparschuh 19), which highlights the aforementioned linguistic ambiguity, which is at once humorous and disconcerting. It is disconcerting because of the ease of the whitewashing that is being perpetrated here through language. In German, a *Vertreter* can have many meanings<sup>70</sup> based on its context; for example, a *Vertreter* can mean a proxy (*Bevollmächtigter*), a deputy (*Delegierter*), a proponent or supporter (*Befürworter*), and a delegate (*Abgeordneter*) to name just a few examples. Hinrich uses this linguistic ambiguity to his advantage by changing from being an advocate (*Vertreter*) of socialism to being a solicitor (*Vertreter*), yet without erasing the different meanings of the word or him having been an advocate of socialism.

Such language manipulation highlights and critiques the ease with which most former GDR politicians and Stasi employees, both official and unofficial, were able either to integrate themselves into a united Germany or to conceal their activities in the former GDR and therefore not having to be held accountable for their actions.<sup>71</sup> Due to the unjust nature of some of the GDR laws when GDR citizens held these positions most were not prosecuted or acquitted - with the exceptions of those who violated basic human rights as set forth by the United Nations General Assembly. In contrast to the denazification process, during which suspected Nazi offenders and supporters could be exonerated by supporting statements from former victims or

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<sup>70</sup> <http://www.dict.cc/?s=Vertreter>

<sup>71</sup> This stands in stark contrast to the de-Nazification process after World War II.



enemies and were given a so-called *Persilschein*, and the rather swift Nuremberg Trials of prominent Nazi leaders, GDR leaders and NVA soldiers, who shot GDR escapees, were prosecuted by the *Bundesgerichtshof* (Federal Supreme Court of Germany). Whereas a *Persilschein*<sup>72</sup> washed the suspect clean (*reinwaschen*) of any wrongdoings, many Stasi employees and *informelle Mitarbeiter* were readily identifiable through the aforementioned meticulous record-keeping of the Stasi. Its files are accessible to victims, researchers, media representatives and other official offices, for example the police, prosecutor's offices, and the NSA.

Indeed, PANTA RHEIn's president Boldinger alludes to the denazification process in a phone conversation with Hinrich about the company's beginning. After the unraveling of the company in 1945 and Boldinger's flight to West Germany, he escapes a war crimes tribunal before starting over with his current company.<sup>73</sup> In addition, Boldinger tries to establish a connection to Hinrich and East Germany by stating his place of birth as Pirna, a city in Saxony, East Germany. However, one has to be careful with connections that span multiple places and times, because they often conceal as much as they reveal. For example, although Boldinger's birthplace lies in Eastern Germany and he likes to claim a special relationship to that part of the country, the fact is that Boldinger did not live in the GDR and cannot compare his post-1945 experience to that of Hinrich post-89. Nevertheless, the novel establishes these references and connections between a post-1945 and a post-1989 Germany to

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<sup>72</sup> Persil is the name of a laundry detergent in Germany. Thus, the connection to the term *sich reinwaschen* – to redeem oneself, to whitewash.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.* 119.

show the problematic nature of reconciling two fundamentally different countries. However, despite there being some overlap in terms of a shared past and similar political systems, Germany between 1945 and 1949 was a defeated state whereas the Germany in 1989/1990 was in the process of reunification, with the GDR as the defeated country about to be colonized by West Germany.

Hinrich's first success at infiltrating West Germany arrives one month after his application to PANTA RHEIn when he unexpectedly receives an invitation to a sales representative conference in Bad Sülz in the Black Forest.<sup>74</sup> To celebrate this occasion he listens to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony:

. . . legte die Neunte, meine Lieblingssinfonie, auf den Plattenteller. Mich selbst legte ich aufs Sofa. Die Platte drehte sich. Alles drehte sich. Alles drehte sich um mich. Ich schloss die Augen und besah mich von innen. Die letzten Wochen und Monate, die ganzen Jahre (und die kaputten) zogen an mir vorüber. Sie verschwanden auf Nimmerwiedersehen im Dunkel der Vergangenheit, im Licht einer neuen Zukunft ... Zum Schlusschor stand ich auf, stellte mich vor die Schrankwand und dirigierte, innerlich bewegt, bis zum Ende durch. (Sparschuh 20)

This invitation and the subsequent celebration represent an opportunity for Hinrich to escape being a homemaker, his apartment, and his past. It allows him introspectively – *besah mich von innen* – to look at himself from the inside – and to let the dark of the past disappear into the light of the future, or the *schamrote Sonne*. This introspection is mirrored by the word *drehen* (to turn) and the self-reflexive prepositional verb *sich drehen um* (to revolve around someone). Aside from the record turning and the world spinning vertiginously, Hinrich's gaze turns inward and

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<sup>74</sup> *ibid.* 20.

now, everything begins revolve around himself. However, before the past disappears introspection enables Hinrich to look at, examine and evaluate himself, who he was in relation to the GDR and who and where he is now. In doing so, he has the option to either turn back to the past, to remain stagnant, or to move into the future. His job application and interview invitation are a testament to his choosing to turn away from the past and moving forward. In fact, Hinrich's chosen celebratory symphony, which includes the final choral based on Friedrich Schiller's poem „An die Freude,“ echoes the sentiment of unification. In fact, multinational orchestras and choirs performed a version of this symphony on Christmas 1989 at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. However, the word “Freude” (joy) from Schiller's poem was replaced by the “Freiheit” (freedom). Kurt Masur also conducted it during the GDR's last official state act on the eve of German Reunification. Interestingly, it was also played for the Unified Team of Germany at the Olympic Games between 1956 and 1968. Later, it became the anthem for the European Union. Thus, just as this symphony is a musical representation of unification, be it for sports or an entire continent, it also marks the beginning of Hinrich's transformation and his freedom. By conducting the final choral and choosing to attend the sales conference in the Black Forest Hinrich takes charge of himself, his life, and his future. In doing so, he assumes the ambiguous role of being at once the colonized and the colonizer which he can spin (*drehen*) to his advantage as needed and which subsequently sets him in a place of *Zwischen*, from which he can perform his double and doubly ambiguous (self-)critique.

The sales conference highlights the fact that despite political unification Germans are not „ein Volk,”<sup>75</sup> that Germany, and in particular the former East Germans, are still very much in a state of transition. In Bad Sülz, Hinrich immediately recognizes that he is out of place and feels trapped: “ . . . ich hatte auf einmal das Gefühl, daß es für mich hier schwierig sein würde, einen Platz zu finden. Rundum war ich schon von Bergen umstellt. Kein Fluchtweg“ (Sparschuh 24). He realizes that he is out of his comfort zone, his apartment and his *Hobbyraum*, and in foreign territory both physically and psychologically. Being surrounded by and trapped in an unfamiliar environment enables Hinrich to become aware of his actions, emotions, and himself. As the only conference attendee from the former GDR he is exposed and vulnerable. Being found out about his lie on his resume, his life in and role within the GDR and even his future within PANTA RHEIn pose a high risk to his existence, an existence that is still deeply rooted within the GDR. The ambiguity of being a *Vertreter* – of the socialist order of the GDR and lack of experience being a solicitor – turns into a fear of becoming a *Verräter*, both of which are semantically connected.<sup>76</sup> The etymology of *Verräter* lays in the German words *Verkünder*, *Vermelder*, and *verreden*<sup>77</sup>. Interestingly, *verreden* as the etymological foundation of *Verräter*

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<sup>75</sup> ein Volk = one people: It was part of the parole “Wir sind ein Volk” ( We are on people) during the Monday Demonstrations, which changed from “Wir sind das Volk (We are the people).”

<sup>76</sup> *Vertreter* is also etymologically connected to the German word *Fürsprecher*, which translates to advocate in English. *Verräter*, in its modern translation and usage, translates to traitor and betrayer.

<sup>77</sup>

<http://woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/?sigle=DWB&mode=Vernetzung&hitlist=&patternlist=&lemid=GV03263>

represents Hinrich's predicament in attending the sales conference of a West German company in the Black Forest. *Verreden* translates to misspeak, which mirrors Hinrich's constant fear of misspeaking the truth about how he feels about his past and role in the GDR – of not only being a *Verräter* to the GDR but also of being a *Selbstverräter*. Although he manages to conceal the truth for the entirety of the conference, Hinrich's hyperawareness of his emotions leads to a forceful eruption of the truth: “>>Ich liebe meine Heimat, die Deutsche Demokratische Republik.<<“ (Sparschuh 52). This eruption, however, remains inaudible to anyone but himself.

While the entrapment leaves Hinrich no choice but to attend the conference, it enables him to occupy a unique position, that of a *Zwischen* from which he can observe and gather information in order to evaluate, critique and judge East and West Germany, but also and most importantly to criticize himself. Hinrich's passivity and silence throughout the conference further support his position as a double-critic and being doubly self-critical. Following a short introductory speech it is established that since 1989 „[hat es] durch den Ostmarkt keinerlei nennenswerten Zuwachs gegeben, nichts“ (Sparschuh 31) pointing to the large cultural and economical gap between former East and West Germans. This gap resulted from the GDR's 40-year existence, during which it and its citizen developed their own unique identity. This unique East German identity was grounded in the GDR's political and economical systems and further strengthened by the *Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl*<sup>78</sup>. Thus, the

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<sup>78</sup> *Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl* is the feeling of solidarity in a political sense and common or shared identity in the societal sense.

negligible growth of sales in the East stems from the West German salesmen's inability to relate to East Germans.

In the same way PANTA RHEIn struggles with sales in East Germany, Hinrich struggles with and critiques West Germany. This becomes apparent in the form of a piece of Black Forest Ham during a short break:

Ich war noch ganz in Gedanken und mir war dabei unversehens ein zähes Stück Schwarzwälder Schinken, das ich an keiner Stelle hatte durchbeißen können, in ganzer Länge in den Mund geraten; und so sehr ich auch darauf herumkaute, es schien nur immer größer zu werden, ein atemraubender Klumpen in meiner Mundhöhle, mit dem ich still verbissen kämpfte – als Direktor Boldinger noch einmal auf mich zutrat. . . . Ich schüttelte atemlos den Kopf, wobei sich allerdings mein Schinkenkloß in Erinnerung brachte – er war ein Stück in den Hals hinabgerutscht. Mit einem kurzen, kräftigen Würger, ich mußte die Augen fest zusammenpressen, brachte ich ihn wieder, ehe es zu einem Erstickungsanfall kam, in die Ausgangslage ... . . . Dort stützte ich in die erste Kabine und spie den rosig-grauen Klops ins Klosettbecken. . . . Ich wollte ihn noch fortspülen. Aber er ließ sich nicht so einfach bewegen. Er schwamm eigensinnig oben. Erst nach der dritten oder vierten Spülung verschwand er endlich im gurgelnden Ausfluß. (Sparschuh 33-34)

This tough piece of ham is everything that West Germany embodies and in the same way Hinrich struggles to chew, eat and swallow the ham, he struggles to comprehend and deal with unification. Even though GDR citizens initiated the fall of the Berlin Wall, which led to German reunification, West Germany soon took over and dominated the course of events in what amounted to a process of colonization: businesses and companies going bankrupt or being pushed out of business by West German competitors and expropriation. Essentially, West Germany swallowed the GDR and became the dominant force behind reunification in the same way the piece of Black Forest ham becomes a dominating and overbearing piece of food for Hinrich, one which he voluntarily took, but resists ingesting. The vocabulary used here

illustrates this struggle. Hinrich fails to take a bite out of the ham – *durchbeißen* – and break it up into smaller, more manageable pieces, and the more he chews – *herumkauen* – the more he struggles. This *Herumkauen* represents his struggle in the impending betrayal of his former *Heimat*, the GDR by being a seller (*Vertreter*) and a sellout (*Verräter*). Indeed, he walks a fine line of being both, a *Vertreter* and a *Verräter*, a *verräterischer Vertreter* (suspicious/traitorous solicitor) and a *vertretender Verräter* (exemplary sellout). Furthermore, the ham threatens literally to steal his breath away – *atemraubend*, and to leave him without breath – *atemlos*, and speechless. This *Atemlosigkeit* also alludes to the breathtaking speed at which German reunification happened<sup>79</sup> and the speed at which Hinrich's job application is processed; he starts working and is finally asked to become sales manager for Eastern Germany. His inability to swallow the piece of ham shows his unwillingness to swallow the truth and reality of German unification and his refusal to allow West Germany and West Germans to dominate him. This inability to swallow and digest further demonstrates Hinrich's skepticism toward anything West German. Yet, it also provides him with the unique opportunity to gain insight into a West German company and how it and West Germans function.

Hinrich finally manages to regurgitate the piece of ham and spits it into a toilet, where it disappears *im gurgelnden Ausfluß*. This *gurgelnder* (*drehender*) *Ausfluß* – gurgling (spinning) outflow - contrasts but also connects to his throat, whereas the

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<sup>79</sup> The Berlin Wall was opened on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1989, and Germany was officially reunited on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1990 – less than one year to reunite two states with different political and economical systems.

former expels and the latter intakes. When he tries but is unable to swallow a piece of Western meat, he expels it. This expulsion however, is unlike the one he experienced through reunification, which is hard for him to swallow. However, even then, the piece of ham does not easily flush down in the same way that German Reunification and the changes it brought about persist and are an ever-present reality in Germany. His struggle to deal with the changes after the fall of the Wall is further illustrated by his passivity, helplessness and non-participation in these events and changes:

. . . in den zurückgelegten letzten drei Jahren hatte sich ja alles fortlaufend erneuert. Ohne auch nur den Fuß vor die Tür zu setzen, hatte ich mein altes Heimatland verlassen (bzw. – es mich). . . . Sogar die Postanschrift hatte sich von heute auf morgen geändert. Ich hatte eines Morgens mit Freitag die kleine Runde gemacht; irgend etwas war anders als sonst. Da bemerkte ich: Heimlich, über Nacht sozusagen, waren wir aus unsrer Straße umgezogen worden. Sie trug jetzt einen anderen Namen. (Sparschuh 35)

Despite Hinrich's passivity toward his environment the inevitable continuation of history proceeds, which is illustrated by the subtle yet substantial changes in his immediate surroundings and the passive voice used to describe them. Like the Berlin Wall, which was erected secretly (*heimlich*) over night on August 13, 1961, and like its rather unexpected fall on November 9, 1989, Hinrich's postal address secretly and suddenly changes and then "waren wir aus unserer Straße umgezogen worden" (Sparschuh 35). This, at once, represents the discontinuation of the GDR and the relentless change of history. By changing the name of the street overnight, they had been moved without actually moving – a passive act that is further underlined by the use of the passive voice in the past perfect tense.



The inherent simultaneity and the irony of leaving the GDR without actually leaving is represented in the novel's title, the company's name, and the commodity it describes – *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen*. The water of a fountain flows without flowing into something. It is “Ruhe und Bewegung zugleich” (Sparschuh 29), a simultaneity that Conrad Ferdinand Meyer's poem *Der römische Brunnen*<sup>i</sup> describes: “Und jede nimmt und giebt zugleich / Und strömt und ruht”<sup>80</sup> (Meyer in (Sparschuh 29)). The *ruhen* (to rest, to be calm), though seemingly at odds with the rest of poem, is only achieved through *strömen* (to run, flow). Ironically, a state of rest for the fountain can only be achieved once the water has flown through all the bowls. The equal taking and giving of Meyer's poem, however, was not present during reunification and is still not there today. In fact, Meyer's poem was in *Bewegung* from 1860 and underwent several revisions before being finalized in 1882 and coming to *Ruhe*.<sup>81</sup> The harmony of opposing forces in Meyer's poem highlight the irony of Hinrich's situation: the world spinning and revolving around while he is lying on the sofa, the intake and expulsion of the piece of ham, the expulsion from the GDR without leaving it. These ironies of opposing factors continue throughout the novel.

The novel's subtitle “*Ein Heimatroman*” (a homeland novel) is the first instance of a literary and historical reference and it opens a space for examination,

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<sup>80</sup> “And every [marble bowl] takes and gives simultaneously / And flows and rests” [my translation]

<sup>81</sup> In addition to political and economic unification, this also includes social and cultural unification. For example, there is still a large discrepancy in wages, rent and cost-of-living between western and eastern federal states.

reflection, introspection and criticism,<sup>82</sup> which that open through the continuation of intertextuality. In addition to being the novel's subtitle a *Heimatroman* also refers to a genre of *Trivilliteratur*<sup>83</sup>, which romanticizes and idealizes the world, which is what *Ostalgie* does with the GDR memory. Therefore, the novel reveals its own irony and critique. The *Heimatroman* genre also establishes the connection to the genre of *Heimatfilme*, which were popular in the 1950s, and whose job was to distract West Germans from the still visible destruction suffered during World War II and atrocities committed by the Nazis whose leaders had just been tried in the Nuremberg Trials. Thus, *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen* explicitly addresses the post-89 period, while also implicitly touching on post-45 events, viewing the former as a kind of repetition of the latter.

The post-89 transformations happened all over the GDR within a very short period of time. So, Hinrich not only left the GDR and it left him, but the GDR and everything associated with it was rapidly disappearing. In fact, few other countries have ceased to exist in such a short amount of time while also being musealized so quickly. The rapid change from dictatorship to democracy, centrally planned to free market economy, including a change in currency, and from officially being a GDR citizen to becoming a united German and a European brought about psychological and emotional changes, which manifested themselves in the form of *Ostalgie*,<sup>84</sup> a

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<sup>82</sup> Throughout the novel, one can closely inspect the text, seriously think about what, how and why the text was written, examine one's own reaction to the text, and analyze the text's merits and faults.

<sup>83</sup> cheap literature

<sup>84</sup> *Ostalgie* – ostalgia in English – is compound of *Ost* (east) and *Nostalgie* (nostalgia)

sentiment or feeling of nostalgia for the GDR. In the immediate years after 1989, the majority of the products associated with the GDR were no longer wanted and disappeared from the public and private realm. However, soon thereafter, East Germans realized that unification did not bring everything they might have hoped for and that not everything associated with the GDR was necessarily bad. Therefore, the same people who could not have gotten rid of GDR products fast enough are the same ones who later felt nostalgic for them.

The discrepancy between expectation and reality combined with a displacement of East Germans' nostalgic feelings led to a growth of *Ostalgie*, which the refashioned room fountain ATLANTIS represents. Of course, the name is a reference to the fictional island nation mentioned by Plato, which at the end of *Timaeus-Critias* sinks into the Atlantic Ocean. Scholars, however, call Atlantis' fictional status into question because of Plato's detailed descriptions. Regardless of its uncertain status – or perhaps precisely because of it –, it is a metaphor for the former GDR, which itself now has the status of a lost or sunken continent, one that has “gone under” only to the extent it has been submerged by market and other forces emanating from the West. However, whereas Atlantis and its people disappeared and their existence remains a myth, the existence of the GDR and its people were real. What differentiates them further is the disappearance of the GDR while the dis- or otherwise enfranchised citizens remain.

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Yet, this draws another connection to post-1945. Following Germany's capitulation on May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1945 and the Potsdam Conference new borders were to be established. In the east, the new German border was the Oder-Neiße line, which concurrently meant the expulsion of millions of German, referred to *die Vertriebenen*. While the post-1945 expellees had to relocate because the borders of their country had shifted, the post-1989 expellees ironically relocated without physically moving, because their country no longer existed. Thus, instead of being in *Bewegung* (movement) and being able to physically experience relocation, GDR citizens crossed a border without actually crossing it. As Meyer's poem says, they were *strömen* and *ruhen* at the same time, a *bewegte Ruhe* or *ruhige Bewegung*. Effectively, the GDR *Vertriebene*, some of whom have formed a "halblegale[r] >>DDR-Heimatvertriebenen-Verband"(Sparschuh 104) are *vertrieben* without actually being *vertrieben*<sup>85</sup> in the same way that Hinrich was moved without being moved. So, ATLANTIS becomes the object of their displaced feelings – of *Ostalgie*.

*Ostalgie* is an underlying motif throughout the novel, and it becomes a part of the critique and a part of both sides of the *Zwischen*, because while Hinrich criticizes *Ostalgie* he also uses it to further his career. This internal conflict stemming from his passivity and carelessness, which, in fact, play out in the novel ironically and contribute to the GDR-inspired room fountain ATLANTIS and his subsequent personal transformation. Indeed, the product transformation leads to Hinrich's transformation

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<sup>85</sup> The GDR expellees were expelled without being expelled. It could even be said that GDR expellees expelled themselves, because they initiated the fall of the Berlin Wall and subsequent German reunification.

and both become a combination – or unification – of East and West Germanness with ATLANTIS' foundation being West German<sup>86</sup> and Hinrich's foundation being East German. The transformation from JONA to ATLANTIS is only possible with Hinrich, an East German, and Hinrich's transformation is only possible through JONA, a West German product. Thus, he creates the *Zwischen* from which he offers criticism. Hinrich's forgetting to give Freitag water leads to the broken room fountain model JONA, which becomes in turn the basis for ATLANTIS.

As part of Hinrich's work he has to read and answer consumer letters, one of which poses an interesting question: “>>Kann eine plötzlich aufgetretene >Incontinentia urinae< ursächlich mit der Aufstellung eines Zimmerspringbrunnens im Schlafbereich zusammenhängen?<<” (Sparschuh 96). In connection to ATLANTIS, it suddenly becomes the incontinent Atlantis: a continent that no longer exist in the same way that the GDR is a country that no longer exists. Although neither Strüver nor Hinrich are able to answer the rather funny question and pass it on to headquarters, Hinrich looks up the meaning of the Latin words and finds out that it is “gewöhnliche Bettnässerei” (Sparschuh 97) - common bedwetting. This medical condition is characterized by uncontrollable urinary excretion, usually while sleeping and seems to be a West German problem, because whereas JONA is the top seller on the Western German market; it is rather unsuccessful on the Eastern German one. Despite Hinrich's knowledge of water-featured room fountains causing incontinence, he builds ATLANTIS, named after the lost continent. When the fountain is plugged in

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<sup>86</sup> ATLANTIS' foundation is the West German room fountain model JONA.

the foundation rises and it at once gives rise to the lost continent and the GDR. Then, the fountain activates and the lost continent will cause or exacerbate any incontinence. Thus, by building ATLANTIS, an incontinent continent, Hinrich ironically mirrors the West German model JONA and its side effects.

In fact, JONA's barely existent sales to East Germans highlight the indifference to the door-to-door seller<sup>87</sup> and a rather useless product such as room fountains through the imposed capitalism. Nevertheless, Hinrich realizes the potential of such an economic system and starts to use it to his own advantage. So, in order not to have to explain his carelessness about the broken JONA, Hinrich decides to refashion it using readily available materials from his old work, such as pens in the shape of the Berlin TV tower:

So mußte ich etwas, wegen des gekürzten Zuleitungsschlauches, auch den Fernsehturm, der jetzt das Zentrum bildete, ein Stück kürzen. Ich sägte ihn, bevor ich ihn wasserfest aufklebte, unterhalb der Kuppel ab. Dadurch wurde er zum Kegelstumpf, was wiederum den Gedanken nahelegte, um ihn herum eine Vulkanlandschaft entstehen zu lassen. (Sparschuh 93)

This seemingly simple refashioning of a room fountain is the metaphorical representation of Hinrich's personal transformation. The shortened supply pipe from the original model and the shortened TV tower replica, which he describes as a *Kegelstumpf*<sup>88</sup>, are metaphors for the process of German reunification and the castration as well as masculinization of Hinrich. It is a castration as symbolized by having to shorten the supply pipe and the TV tower pen, but also a simultaneous

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<sup>87</sup> The indifference to and rejection of door-to-door sellers can also be seen in Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!* when Alex and Denis try to sell satellite dishes and are met with rejection.

<sup>88</sup> A *Kegelstumpf* is stump (*Stumpf*) of a cone (*Kegel*), or mathematically speaking a frustum of a cone.

masculinization, because Hinrich is able to utilize an East German product to enhance the West German foundation. Without this enhancement ATLANTIS would not have been possible. To clarify this metaphor, the central fountain elements are phallic symbols and by shortening them castration takes place – a castration of the former East German *Vaterland*<sup>89</sup>. Through it the importance and impact of the former GDR is lessened. The assembly of the water supply pipe and the TV tower culminates in a working fountain - or in phallic language, an erection and ejaculation. In connection with Atlantis as the lost continent, the previously mentioned urinary incontinence connects to Atlantis being an incontinent and ATLANTIS as being incontinent, or in German *Hemmungslosigkeit* and *hemmungslos*. In the same way the water flows *hemmungslos* or with a certain *Hemmungslosigkeit* from ATLANTIS, so are the customers' reactions and its sale success: "... die Erfolgsbilanz ging ausschließlich auf das Konto von ATLANTIS. Um genau zu sein: *fast* ausschließlich" (Sparschuh 109).

Throughout building ATLANTIS the sexual connotations have been implicit, but selling ATLANTIS forces Hinrich to confront his sexuality and manhood. They are first tested during a sale's visit to "Studio Manuela," a rather nondescript place. After entering the establishment not knowing what awaits him he soon discovers that Frau Manuela is a dominatrix, yet another form of incontinence, a *sexuelle Hemmungslosigkeit* that she exudes:

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<sup>89</sup> A *Vaterland* is one's homeland – usually the country that one feels a belonging to and it usually is the same as the country where one was born. (<http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB?lemma=vaterland>) Its literal translation to English is fatherland.

Ich will jetzt nicht davon erzählen, wie mich, ehe, ich überhaupt ein einziges Wort hervorbringen konnte, aus dem Handgelenk dieser Person ein Peitschenhieb traf; darauf, trotz meines Protestes, ein zweiter, noch viel schärferer – und zwar mit der Erklärung versehen: >>Das brauchst du, ja, nicht wahr, das tut dir gut<<; wie ich mich irrsinnigerweise an meinem Karton festklammerte, . . . (Sparschuh 116)

Before Hinrich can utter any words Frau Manuela whips him with a lash and despite protesting calls from him she continues. However, instead of protecting himself, he protects the box that holds ATLANTIS, because it represents his masculinity and his newly found purpose in life: “>>Was haben wir denn da für eine kleine süße Sauerei?<< entrissen werden sollte; wie ich es aber nicht zuließ und ihn, als gälte es mein Leben, verteidigte“ (Sparschuh 116). He is unable to control her and slips into a submissive role, which is a familiar role having lived in a dictatorship for the majority of his life. Aside from the familiarity of submission, Hinrich also displays a certain degree of wanting to be punished and having pain inflicted upon him by Frau Manuela. This want stems from Hinrich feeling guilty, guilty for his lies, but also for betraying what he used to be. After tolerating some punishment and having wounds inflicted upon him, which his weak protests only encouraged, he hesitantly mentions trade control and police, which finally gets her to stop.<sup>90</sup> This event provides Hinrich with many opportunities to criticize. First, it is a critique of capitalism, because despite the misunderstanding behind Hinrich’s appointment, Frau Manuela demands to be paid for services rendered:

>>Bin zwar allen erdenklichen Abartigkeiten von ganzem Herzen aufgeschlossen, und darf von mir sagen: ich bin ein moderner Mensch – aber: daß man nach Lust & Laune für nichts und wieder nichts (beziehungsweise für

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<sup>90</sup> *ibid.* 116.



100 Mark = ein Viertel der Jüterborg-Einnahmen) hemmungslos verkloppt wird – das will mir nicht in den Kopf. NEIN DANKE! NICHT MIT MIR! – Klappe zu, Affe tot.<< In dieser Nacht fehlte mir Julia sehr. (Sparschuh 117)

It also criticizes the domination of West over East Germany and it makes him see his dominant-submissive relationship to Freitag: “. . . und nicht wußte, wie ich Freitag heute Abend in die Augen sehen sollte . . .” (Sparschuh 117). It leads him to question his domination over Freitag, even if only for a short time. Additionally, it connects to “Engels’ Schrift >Anteil der Arbeit an der Menschwerdung des Affen”<sup>91</sup> (Sparschuh 138), that Hinrich reads and comments on. The question of work (*Arbeit*) is one he has been contemplating for a while and rightfully so, since the GDR referred to itself as *Arbeiterstaat* (worker’s state). According to the principles of Marxism and Leninism: “<<Die Arbeit, höre ich, habe den Menschen geformt. Meinetwegen. Wäre es da nicht an der Zeit, sich einmal – auch sehr *kritisch!* – mit der Arbeit auseinanderzusetzen?>>“ [original emphasis] (Sparschuh 138). Hinrich reluctantly agrees that work formed the human, while also simultaneously and critically questioning work itself. In fact, he continues to contemplate this question, which ironically reemerges during time off from work. After reading Engels’ work Hinrich makes a suggestion regarding an update to the existing essay: “Kurze Ergänzungsschrift . . . unter dem Titel >Anteil der Arbeit an der Affenwerdung des Menschen<” (Sparschuh 138), which is also to include a rethinking of Engel’s parts on work, language, and thought.<sup>92</sup> Hinrich’s comical and ironic reversal of Engels’ essay title comes in light of his experience as a room fountain solicitor. Here, his period of

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<sup>91</sup> Friedrich Engels “The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man”

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.* 139.

unemployment contrasts with his new job allowing him to at once to agree with Engels' original title and to reverse it. Namely, his work as a *Vertreter* of the socialist order and of room fountains gives him a purpose – humanizes him, but the tasks associated with each job, such as making lists or going door-to-door, are rather menial and therefore dehumanizing, which is corroborated by Strüver: “>Ich mach mich für die Firma zum Affen<” (Sparschuh 138). Neither the centrally planned economy of the GDR nor capitalism in West Germany represent perfect economic systems, which Hinrich realizes: “Keine Revision des Marxismus, aber schrittweise Modernisierung. – Daran hat es immer gefehlt!” (Sparschuh 139). His proposed solution is a modernisation of Marxism (*Realsozialismus* – Real Socialism),<sup>93</sup> which was one of the GDR's premises that never happened. However, the progress Hinrich makes regarding his own development and his place as an East German in a united Germany becomes more apparent through ATLANTIS and its success.

Hinrich's initial model for ATLANTIS could have remained a unicum, but its success in comparison to the JONA model encouraged him to refashion all the remaining JONA models into ATLANTIS ones. Thus, he realizes the value of ATLANTIS and utilizes capitalist strategies, strategies he criticizes at the same time. Thus, by selling ATLANTIS he at once is a *Vertreter* of the capitalist system and the socialist order. At the same time, Hinrich is also a *Verräter* (a sellout) by selling a rather useless commodity to East Germans, his fellow people, who refuse to partake in anything West German and cleave to their *Ostalgie*. What he is selling is a piece of the

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<sup>93</sup> Alex Kerner implements Real Socialism when he restores the GDR in his mother's bedroom in Wolfgang Becker's film *Good Bye, Lenin!*.

GDR, *Ostalgie*, and by extension, the memories and emotions associated with it. In the process, he also sells himself and, like Faust, his soul. By succumbing to the capitalist system they too betray the socialist order. Nevertheless, he continues the refashioning of JONA models into ATLANTIS ones.

The first ATLANTIS models include a copper plate shaped like the GDR due to yet another careless act and intuition:

. . . als [ich] in mühseliger Nachtarbeit ausgerechnet die Umriss der DDR, meines untergegangenen Landes, aus der Kupferplatte herausäg[te] . . . (Vielleicht war das damals auch nur aus einer Laune heraus geschehen oder, wie ich mich zu erinnern glaube, weil an einer Ecke der rechteckigen Kupferplatte ein Stück herausgebrochen war ... .). (Sparschuh 102)

A broken corner of the copper plate changes its rectangular shape and inspires him to saw the plate into a shape resembling the GDR, which, combined with the Berlin TV tower, becomes the room fountain ATLANTIS. Even though it was supposed to be a unicum, it sells instantly, because unlike its builder “ATLANTIS sprach für sich ...”<sup>94</sup> (Sparschuh 101). In fact, ATLANTIS becomes so popular that Hinrich begins to transform all JONA into ATLANTIS models. In doing so, he uses capitalism and *Ostalgie*, both of which he simultaneously criticizes, to further his career and to transform his unemployed former self into a successful working member of a united Germany.

By being a product of West and East German parts ATLANTIS at once represents unification and the *Zwischen*, which Hinrich also embodies. As such, it also criticizes what it stands for: *Ostalgie* and capitalism. The first sale of Atlantis happens

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<sup>94</sup> Für sich sprechen = to speak volumes

rather accidentally and after a disappointing viewing of JONA, because one of the customers' children discovers the box containing ATLANTIS and asks to open it. Hinrich follows the child's command and unpacks ATLANTIS in silence: "Ich sagte kein Wort. Im übrigen, wenn es etwas zu sagen gab: ATLANTIS sprach für sich ..." (Sparschuh 101). The first model sells itself silently and without Hinrich needing to employ his sale tactics. By representing *Ostalgie* ATLANTIS plays right into the hands of the *Ostalgiker*<sup>95</sup>. So, ATLANTIS not only silently speaks for itself, it also silently sells itself, which, in contrast to the other room fountain models, is any salesman's dream. At once, ATLANTIS represents and perpetuates *Ostalgie* and capitalism, and upholds an economic cycle that criticizes both. Hinrich, however, does not understand the self-representative critique of ATLANTIS, a critique that also speaks for itself. Neither do his customers, which in turn leads to the sales success:

Der Erfolg, den ich mit ATLANTIS hatte, war mir unbegreiflich, ja, bisweilen auch unheimlich. Vielleicht lag das daran, daß ich solange abgeschirmt von allem in meinem kleinen Hobbyraum vor mich hin vegetiert hatte und die große Welt draußen nicht mehr begriff? Zwar spürte ich manchmal, wenn ich an früher dachte, so etwas wie einen Phantomschmerz, aber ... . (Sparschuh 103)

Hinrich cannot understand the success of ATLANTIS, because it is *unbegreiflich* and *unheimlich* to him. The adjective *unheimlich* emphasizes Hinrich's psychological disconnection. The root *heim* (home) refers to the GDR, Hinrich's apartment and more specifically, his *Hobbyraum*, and his name.<sup>96</sup> *Heim* is also the root for *Heimat*,

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<sup>95</sup> *Ostalgiker* are people that love *Ostalgie*

<sup>96</sup> Hinrich is a form of the name *Heinrich*, whose origin lies in the German words *heim* (home, house) and *Reich* (territory of a ruler). Therefore, Heinrich or Hinrich in this novel, means *Hausherr* (head of household).

which in connection to *unheimlich* makes ATLANTIS, the former GDR, the apartment and the *Hobbyraum* now an *unheimliche Heimat* - an uncanny and unhomely home. He acknowledges feeling something that he describes as *Phantomschmerz* (phantom pain). Phantom pain is a medical or psychological condition, in which the patient feels the sensation of pain for a limb or organ that has been removed. Here, it is a metaphor for the disappearance of the GDR and although Hinrich knows that the GDR no longer exists, he still feels its presence. In fact, the word *Phantomschmerz* is closely connected to *Ostalgie* in that it highlights its negative side, the absence of the GDR. A *Phantom* is an *unwirkliche Erscheinung*, *Trugbild*<sup>97</sup>, or an unreal appearance, which in combination with *Schmerz* (pain) becomes the pain of unreal appearance. In connection with *Ostalgie* it highlights the aspects that most East Germans are nostalgic for an unreal appearance of the GDR that did not exist. They are chasing a phantom GDR, one that did not have travel restrictions or a government spying on their citizens. This phantom is a German Democratic Republic, one that appeared democratic, but never was. The *Phantomschmerz* is the pain of never having a truly democratic GDR. They realize that the (phantom) GDR like Atlantis is lost. So, by selling ATLANTIS Hinrich simultaneously reinforces *Ostalgie* and criticizes it. Interestingly, one of the treatments for phantom pain is mirror box therapy, which bases its success on the illusion of movement and touch of the phantom limb by receiving feedback from the brain in order to alleviate pain. In regard to ATLANTIS, it is the *Phantomschmerz* and the mirror box treatment that allow East Germans to see

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<sup>97</sup> <http://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Phantom>

what they are missing and what they are mourning, which certainly contributes to its success. All these previously mentioned factors contribute to the fetishist and cult status ATLANTIS acquires. In fact, the first sale exemplifies this:

Als ich nun den Mann bat, den Einschaltknopf zu drücken, und sich nach wenigen Sekunden langsam aus dem Wasser die Kupferplatte mit dem darauf befestigten Fernsehturm emporhob, war es still – doch es war eine feierliche, eine andächtige Stille! (Das abschließende A [= action], also das Unterschreiben des Kaufvertrages, war dann nur noch eine Formsache.) Was war geschehen? (Sparschuh 102)

ATLANTIS creates “eine feierliche, eine andächtige Stille” (Sparschuh 102) – a solemn, reverential silence. The adjectives used to describe the atmosphere – *feierlich* (solemn) and *andächtig* (reverential) – have a religious connotation that is further exaggerated by other customers. Moreover, “[d]ie meisten aber behandelten ATLANTIS wie einen Kultgegenstand. Es waren regelrechte Altarecken, wo er landete; manchmal hatte ich den Eindruck, in einem Traditionskabinett gelandet zu sein“ (Sparschuh 103-104). Most of the ATLANTIS buyers treat it as a cult object – *Kultgegenstand* – and place it on an altar. They take the previous religious experience to an extreme. Witnessing this development Hinrich criticizes it stating that he feels as if he is in a *Traditionskabinett*. A *Traditionskabinett* (tradition chamber) is “a small museum consisting of objects, photographs, and other materials showing the history and the overall development of a place” (Ludwig 2). Thus, ATLANTIS fulfills and represents many functions: For Hinrich, it is a source of income, and for buyers it is piece of *Ostalgie* and a fetishized commodity, which, like so many other GDR commodities, is put into a museum-like space, where it can be worshipped. Although Hinrich criticizes this worship, he is perpetuating it by producing more ATLANTIS

models than he needs. Interestingly, the making of the first ATLANTIS model is based on what one can describe as a religious experience: “Später bin ich oft gefragt worden, wie ich damals auf meine Idee gekommen bin, ob vielleicht >>Auferstanden aus Ruinen<< mich inspiriert hätte? Ich weiß es nicht. Ich konnte es nie genau sagen“ (Sparschuh 93). „*Auferstanden aus Ruinen*“ was the national anthem of the GDR and upon closer inspection of the German word for anthem – *Hymne* – it supports the previously mentioned religious connotations for ATLANTIS. More to the point, ATLANTIS resurrects Atlantis and the GDR.

The national anthem of the GDR “Auferstanden aus Ruinen” is a lyrical representation of the transformation of the room fountain, Hinrich, and Germany. In fact, the anthem partially reflects Sparschuh’s novel. In order to draw the necessary connections, it is necessary to analyze the entire anthem. Johannes Becher, a German poet and later secretary of culture and president of the Cultural Association of the GDR, and Hanns Eisler, an Austrian-Jewish composer, were commissioned to write and compose an anthem for the newly founded GDR. The text consists of three stanzas, which were sung until 1972/1973, the years in which both German countries signed the *Grundlagenvertrag* and became members of the United Nations. Both events signaled the absolute sovereignty of each German state and erased the underlying hope of unification anchored in the Basic Law of West Germany and mentioned in the anthem with the line “Deutschland, einig Vaterland” (“Germany, united fatherland”).<sup>ii</sup> In general, the anthem describes how Germany rose from its

ruins and was looking toward its future by overcoming its past, being productive and uniting in peace.

“Auferstanden aus Ruinen” is the opening line of the anthem, and it is also the descriptive statement for the ATLANTIS room fountain and Hinrich. Additionally, it is also reminiscent of PANTA RHEIn and its president, Bolding, regarding the post-1945 period. Factually, German reunification has opened two wounds: one involving a confrontation with the GDR past and one’s own role in it, and the other involving the Nazi past, a wound that was opened for East Germans as they never had to confront that past before, and reopened for West Germans. *Auferstanden* is the simple past tense of *auferstehen*, which means *wieder zum Leben erwachen*, or to come back to life in English. As such, *auferstehen* essentially implies that something or someone is present that needs to be brought back to life, but not necessarily to its original state. In a religious context, it means to resurrect or to be resurrected. In its noun form, *Auferstehung*, is not only a resurrection of the lost continent, but also of the GDR. Combined with ATLANTIS’ placement in altar-like space, ATLANTIS becomes a secular idol. In the case of the room fountain, the model JONA lay in ruins and Hinrich brought it back to life as ATLANTIS. Then, Hinrich found himself in ruins – unemployed and questioning his role in society - after German reunification and with ATLANTIS he is able to come back to life, so that “die Sonne schön wie nie [ü]ber Deutschland scheint<sup>98</sup>.” In fact, this is actually the last two lines of the first and the last stanza, and they also allude to the the novel’s ending: “Drüben, im Osten, ließ

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<sup>98</sup> „And the sun shines above Germany like neverbefore.“



sich schüchtern die Sonne blicken. Daß die sich das überhaupt noch traute ... Immerhin, sie war schamrot!“<sup>99</sup> (Sparschuh 158). Despite the sun emerging shyly and being flushed with shame (*schamrot*), it symbolizes life and rising in the east<sup>100</sup> means that, borrowing words from Hinrich’s horoscope from the novel’s opening, “[r]osige Zeiten sind in Sicht“ (Sparschuh 158). Like the sun, Hinrich arises shyly from the ruins and flushed from the east with a rosy future of becoming *Vertriebsleiter Ost*. Moreover, what Becher poetically wrote to become the anthem of the GDR at its beginning is also the underlying storyline of *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen* and its protagonist Hinrich: a resurrection from ruins.

Hinrich’s role as an East German in a united Germany is finally called into question and he has to make a decision regarding his future of becoming a *Vertriebsleiter Ost* – a sales manager for Eastern Germany for PANTA RHEIn and/or a manager of the expellees of the former GDR. In fact, being a sales manager for PANTA RHEIn can provide him with the opportunity to integrate himself and become a united Germany. In the position of *Vertriebsleiter Ost* he would be able to help facilitate the integration of East Germans into a united Germany by making their transition easier through the sales of ATLANTIS. Though, it would be a betrayal of everything he stood for at the novel’s beginning: a loyal GDR citizen. This question and decision follow a phone call from PANTA RHEIn’s boss, Alois Boldinger, who offers him the position of *Vertriebsleiter Ost*, a decision that Hinrich has to make by

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<sup>99</sup> Over there, in the East, the sun shyly showed her face. That she even still dared to do that ... Nevertheless, she was flushed with shame!

<sup>100</sup> The rising sun in the east is also how Hilbig’s novel *Das Provisorium* ends.

the new year. This offer is based on Hinrich's sales success with ATLANTIS, a success that he has had to hide – *verheimlichen*. Indeed, secrecy (*Heimlichkeit*) is a theme that runs throughout novel and is used by East and West Germans alike. *Heimlichkeit* also closely connects etymologically to other themes already outlined, such as *Heimat*, and *heimlich*, and their derivatives. Additionally, it connects to its antonyms *Vertriebe* and *Vertriebsleiter*. Hinrich's secrecy about ATLANTIS extends to him also hiding his pending promotion to his colleague Strüver, who has secrets of his own: "Mir schien, er hatte etwas vor mir zu verbergen, ein Geheimnis, das ihn bedrückte" (Sparschuh 122), namely that "Uwe ist schwul!" [original emphasis] (Sparschuh 125). Strüver's *Geheimnis* (secret) remains *geheim*, but because Hinrich is a trusted (*vertrauter*)<sup>101</sup> colleague, he nevertheless manages to figure out his secret, which is most likely due to his past as a Stasi agent. Although neither secret is openly revealed to the other, they are revealed to the *vertrauter* reader. Both *Geheimnisse* remain a *Heimlichkeit*, concealed but also revealed. The one secret that remains hidden from Strüver is Hinrich's offer to become *Vertriebsleiter Ost*, which leads to a crisis of conscience that is further fueled by trying to save his marriage.

In order to make these decisions and to define himself, Hinrich places himself in a transitional space, a *Zwischen*, namely Bahnhof Zoo in Berlin. This space allows him to reflect on where and who he has been and to find out where and who he wants to be. In his attempts to find Julia over the Christmas holidays he reverts to established STASI behaviors: "optische Überwachung" and a "Kontrollgang"

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<sup>101</sup> *Geheim* and *vertraut* are etymologically connected as outlined in Grimm's dictionary: <http://woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB/?sigle=DWB&mode=Vernetzung&lemid=GG04837>

(Sparschuh 148). He wants to foil any possible escape attempt by the *Ausreißerin* (runaway), a word which clearly connects to the German noun *Ausreise* (departure) and *Ausreisende* (departing traveler) and is reminiscent of the *Ausreiseantrag* in the GDR, an exit visa that allowed GDR citizens to officially depart the GDR. Even though Julia is neither a runaway nor needs an exit visa, Hinrich still treats her as a STASI *Observationsobjekt*. Despite “Julias aromatischer verpackte Geruchprobe” (Sparschuh 149), an odor sample, which the STASI frequently took from and used for suspects, he fails to find Julia, but decides to stay in the train station with his newfound friends, a group of homeless people. He feels connected to them, because they are homeless, *obdachlos*, and he is homelandless, *heimatlos*. Being in this transitional space and around people, who are in a similar situation, he partially lets his guard down and his fear of being found out is lowered and he readily admits to being from the GDR<sup>102</sup> and even identifies himself as *Vertriebsleiter*: “>>Ich bin Vertriebsleiter<<, gab ich deshalb bekannt. . . .>>Vertriebsleiter Ost<<, fügte ich leise, weil mir das plötzlich wichtig erschien, hinzu” (Sparschuh 150). Even though this announcement is rather hesitant, he begins to sense an importance in being a *Vertriebsleiter Ost*, especially after being a successful solicitor selling “ostalgic” room fountains. Moreover, he begins to see himself as a savior: “>>Hört! Ich will mein Brot mit euch teilen.<<” (Sparschuh 151). Although Hinrich shares his food with the group of homeless men, his efforts to connect with them fail, because he is not *obdachlos* and there is no shared experience and identity. Now, after also being acutely aware

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<sup>102</sup> *ibid.* 155.

of being without a homeland – *heimatlos*, he realizes that he is also ironically and involuntarily a de facto leader of the expellees of the GDR. Thus, Hinrich can fulfill both roles, be a sales manager and leader of the GDR expellees. In fact, by taking on both jobs he can continue to fulfill his ambiguous role as being a double and doubly ambiguous (self-) critic. On the morning of New Year's Day, Hinrich and Freitag leave the train station as the sun shyly emerges. The rhetorical question and exclamation of how dare it emerges from the east refers to Hinrich's emergence as an East German in the position of *Vertriebsleiter Ost* as opposed to a Western German. He begins his role as being a leader of the GDR expellees and the possibly still submissive East German reader by commanding him and Freitag, another submissive figure, "Na, los, komm schon! "Komm" (Sparschuh 158).

In conclusion, Hinrich not only exists in a *Zwischen*, but he becomes a *Zwischen*, a suspended figure. This space allows him to take on the role as a double and doubly ambiguous (self-) critic. As this critic, he can navigate, question and (re)negotiate being colonized and a colonizer, expellee and *Vertriebsleiter Ost*, submissive and dominant, and using *Ostalgie* and capitalism to further each other. The text also mirrors this doubling and ambiguity linguistically. In doing so, Hinrich and the novel continuously question themselves and in turn ask the reader to question it and him or herself, especially former GDR citizens. The novel does not entirely resolve Hinrich's and its own suspended state indicating that a continued state of suspension is needed to examine the GDR and its citizens in a united Germany.

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<sup>i</sup> Aufsteigt der Strahl und fallend gießt

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Er voll der Marmorschale Rund,  
 Die, sich verschleiern, überfließt  
 In einer zweiten Schale Grund;  
 Die zweite gibt, sie wird zu reich,  
 Der dritten wallend ihre Flut,  
 Und jede nimmt und gibt zugleich  
 Und strömt und ruht.

Quelle: ibid. 29.

<sup>ii</sup> Auferstanden aus Ruinen  
 Und der Zukunft zugewandt,  
 Laß uns dir zum Guten dienen,  
 Deutschland, einig Vaterland.  
 Alte Not gilt es zu zwingen,  
 Und wir zwingen sie vereint,  
 Denn es muß uns doch gelingen,  
 Daß die Sonne schön wie nie  
 |: Über Deutschland scheint. :|

Glück und Frieden sei beschieden  
 Deutschland, unserm Vaterland.  
 Alle Welt sehnt sich nach Frieden,  
 Reicht den Völkern eure Hand.  
 Wenn wir brüderlich uns einen,  
 Schlagen wir des Volkes Feind!  
 Laßt das Licht des Friedens scheinen,  
 Daß nie eine Mutter mehr  
 |: Ihren Sohn beweint. :|

Laßt uns pflügen, laßt uns bauen,  
 Lernt und schafft wie nie zuvor,  
 Und der eignen Kraft vertrauend,  
 Steigt ein frei Geschlecht empor.  
 Deutsche Jugend, bestes Streben  
 Unsres Volks in dir vereint,  
 Wirst du Deutschlands neues Leben,  
 Und die Sonne schön wie nie  
 |: Über Deutschland scheint. :|

Quelle: [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auferstanden\\_aus\\_Ruinen](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auferstanden_aus_Ruinen)

## Chapter IV

### The Long Good Bye: Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!*

“Die DDR, die ich für meine Mutter schuf, wurde immer mehr die DDR, die ich mir vielleicht gewünscht hätte.” Alex Kerner in *Good Bye, Lenin!*

Unlike my other primary sources, Wolfgang Becker's 2003 film *Good Bye, Lenin!* received considerable public and academic attention thanks to its success at the box office in Germany, Europe and even the US. In fact, it is among the top ten most successful German movies in Germany and the US. The film opens with a flashback home movie montage of the seemingly idyllic life of the Kerner family in the summer 1978 in the GDR. The film then cuts to a scene showing a Stasi interrogation of the mother, Christiane Kerner, that reveals the father's secret escape to West Germany. Following a short stay in a mental ward, Christiane devotes her life to her children, Ariane and Alexander, and more importantly to the GDR. On the eve of October 7, 1989, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the GDR, Christiane, who is on her way to the festivities in the *Palast der Republik*<sup>103</sup>, sees her son Alex being arrested after participating in a demonstration for basic rights in the GDR. She collapses and falls into a 8-month long coma during which the GDR and all of Germany undergo massive changes. After she wakes up, the doctor cautions Alex not to excite his mother unnecessarily or she could die. From that point forward, Alex has to return parts of his and his family's life to what it was before the fall of Berlin Wall. This is the

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<sup>103</sup> The *Palast der Republik* was the seat of the parliament of the GDR.

beginning of a charade that soon takes on its own life. Still ending with the death of Christiane, it nevertheless reworks and rewrites in the interim the history of the events of 1989 and 1990.

The majority of scholarly contributions on *Good Bye, Lenin!* focus on the phenomenon *Ostalgie*, the mother and son relationship and how they intersect with identity and memory. In their individual analyses of the film, *Ostalgie* is most often criticized as looking at the GDR through rose-colored glasses and presenting it in a romanticized way while also describing it as a means to remember the GDR. Finger quotes Berdahl and suggests, “*Ostalgie*, in all its various forms, thus does not entail an identification with the former GDR state, but rather an identification with different forms of oppositional solidarity and collective memory. It can evoke feelings of longing, mourning, resentment, anger, relief, redemption, and satisfaction – often within the same individuals” (42). Cook agrees with this assessment and expands it stating “*Ostalgie* grew out of this disadvantaged position as a defense mechanism against the loss of cultural identity and the prospect of becoming second-class citizens in unified Germany. But the path to a collective identity that includes western Germans draws less from a nostalgia for the material culture than from a silent notion of community that united many of the citizens of the GDR” (“Recharting Skies” 45). Godeanu-Kenworthy combines Finger’s and Cook’s argument to state that “. . . the film emerges as a powerful argument in favor of the healing potential behind the phenomenon of *Ostalgia*, which can benefit both East and West in their search for a common national identity and a common understanding of recent history” (163).

Although I agree with these assessments of *Ostalgie*, the film presents a more nuanced view. Initially, it is a means to keep Christiane alive, but as Alex's scheme becomes more complex, so does the function of *Ostalgie*. As the film progresses it uproots and undermines itself while simultaneously domesticating Western products. However, *Ostalgie* is only one of the interweaving themes, which have Sigmund Jähn as their leitmotif. Of course, scholarship acknowledges his importance within the film (Cook 2007, Creech, Finger, Schmidt, Uecker), especially as a male role model for Alex, but fails to connect him to motifs of space (outer space, private versus public), utopia, departures and arrivals, memories (individual versus collective), and media. Through a critical examination of these themes I will show that Jähn as leitmotif guides Alex's decisions from his early childhood to his mother's death. Through constant framing and reframing, he lays open the opposing and at times contradictory aforementioned motifs. Through this exposure Alex comes to realize that "[d]as Land, das meine Mutter verließ, ein Land [war], an das sie geglaubt hatte. Und das wir bis zu ihrer letzten Sekunde überleben ließen. Ein Land, das es in Wirklichkeit nie so gegeben hat. Ein Land, das in meiner Erinnerung immer mit meiner Mutter verbunden sein wird" (Lichtenberg 131). In this final voiceover he recognizes the impossibility of his artificially constructed GDR. By rewriting the history of the fall of the Berlin Wall and unification Alex is able to navigate and mediate the culturally and politically unstable space between October 7, 1989 and 1990, which in turn allows him to find closure from the GDR and his mother's death.



*Good Bye, Lenin!* is a film that takes up the previously discussed topics positioning itself temporally, spatially, and in this case cinematically, between reality and fiction. The film's release in 2003 was accompanied by the tagline: "Die DDR lebt weiter – auf 79qm!" (Becker ). Fourteen years after the end of the GDR, the tagline uses the word "weiter" (lives on) as opposed to "wieder" (again) expressing the notion that the GDR to some extent never really ceased to exist and remains present in one form or another. It clearly points to the fact that a state of suspended animation not only exists within the film, but also among former East Germans, one of the target audiences. The opening sequence, including the opening credits, consists of a series of home-movie clips and superimposed still images before revealing the film's title. In connection with the film's closing sequence, it provides the audience with a specific temporal and spatial frame.

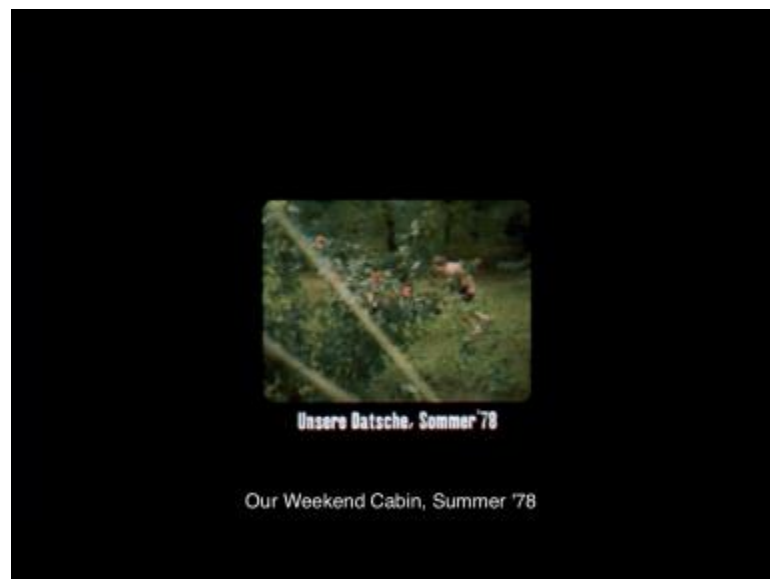


Figure 3: *Good Bye, Lenin!* 00:00:28



Figure 4: *Good Bye, Lenin!* 00:01:11

Here, the film clearly locates itself in 1978 and in East Berlin through various visual markers such as the word “*Datsche*,” the GDR state seal, East German cars, the Berlin TV tower, Alexanderplatz with its Weltzeituhr, and the German acronyms for the GDR and the Soviet Union on young Alex’s t-shirt. However, there is a difference in the identification of and connection to these visual markers on the part of the audience. Not only is this disjunction the focus of the film but it plays out in the viewing experience of its various audiences:<sup>104</sup> “ . . . the observer’s identity and cultural context is clearly going to have a bearing on how the various aspects of image constellation may or may not come to override or augment each other” (Manghani, “Metapictures” 125). Former GDR citizens will view the film through their pre-unification experiences and will readily identify with certain products and events. The

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<sup>104</sup> For further information on the differentiated viewing experiences see Allan 2006, Coulter, and Manghani 2009.

first shot shows Arianne pushing Alex in a wheelbarrow as part of their home movie with the caption “Unsere Datsche, Sommer ‘78” (*Good Bye, Lenin!*<sup>105</sup> 00:00:28). The word “Datsche” is readily identifiable by former GDR citizens, because it comes from Russian and was introduced into the German language during the Cold War.<sup>106</sup> The caption also uses the possessive pronoun “unsere” (our), which at once includes and excludes certain viewers. It marks a divide between the various audiences: those who can identify with the “Unsere Datsche” caption and those who cannot. For many West German viewers “Datsche” was – at least still in 2003 – probably meaningless and provides little clue as to where the film takes place. However, the later images will provide clarification culminating in the image displaying the film’s title *Good Bye, Lenin!*



Figure 5: *Good Bye, Lenin!* 00:02:07

<sup>105</sup> Going forward, all parenthetical references to the film *Good Bye, Lenin!* will use the acronym GBL.

<sup>106</sup> A *Datsche* is term derived from Russian and refers to a weekend/summer house with a piece of land/garden used by many GDR citizens to get away from the cities and the cramped housing styles called *Plattenbauten*.

The shot shows a sheet of 20-cent stamps with various images that provide the audience with an overview of the film's premise. At its center is a bronze bust of Lenin establishing together with the title the film's main narrative, a transition away from a communist/socialist ideology (visually marked though the red color and the red stars in the image), which is further emphasized by the words "Good Bye."<sup>107</sup> Referencing the end of the Cold War, the title also celebrates GDR achievements. Sigmund Jähn, whose picture is shown in the lower lefthand corner, was the first German in space as part of the Soviet Union's space program.

Jähn's real and fictional character is central to the main protagonist's, Alex, development and becomes a way to show Alex's own complex relationship to his upbringing. Jähn's figure frames the film in significant ways: not only do important events in Alex's life coincide with Jähn's actual achievements, but the latter's appearance as a taxi driver has a way of relativizing those achievements and of bringing him, as it were, back down to earth. Jähn becomes in a sense Alex's surrogate father (*Ersatzvater*) and a kind of ironic role model, one who comes to personify Alex's charade. The footage of the real Jähn provides the film with a certain authenticity in the opening sequence, while his appearance as a taxi driver underscores Alex's charade and self-delusion. Thus, Jähn presents at once the space between reality and fiction, or rather utopia, the truth and a lie, authenticity and (un)conscious manipulation.

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<sup>107</sup> "Good Bye" is an English greeting that Germans in 2003 know through their exposure to English-speaking media and pop-culture.

By incorporating historical footage in the entire film, Becker seeks both to authenticate the GDR and to question it, doing so in the latter case through Alex and Denis' manipulation of historical footage. Specifically, Jähn's space flight alludes to the GDR's utopian endeavors of socialism that remained unfulfilled. It confronts the viewer "with the conflicted and often split nature of socialist identity" (Creech 114).<sup>108</sup> In short, the film invites the audience, above all viewers in the former East and West, to revisit the events of 1989-1990, to reexamine how they might have experienced, witnessed or seen them in person or on TV, or how they remember them and the GDR. Similar to the mirror box treatment for phantom pain, *Good Bye Lenin!* presents the viewer with a utopian version of the GDR, which partially causes the pain of the lost GDR to disappear. Yet, by exposing the fake utopian GDR through media manipulation the audience is confronted with the unreality and impossibility of it, which Alex realizes at the end of the film.




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<sup>108</sup> Jennifer Creech. "A Few Good Men: Gender, Ideology, and Narrative Politics in *The Lives of Others* and *Good Bye, Lenin!*." *Women in German Yearbook* 25 (2009) 113. Print.

Figure 6: *Good Bye, Lenin!* 00:02:38

The opening sequence fades into the live stream of Jähn's departure to become the first German in space (Fig. 6), which the Kerner children are watching. This news item within the film serves several functions. First, it locates the film temporally on August 26, 1978, shortly after the earlier home movie was made. Then, it also establishes the fact that the GDR's utopian space travel endeavors stand in striking contrast to the GDR citizens' travel restrictions. Jähn's flight also coincides with the father's flight to the West, a scene that plays out in the Kerner's apartment. While the Kerner children celebrate Jähn's achievement and the GDR makes propagandistic use of it, the Stasi sternly questions Christiane on the whereabouts of her husband. The questions she is asked vividly show the hostility between the GDR and the FRG by referring to the latter as the capitalist foreign country (*das kapitalistische Ausland*). The agents inquire about possible West German contacts, the state of their marriage and the possibility of a "Republikflucht" (escape from the GDR) in such an intimidating manner that Christiane barely has time to answer. She becomes increasingly agitated and finally has an emotional breakdown, yelling: "Haut ab! Lasst mich in Ruhe!" (Get lost! Leave me alone!)<sup>109</sup> (Lichtenberg 12). This breakdown is also partially due to Christiane being privy to her husband's plans to stay in West Germany; information that neither of her children (including the voiceover of Alex) know at this point. The increasing relentlessness of the Stasi

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<sup>109</sup> All quotes are taken from the script, not the movie. There wording between these two mediums can differ slightly.

agents' questioning in the presence of the children force the young Alex to cover his ears.

A voiceover by an older Alex points to the irony of the situation. Whereas the GDR had reached an international level of success, his personal life had reached an historic low-point. Unbeknownst to him and partially borrowing vocabulary from the Stasi, he assumes that “. . . sich [s]ein Erzeuger im kapitalistischen Ausland von einer Klassenfeindin das Hirn wegvögeln [ließ]” (. . . that his begetter let a class enemy screw his brains out in the capitalist foreign country) (Lichtenberg 10). Alex also depersonalizes his father by referring to him as his *Erzeuger* (begetter), who in his imagination is a fat, burger-eating person who owns a large house and sits by the pool. Alex's image of his father is based on a lie told by his mother and the Western stereotypes perpetuated by the GDR, which, of course, are intended to soften the father's supposed betrayal. What this scene shows are the positive and the negative sides of the GDR, ironically pairing Jähn's extraterrestrial space flight with the father's surreptitious flight abroad. It juxtaposes the themes of departure and arrival, because the father's planned departure to the West simultaneously means the mother's self-imposed physical and psychological arrival in the East. As Cook points out:

Having (the) Jähn (*Doppelgänger*) assume (t)his role weaves a thread back to the young Alex's belief in a socialist society that lives up to its core principles. But it also alludes to the utopian ideals that were a part of its downfall. Space exploration represents in this context the absolute goals that steered East Germany theoretically towards a socialist workers' state, while the political and social reality resembled more an Orwellian nightmare. (Cook 211)

These discrepancies between fiction and reality need to be navigated and mediated and whereas Schmidt suggests that “[Alex’s] mother serves a crucial function in mediating the relationship with a father figure that has been discredited by the victory of West German capitalism” (para. 13) I claim that the mother becomes the mediator between reality and fiction to help herself and her children cope with the father’s defection to the West and to hide the truth about him. Moreover, it allows the mother herself to construct a GDR that she might have wanted to live in. According to Creech, “Christiane Kerner ... is the site of social contradictions, the embodiment of conflict between socialist ideals, and real existing socialism” (115). During her coma, her role as mediator has become pointless. Now, it is Alex who becomes the mediator between reality and fiction, between West and East Germany, and a suspended figure himself. In this role, he constructs a GDR as he might have wished: “Irgendwie musste ich zugeben, dass sich mein Spiel verselbstständigte. Die DDR, die ich für meine Mutter schuf, wurde immer mehr die DDR, die ich mir vielleicht gewünscht hätte“ (Lichtenberg 104). Whereas Christiane adjusted herself to reality as best as she could until she fell into the coma, Alex manipulates it. By using the subjunctive in the past (*gewünscht hätte* – would have wished) he knows that his actions reflect unreal possibilities. By constructing this unreal GDR and rewriting the fall of the Berlin Wall and Reunification Alex is able to navigate the changing space between departing the GDR and arriving in a united Germany.

Christiane’s interrogation also marks an important turning point in the relationship between mother and son. Whereas the earlier home movie shows her



visual and auditory absence as opposed to the father's auditory presence, the latter's departure provides her with the opportunity to take on a leadership and mediator role within their family and in GDR society in general. Following the Stasi interrogation and her husband's escape to West Germany, Christiane falls into a deep depression during which she stops communicating: "Meine Mutter wurde so traurig, dass sie aufhörte zu reden. Sie sprach einfach nicht mehr. Nicht mit uns, nicht mit anderen" (Lichtenberg 10). However, as the audience later learns, her silence and stay in a mental hospital is a ruse to hide her complicity in her husband's escape. The original plan was to follow her husband to West Germany, but once the Stasi question her, the situation becomes more complicated. In the GDR, any visa application or an admission of guilt had severe consequences such as a prison sentence and/or loss of custody of her children. So, in order to avoid this and to evade further questioning from the Stasi in general, Christiane chooses silence.

After his father's departure Alex not only gets closer to his mother, but constructs Jähn as a kind of *Ersatzvater*. He also begins to participate more in particular GDR activities such as miniature railroads<sup>110</sup> and summer camp AG *Junge Raketenbauer* (project group young rocket makers) to emulate his idol's activities. This participation also represents Alex's utopian hope of following in Jähn's footsteps, a hope that will remain unfulfilled and will leave his older version disillusioned. Then, he witnesses the mother's transformation:

Schlafzimmer. Die Mutter räumt das Bettzeug der einen Hälfte des Doppelbettes beiseite. Alex beobachtet sie durch den Türspalt. Die Mutter

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<sup>110</sup> Mini railroads are miniature trains that run through parks. They are not model railroads.

nimmt schwungvoll Krawatten von der Kleiderstange und stopft sie in einen Sack mit der Aufschrift >>Solidarität mit Mosambik<<. (Lichtenberg 173)

The removal of the father's belongings is turned into a donation to an African country with political ties to the GDR. Alex' voiceover describes this ironic scene.

Instead of drowning in sorrow,

hat sich [Christiane] von dieser Zeit an mit unserem sozialistischen Vaterland verheiratet. Da diese Beziehung naturgemäß keine sexuelle war, blieb viel Elan und Tatkraft für uns Kinder und den sozialistischen Alltag übrig. Meine Mutter wurde Förderin des gesellschaftlichen Fortschritts – eine leidenschaftliche Aktivistin für die einfachen Bedürfnisse der Bevölkerung und gegen die kleinen Ungerechtigkeiten des Lebens . . . (Lichtenberg 173)

Following the husband's escape, Christiane figuratively marries the GDR fittingly described as socialist fatherland to put the fragmented family back together. This marriage remains a *Zweckehe* – a marriage of convenience. Despite her social activism, she remains apolitical like her husband. The voiceovers, which an older Alex narrates, function as his thoughts and commentary on his childhood and current events. Moreover, they are a subjective retrospective on the events of the past. At times, they are astute observations and insightful thoughts; at others they are snide remarks and ironic or sarcastic comments. The voiceovers also provide the audience with an alternative auditory version of events and history. They are part of Alex's individual memory. Directly addressing the audience, the voiceover enables them to rethink and re-evaluate their own experiences in the GDR and the subsequent Reunification.

A 10-year time jump to October 7, 1989, shows a scene perfectly visualizing the political and social decay of the GDR and its upcoming disintegration. It is part of a sequence, during which conflict between the GDR and its citizens becomes obvious. Alex, who as a child admired Jähn (and by extension the GDR's achievements) and hoped to follow in his footsteps, has become disillusioned by the GDR and sits on a bench drinking beer in the middle of the day. His clothes and environment -- despite the sunshine -- are drab and sad.<sup>111</sup> His facial expressions convey a mixture of disappointment and dreariness. Except for a few colored posters on an advertising pillar and the flags on the buildings in the background the entire mise-en-scène (Fig. 7) paints a depressing picture of life in the GDR. Another angle of the same shot (Fig. 8) shows the irony of what was officially portrayed to the outside world in contrast to reality in the GDR. The side-angle shot now also shows the entrance to a residential building, which has been decorated with red flags and placards for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the GDR. The flag above the door reads: "Der Mensch steht im Mittelpunkt der sozialistischen Gesellschaft." ("The human being stands at the center of socialist society.") The statement has a hollow ring reminding us in turn that the German Democratic Republic was only democratic in name. Alex, one of the people in this socialist society, is off center in this shot and aptly demonstrates that human beings were not at the core of the GDR's socialist society, but really rather marginalized.

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<sup>111</sup> This color scheme is typical for movies set in the GDR. For example, *Das Leben der Anderen* uses the the same muted colors: blue, grey, brown.



Figure 7: *Good Bye, Lenin!* 00:08:12



Figure 8: *Good Bye, Lenin!* 00:08:17

At the center was the government, which surveilled its own citizens and censored, silenced or imprisoned anyone with opposing views. The pent up response of the population to government tyranny was a mass exodus in October 1989 via the West German embassies in Hungary and the Czech Republic. There were large

demonstrations, specifically the Monday demonstrations in Leipzig and other large GDR cities, in which people expressed their growing dissatisfaction with their government. They demanded freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom of travel, rights they had been denied. Yet, the protesters did not ask for the dissolution of the GDR, only a change in government. The sentiments of “We are the people” and “We are one people” were not chanted until after the GDR borders were already open. The demonstrations, which were not officially allowed, were at times put down with force and participants were arrested. Against the background of these repressive measures, official 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the state continued, combining increasing violence within with a show of stability to the world without.



Figure 9: *Good Bye, Lenin!* 00:08:42

At the time the Eastern European countries were indeed in a precarious state with Gorbachev's policy of glasnost and perestroika (openness and restructuring)

providing an unprecedented opportunity for citizens to demand change. Honecker, who at the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the GDR had been in power for 18 years, refused to adopt Gorbachev's policy. The perfectly staged celebratory parade and the attendance of Gorbachev were nothing but a farce. The shot (Fig.9) of Gorbachev and Honecker shows the two politicians' distance and indifference toward each other.<sup>112</sup> Their facial expressions are emotionless and cold. Both are surrounded by other political figures, who are aged. The absence of younger government officials shows that there is no longer any support for the current and outdated government. Unlike many other celebrations of state holidays across the globe, this is in fact a military parade and a demonstration of the GDR's strength against its foreign and domestic enemies. In light of the recent mass protests it could not help but conjure memories of the Workers' Uprising on June 17, 1953 that was violently suppressed by the Soviet military. The dark and muted colors, which are also used in the previous shots of Alex on the bench, convey a sense of seriousness and strength, but also a sense of finality and death. Thus, the GDR's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary military parade is a celebration of its past might and a *Staatsbegräbnis*. It is not a state funeral, but a funeral for a state, a sentiment that is also voiced by Alex: "Die Zeit roch nach Veränderung, während vor unserem Haus ein überdimensionierter Schützenverein seine letzte Vorstellung gab" (Lichtenberg 17). Alex's voiceover here informs the unknowing viewer that the scene does not mirror reality and change was in the air. Just three days earlier, thousands of East German citizens who had fled to the West

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<sup>112</sup> The entire parade is on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CeePo6BGmHc>) and one can clearly see what this single shot so simply conveys.

German embassies to seek refuge were officially allowed to emigrate to the West. The GDR's concession in this matter shows the weakening of its grip on its citizens. Not even the military, which Alex befittingly calls an oversized gun club, is able to exert any power. In fact, this parade is merely a *letzte Vorstellung* a final show or performance. Later on, Alex will extend this performance with an encore of his own.

While the events of October 7, 1989, and the ensuing conversations between Christiane and Alex seem to foreshadow the end of the movie, at this moment mother and son still seem to have strongly contrasting points of view. Seeking on some level to harmonize their difference, Alex subconsciously takes his mother's words and turns them into actions, leading him to rewrite the history of the fall of the Berlin Wall and German Reunification in order to provide the GDR with a dignified end. Christiane, in her turn, seems to move somewhat closer to Alex. While still writing petitions that show her devotion and commitment to the socialist cause and the GDR, she begins to advocate for change. As the anniversary celebrations are happening, she dictates one of these calls for change to her neighbor. As she does so, Alex sleepily enters the room and begins to mock the celebration and politicians.

During this back and forth the mother contemplates an invitation to the ceremonial act, unsure whether or not to accept it. Certainly, the opportunity to see Gorbachev, the very personification of change, is one motivation to accept the invitation: "Obwohl, Gorbatschow würde ich schon gerne mal aus der Nähe sehen" (Lichtenberg 20). After Alex's derogatory remarks about the politicians attending the ceremony she provocatively asks him: "Und du, was willst du? Abhauen? Es wird sich

nicht ändern, wenn alle abhauen” (Lichtenberg 21). Christiane knows that an escape from the GDR is not the answer to his problems. An escape does not lead to change. That same evening, the mother decides to attend the ceremonial act and the son, unbeknownst to her, attends a protest, which is when their paths as well as fiction and reality intersect. Although the peaceful protesters shout “freedom of the press” and “no violence” the police intervene. At this point, violence ensues and the mother, for possibly the first time, witnesses the physical brutality of the GDR, a country and system she began to believe in and support after her husband’s escape. Protesters are dragged off and beaten. Christiane stands stock-still and shocked. It is clear that her perception of the GDR does not match what she is witnessing. Finally, she snaps out of her shock and yells to the police: “Hören Sie auf damit!” (Stop it!) (Lichtenberg 173). Her demand – like her petitions – goes unheard. Suddenly, she sees Alex being escorted to one of the police trucks. They recognize each other and then, Christiane collapses. Because the policemen are holding Alex back, he is unable to reach her and she remains motionless and unattended. After being detained overnight, Alex is let go because of his mother and rushes to the hospital. The doctor diagnoses her collapse as a heart attack, but it remains unclear whether Alex’s arrest or her witnessing GDR police brutality and violence caused it. While certainly both, I would further claim that Christiane’s heart attack is a psychosomatic response to the surfacing memory of her husband’s escape, her inability to follow through on her own escape plans and the ensuing interrogation by the Stasi.



Any event that affects her family and simultaneously leaves her powerless and exposed to GDR power seems to trigger a physical and psychological response. In 1978, she fell into a deep depression and remained speechless for 8 weeks, and now, she has a heart attack and remains in a coma. When she wakes up eight months later, the doctor, ironically the third doctor since Christiane fell into a coma, instructs Alex to keep his mother away from any excitement to avoid another heart attack. He needs to uphold the gap between reality and fiction. The only way he can do so is to manipulate and rewrite the history of 1989/1990.

In order to reconstruct the GDR and rewrite its history Alex employs stereotypes and clichés to cleverly lie, deceive, and manipulate. For example, when his mother asks what happened to her his answer is:

ALEX: ... das war im Oktober. Ich glaube, du wolltest einkaufen gehen. Du wolltest einkaufen gehen und da war so eine Riesenschlange vor der Kaufhalle. Und dann war's so heiß und dann bist du einfach umgekippt.

MUTTER: Im Oktober?

ALEX (nickt): Es war ein ganz besonders heißer Oktober ... damals.  
(Lichtenberg 45)

Alex ambiguously states that it was an especially hot October, which he does not mean meteorologically but politically. The *heiß* (hot) in a political context refers to the widespread demonstrations for reforms, the mass exodus of GDR citizens, and the resignation of Erich Honecker. The “*heißer Oktober*” is a reference that only the characters except for Christiane and the audience know about. This establishes a connection between the protagonist and the viewer that works outside the film. It also activates the individual memory of the audience, a memory that the mother cannot access. So, she does not question his story, or the queues in front of stores in

the GDR, because they were not unusual. She does, however, question the weather being hot in October. Nevertheless, Christiane believes him. This first deception and the mother's affirmation of "Hat sich ja gar nichts verändert hier" (Lichtenberg 55) after returning to her refurnished bedroom strengthen Alex's resolve to continue his scheme. In a later dialogue with his father, who visits Christiane as a last wish, Alex asks him to lie and states: "Du musst dich nur einmal überwinden, danach ist es ganz einfach" (Lichtenberg 120).

This manipulation and rewriting mainly takes place through imagery and film. These highly self-reflexive media do not only lead Alex to question the public images and memories of the events of 1989/1990, but also lead the audience to question public and private memories of said events. By using real images of real events *Good Bye, Lenin!* provides "a polyperspectival view of the fall of the Wall" (Manghani "Metapictures" 114) that calls for critical (re)examination. The film "re-figure[s] the site/sight of the fall of the Wall to allow for various layers of meaning and relationships to be contested and tested at the same time" (Manghani "Metapictures" 122). The events of 1989/90 were very public with Germans celebrating in the streets while also being televised globally. Becker, and by extension Alex and Denis, take these public screenings and make them private, which permits each audience member to relate to them on a personal level. As much as Alex makes these private screenings for his mother, he also makes to them for himself. He creates a utopia of the GDR that he was denied.

Although the manipulation of the media is easy with the help of his West-German friend and wannabe film director, Denis, it becomes increasingly difficult to obtain GDR products and to portray everyday life. Unlike any other country, the GDR - and anything associated with it -- ceased to exist in less than a year. Incidentally, the fall of the Berlin Wall was an event somewhat accidentally initiated by Günter Schabowski when he declared immediate visa-free travel at a press conference on November 9, 1989. Upon hearing this, East Germans flocked to border crossings and demanded that guards open the borders, who initially hesitated but complied after all. From then on, the Berlin Wall and the GDR border became immaterial. East Germans were quick to depart their GDR lives and replace their old belongings with Western equivalents. With the GDR government scrambling to maintain control and East Germans exiting to West Germany, the West German government soon began its colonial takeover.

Throughout these events, Christiane remains in a coma. Although this coma protects her from experiencing the downfall of her beloved GDR, I claim that its purpose is to allow Alex to see the GDR differently. Instead of associating it with his father's escape, he can see the value and the promise of the GDR. It provides him with the opportunity to construct a fictional/utopian GDR, which is the true democratic and socialist country it had always claimed to be. In fact, Alex continues his mother's fantasy because the potential he sees and imaginatively constructs at the end of the film is the potential she had always seen and that he had wished for.

At first, Alex completely indulges in capitalism and democracy while his mother remains in the coma. During his first trip to West Berlin he witnesses stereotypical capitalist things-- for example, an advertisement for a restaurant by a famous West German, and a sex shop that is showing soft porn on a TV screen. To sum up, anything that can be capitalized on or commodified is being sold. This shiny and flashy, yet unknown and endless world of consumerism stands in complete contrast to what East Germans are used to. The GDR as seen in previous shots was grey and dull. The production of consumer goods was controlled and the prices remained the same. The need for advertising and attractive packaging did not exist, because the government determined what and how much was produced. Choice was almost non-existent. The newness of capitalism was extremely attractive and after 40 years of deprivation, East Germans craved change and choice. In fact, consumerism was definitely encouraged as West Germany gave every GDR citizen 100 DM *Begrüßungsgeld*<sup>113</sup> (welcome money). Alex initially buys into capitalism, promoting and profiting from it. After his workplace is liquidated, he begins working for “X TV”,<sup>114</sup> which sells satellite dishes. At this company, he is paired with a West German colleague, Denis, to mirror reunification. Similarly, In Jens Sparschuh’s *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen* the company PANTA RHEIn did not net any profit in the East German market until the East German Hinrich Lobeck joined the team and started to

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<sup>113</sup> This welcome money was a yearly and later one-time payment, which after the fall of the Berlin Wall was stopped due to the large number of GDR visitors.

<sup>114</sup> The West Germany company name “X TV” is a direct reference to the distributor of *Good Bye Lenin!* “X Verleih” and the German film and TV production company “X Filme Creative Pool.”

sell room fountains. In both it appears that in order to establish a trustworthy connection to East German consumers it is necessary to have an East German salesman or worker.<sup>115</sup> During their sale visits, Denis does the majority of the talking with Alex standing by his side as the token East German needed to establish a trustworthy, if ultimately exploitative relationship with the East German customer. This becomes clear later on when Denis and Alex go to repair the faulty satellite dish of an East German customer. The West German firm winds up turning a profit by selling the East German consumer an inferior product. As one faulty good is exchanged for another, the West German company makes money hand over fist. Additionally, the satellite dishes are tools for spreading capitalism via TV commercials and to show a Western utopia. The fact that it is selling satellite dishes may also be an ironic reference to the now grounded astronaut, Sigmund Jähn.

More generally, the removal of East Germanness from daily life proceeds at such a rapid pace and without any regard for well-established and successful products that it turns into regret and longing for those products. This is known as *Ostalgie*. Alex's endless and unsuccessful search for the ever so elusive *Spreewaldgurken* perfectly describes this state of affairs. Though, the *Ostalgie* in *Good Bye, Lenin!* is not the kind that longs for a return of the GDR. Rather, "[i]t is a form of personal therapy after the shock of reunification as well as an amateurish attempt to regain one's interpretational powers over one's own biography" (Ahbe qtd. in Finger 40). Alex not only uses *Ostalgie* as a means to keep his mother alive, but also change

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<sup>115</sup> The Soviet and Chinese flags are both red with stars on them, which the exclamation point in the title *Good Bye, Lenin!* mirrors.

the biography of the GDR. When his mother wakes up from her coma in early June 1990 the majority of the changes have already taken place, putting Alex in a precarious situation.

He believes that his mother cannot handle the changes and will suffer another heart attack. Thus, he begins his charade of reconstructing the GDR. With the help of Denis he refurnishes his mother's bedroom with her old furniture that Ariane had already marked and removed to the trash. This sequence is shown in fast motion, which not only visually speeds up an otherwise time-consuming process, but also highlights the comical aspects of Alex's undertaking. Alex faces his biggest challenge when trying to buy groceries. Not only are many products no longer made, but many are no longer wanted, replaced by new options from the West. A comparison between two shots (Fig. 10 and Fig. 11) demonstrates this: "Über Nacht hatte sich unsere graue Kaufhalle in ein buntes Warenparadies verwandelt. Und ich wurde als Kunde zum König" (Lichtenberg 55).



Figure 10: *Good Bye, Lenin!* 00:40:37

Christiane's request for *Spreewaldgurken* poses a particularly vexing problem. In preparation for the currency reform the shelves of the supermarket have been emptied of the last East German products to make room for new and more desirable ones. The above shot shows the dreariness of an East German supermarket. The layout and signs are simple and informative. The colors are white and black and the saleswomen (and Alex) wear blue. There is no embellishment or marketing ploy to sell products. After the currency reform on July 1, 1990, the same drab supermarket is transformed into a colorful *Warenparadies* (Fig. 11) (consumer product paradise).

Figure 11: *Good Bye, Lenin!* 00:41:45

As much as capitalism presents a problem for Alex's scheme, it also provides him with a wide array of solutions. Therefore, he does not panic when he cannot obtain the desired GDR groceries. Rather, he becomes more inventive and deceptive.



Figure 12: *Good Bye, Lenin!* 00:43:23

The above shot (Fig. 12) is part of a sequence in which Alex sterilizes empty jars and attaches GDR labels to them. Then, he sits down at a table and pours West German products into empty GDR-labeled containers. The shot shows Alex at the center as the orchestrator of the scheme surrounded by his objects of deception. The plainer jars are East German products, which Alex fills with West German contents. The more colorful containers are obviously West German products and among them are Bonduelle (canned vegetables), Heinz ketchup, Jacobs coffee, and Langnese honey, which Alex pours into an empty jar. He and “Ostalgia at the same time resist and [are] complicit in the consumerist mode of production of Western extraction that is generating new ways of remembering the GDR past through the lenses of brands and everyday objects” (Codeanu-Kenworthy 174). This refilling of West German contents into East German containers is a form of domestication, a reversal of colonization. Next, Alex brings Christiane her dinner and explains that



“Spreewaldgurken hatten Lieferschwierigkeiten. Leider” (Lichtenberg 57). She readily accepts this excuse, because delivery problems in the GDR were not unusual. However, her positive response to the *Moskauer Gurken* that ironically are from Holland establishes a few things. The difference in food and taste between East and West German products is indistinguishable and a West German product is not superior, because its origin or packaging is western. But, just as in the GDR, the contents do not match the label. “Ultimately, the fact that Christiane does not notice the difference between the old East German products (present in the film only through their labels), and what she consumes suggests that the contemporary fetishization of consumer products from the GDR is empty of content, being more about form” (Cooke qtd. in Godeanu-Kenworthy 162). Nevertheless, it validates Alex in his game of deception and lies, which he can now take further.

When Alex refurnishes his mother’s room, he ensures that the view from her bed does not reveal anything West German. The generic apartment buildings are bare and offer the perfect non-descript view. Of course, the advertising industry discovers these bare walls as the perfect spot for product placement. So, in another colonialist move, Coca Cola unrolls a large advertisement banner where a mere 8-months earlier flags and banners celebrating the GDR’s 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary had been.



Figure 13: *Good Bye, Lenin!* 01:03:08

The shot (Fig. 13) shows the bare and generic apartment buildings that are so typical of East German architecture. There are no embellishments or beautifications and the large façade is the perfect location for an advertisement. The bright red and white banner, though off-center, jumps out at the viewer, because the surrounding environment is so dull. Of course, Coca-Cola is the signature beverage of the West and capitalism. Once Christiane sees the banner during her staged birthday celebration, she calmly asks, “Was ist denn das da?” (What is that over there?) (Lichtenberg 75). All the attendees begin to scramble for answers and explanations. It is Alex who assures his mother that there must be an explanation for this. Ironically, there is an explanation for it, but it is not the one he wants provide. Since he can neither change the label nor the content, a more elaborate lie is needed. This is the moment when Alex begins to manipulate media, specifically the news.

Alex's original intention was to keep his mother alive, but soon he realizes that it is more complicated than he thinks. Keeping Christiane alive involves not only his immediate family and consumer products, but also everyday media and Christiane's friends. When his mother suddenly requests that the TV be put in her room, Alex hesitates under the pretense of having to ask her doctor for permission. Somewhat helpless, he asks his colleague and friend Denis for help. The latter gives him a blunt but truthful answer:

DENIS: Zeig ihr doch was Altes.

ALEX: Wie jetzt?

DENIS: Na, so altes Ost-Fernsehzeug auf Video.

ALEX: Nachrichten vom letzten Jahr? Merkt sie doch.

DENIS: Glaub ich nicht. War doch immer der selbe Quatsch! (Lichtenberg 64-65)

As a West German Denis was aware of the GDR government's censorship of its media and insists that it "was always the same nonsense" and will do no harm. Although one can perceive this as a derogatory remark from a West German, Alex shrugs his shoulders and dismisses it, which is a sign that Denis' observation is correct. Indeed, Denis is a character who does not portray a stereotypical West German. At no point in the film does he judge or joke about the GDR. Moreover, he readily helps Alex in his scheme. In the end, it is Denis who gives him a VCR so that he can continue to fool his mother.

The ensuing lies, deceptions, and manipulations are the beginning of Alex's rewriting of the events surrounding the fall of the Berlin Wall. His methods also unveil how easy it is to modify or change the truth. In fact, "Christiane's frame of reference is constantly constructed and validated by television. ... The Other remains

stereotyped and recognizable, strangely familiar” (Codeanu-Kenworthy 170). Alex meshes authentic footage with fiction and thereby creates a hybrid form of media that he can (re)frame as needed. Denis and Alex’s false reports are quite comical. At first, they are inserted into old news broadcasts, which make them believable. Then, they get bolder and film entire broadcasts. Both formats become part of the film and doubly highlight the ambiguity of the news and history. “[T]he use of frames within frames allows the film to comment not only on the power of the global mediascape to disseminate consumer culture but also on how media, in particular news reportage, can be deployed to construct, deconstruct, and reimagine history” (Manning and Shackford-Bradley 48). By questioning the medium of film generally, the viewer becomes aware of himself or herself watching a fictional story. The fake broadcasts function as what Manghani calls metapictures. “Metapictures do not necessarily circulate the public screen to get a ‘message’ heard (indeed it does not have a single message), but instead in being its own ‘screen,’ prompts us to keep looking, to keep probing, to ask questions not only of what is shown or how/why it was shown, but also what ‘we,’ as spectators, bring to its spectacle” (Manghani “Metapictures” 126). Alex’s broadcasts prompt the viewer to reexamine his memory of the events of 1989/1990 and to set their private memories apart from the public memories. There is always an official version of history, one that is objective and gets reported or written down. The purpose of Alex’s broadcasts as metapictures is to mediate between reality and fiction, and private and public memory.

In the beginning, Alex's intention is to bend the truth to keep his mother alive, but in reality he tries to reconcile the events he witnessed in the media with those he encountered in real life.

Als ich an diesem Tag in die Wolken starrte, wurde mir klar, dass die Wahrheit nur eine zweifelhafte Angelegenheit war, die ich leicht Mutters gewohnter Umgebung angleichen konnte. Ich musste nur die Sprache der Aktuellen Kamera studieren und Denis' Ehrgeiz als Filmregisseur anstacheln. (Lichtenberg 78)

Alex's and Denis' first deception is to make Coca Cola a socialist beverage in order to explain their advertising banner on the apartment building. In doing so, Alex domesticates Coca Cola.

DENIS (TV): Ein Gutachten internationaler Wissenschaftler bestätigte nun endlich dem Kombinat, wonach der originäre Geschmack von Coca Cola bereits in den 50er Jahren in den Laboratorien der DDR entwickelt wurde. Zurück ins Studio. (Lichtenberg 79)

The language here mirrors that of the *Aktuelle Kamera*. It is scientific, yet concise, emotionless and specific. This way of speaking is not only typical of news reporting, but words such as *Kombinat* (combine) mark it as GDR-typical language. Additionally, Denis' intonation is consistently monotonous, which is reminiscent of the dullness of the architecture and clothing previously discussed. At first, Christiane is skeptical, but Alex readily employs a lie.

MUTTER: Coca Cola ist ein sozialistisches Getränk?

MUTTER: Ich dachte, Cola gab es schon vor dem Krieg.

ALEX: Verstehst du nicht, Mama? Der Westen hat uns jahrelang beschissen! (Lichtenberg 79)

He dismisses her question and inquiry by using a GDR technique of stating that Western countries lie, a prejudice that was heavily propagated by the Eastern Bloc.

Again, she believes him, which strengthens his resolve to do anything to keep his mother alive. Moreover, this resolve increasingly becomes a pretext to fulfill his childhood wish for a utopian GDR.

Another incident forces Alex to take even more drastic steps. One afternoon, while he is sound asleep, Christiane gets up from her bed rest and ventures outside her apartment and building. She sees a swastika in the elevator, Western ads on billboards, Western cars on the street, funky furniture outside her building, and new tenants exclaim that they are from the West. She continues wandering the streets until Alex and Ariane find her. She directly asks them: “Was ist hier eigentlich los?” (What is actually happening here?) (Lichtenberg 101). Again, the question remains unanswered for the moment, because Alex needs to reconcile what Christiane has seen publicly with the private screening of his manipulated events.

Alex uses partially fabricated news once more, because the GDR government controlled and censored the media, which ironically makes it more believable for Christiane. Now though, Alex uses the same censorship techniques to control what his mother sees. Since Christiane has seen West Germans in East Berlin, he uses this fact to spin the story of East Germans seeking refuge in West German embassies in Prague and Budapest.



Figure 14: *Good Bye, Lenin!* 01:25:01

Once again, Denis plays the news anchor of *Aktuelle Kamera*. The above shot (Fig. 14), specifically the TV screen, mirror the earlier shot (Fig. 10) of the saleswomen in the supermarket. The colors are a dull blue and grey again and match the intonation of his monotonous voice, which once again blandly proclaims:

DENIS (TV): ... hat der Generalsekretär des ZK der SED und Vorsitzender des Staatsrats der DDR, Genosse Erich Honecker, in einer großen humanitären Geste der Einreise der seit zwei Monaten in den DDR-Botschaften Prag und Budapest Zuflucht suchenden BRD-Bürgern zugestimmt. Honecker sieht in dieser Entwicklung eine historische Wende der Ost-West-Beziehungen. Und versprach jedem Einreisenden ein Begrüßungsgeld von 200 Mark.

...

DENIS (TV): Arbeitslosigkeit, mangelnde Zukunftsaussichten und die zunehmenden Wahlerfolge der neonazistischen Republikaner haben die deutlich verunsicherten BRD-Bürger in den letzten Monaten dazu bewogen dem Kapitalismus den Rücken zu kehren und einen Neuanfang im Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat zu versuchen. (Lichtenberg 102-103)

The report names all the official titles of Erich Honecker and uses long participle constructions to bestow truth and approval of the government. Indeed, the news reports exactly the opposite of what really transpired. Now, West Germans, who

seek refuge in GDR embassies, are graciously granted asylum. Moreover, they are also promised welcome money in the amount of 200 East German Mark. Of course, the reasons for leaving are the opposite of what socialism represents: unemployment, lacking prospects for the future, and growing electoral success of nationalist republicans. The original footage, similar to images from the actual fall of the Berlin Wall, and the added footage are non-descript enough that one cannot distinguish between East and West Germans. At this point, it is unclear whether the mother knows or buys into Alex's scheme, because her questioning gaze switches between the TV and her son. Of course, the audience is aware of the falseness of the news, but it also reminds them of the falseness and censorship of the GDR news. Alex employs the same GDR techniques to expose and discredit West Germany's colonization. Because of Alex's manipulated news, the mother suggests housing some refugees in their *Datsche*, which they take as an opportunity for a visit. This visit, however, turns out to have dramatic consequences for the mother and Alex's scheme.

The visit to the *Datsche* reminds the viewer of the film's opening sequence, which is associated with the memory of the father. These memories are stirred up and trigger the mother to tell the truth about the father's escape and absence just as Alex is about to tell her the truth about his scheme. Her confession reveals the truth about their father's escape plan, her inability to follow through with her own escape, and about the GDR and its intimidation methods. She is reconciling her truth with the GDR's fiction. Now, she regrets her lie and describes it as her biggest mistake in life. Throughout her monologue, she speaks in a calm voice that is filled with fear and the



regret. The mise-en-scene places Christiane at the center flanked by her children and their partners on either side. Her eye movements pan from shamefully looking down to looking at each child while she explains the truth. At the end of her story she sighs and closes her eyes. Similar to earlier events that affect her family and trigger a psychosomatic response, Christiane suffers another heart attack and is brought to the hospital. Although she reveals her truth, Alex's lies remain. According to one of her doctors' earlier words and Alex's continuing belief, he maintains them to keep his mother alive.

Alex's final lie is also the one that has the most impact by being doubly screened: to the Kerner family and Lara, and to the audience. It is also an important evaluation and commentary on the almost 11 months, and retrospectively 14 years or more since the fall of the wall. However, unbeknownst to Alex it is no longer lie, but a true work of fiction. Lara, who disagrees with Alex's game, finally tells Christiane the truth about the GDR and probably also Alex's scheme.

LARA: ... gibt nicht mehr. Es gibt nicht mehr ...

MUTTER: Das kann ...

LARA: Nein, das ist nicht so schlimm. Es ist einfach alles ein Land.

(Lichtenberg 119)

Christiane seems surprised by the news but she is not psychosomatically affected. In fact, she is more concerned about her appearance prior to her ex-husband's visit.

Meanwhile, Alex goes to find his father as his mother's last wish. This is also the beginning of Alex's reconciliation with his own past. Jähn, who served as Alex's *Ersatzvater* during his childhood, is now the *doppelgänger* who as a taxi driver brings him to his biological father. At his father's house, Alex is reminded of his childhood

when he joins his half-siblings watching the *Sandmännchen*, a popular GDR children's show.<sup>116</sup> Them watching an East German show is a reversal of, if not a resistance to, West German colonization. The particular episode shows the *Sandmännchen* traveling by rocket to Moscow, which establishes the connection between Jähn's space travel, the father's departure and return, and the mother's impending death. Because Alex no longer needs a surrogate father, Jähn's role soon shifts to become the fictional leader of the East German government in Alex's last fake broadcast.

Alex, who is unaware of Lara's doings, proceeds with his plan and prepares his manipulated footage to coincide with the official German Reunification on the eve of October 2, 1990. As opposed to the GDR's annexation to the FRG, Alex and Denis direct a more honorable end for the GDR: "Ein letztes mal noch sollten wir den Geburtstag unseres sozialistischen Vaterlandes feiern. Aber im Gegensatz zur Wirklichkeit als einen würdigen Abschied" (123). For that purpose, Alex enlists the help of a Sigmund Jähn doppelgänger and typical communist GDR memorabilia to create a mise-en-scene (Fig. 15) that resembles a GDR politician's office.

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<sup>116</sup> The bonding between the siblings over the TV show also reveals linguistic difference. Whereas the West German children call the *Sandmännchen* an Astronaut, Alex refers to him as a cosmonaut.



Figure 15: *Good Bye, Lenin!* 01:49:11

Sigmund Jähn sits in the center of the shot with his hand neatly folded on top of one another. He wears his military uniform with his military hat on the table to his left. On the table is a telephone, two busts and a microphone. On the front right of the shot is the GDR flag, which is the only color in an otherwise typically muted color scheme. In the background is a bookshelf neatly stacked with books and a white bust. The overall shot is reminiscent of earlier ones that prominently feature GDR elements. All these elements convey intelligence, seriousness, and pride in what the GDR achieved. The GDR national anthem, which begins to play in the background as soon as Sigmund Jähn begins his speech, highlights the scene and makes it comparatively less official and political than the previous newscasts.

>>SIGMUND JÄHN<<: Liebe Bürgerinnen, liebe Bürger der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik. . . . Wir wissen, dass unser Land nicht perfekt ist. Aber das, woran wir glauben, begeisterte immer wieder viele Menschen aus aller Welt. . . . Sozialismus, das heißt, nicht sich einzumauern. Sozialismus, das heißt auf den anderen zuzugehen, mit dem anderen zu leben. Nicht nur von

einer besseren Welt zu träumen, sondern sie wahr zu machen. Ich habe mich daher entschlossen, die Grenzen der DDR zu öffnen. (Lichtenberg 127)

This speech echoes the sentiments of Alex's mother that in order to create a better world, one has to actively participate. At the same time, Jähn also criticizes the GDR for its closed-border policy. "Einmauern" means to wall in and despite the GDR claiming that the Berlin Wall and its western border were a *Antifaschistischer Schutzwall* (anti-facist protection wall) to keep fascism and Western countries out, it in fact walled its own citizens in. Moreover, Jähn echoes Christiane's statements from the film's beginning that one cannot only dream of a better world, one has to actively make it come true. It is a reminder to the audience of 2003 and onwards, specifically East Germans, that they demanded change and succeeded with their demands. It also reminds them that wanting the GDR back in 2003 does not guarantee a GDR as portrayed by Alex. Then, by using the pronoun "wir" (we), he evokes a sense of *Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl*, a sense of community that formed among East Germans through shared experiences. Throughout the broadcast, he smiles showing optimism and hope for the new political order. The news continues with Denis as the news anchor criticizing capitalist ideas.

DENIS (TV): Viele wollen bleiben. Sie sind auf der Suche nach einer Alternative zu dem harten Überlebenskampf im kapitalistischen System.

MUTTER (strahlt): Ist das nicht wundervoll.

DENIS (TV): Nicht jeder möchte bei Karrieresucht und Konsumterror mitmachen. Nicht jeder ist für die Ellbogenmentalität geschaffen. Diese Menschen wollen ein anderes Leben. Sie merken, dass Auto, Videorekorder und Fernseher nicht alles sind. Sie sind bereit mit nichts anderem als gutem Willen, Tatkraft und Hoffnung ein anderes Leben zu verwirklichen. (Lichtenberg 128)

The words and phrases used here are harsh and raw. *Überlebenskampf* (fight for survival), *Karrieresucht* (career obsession), *Konsumterror* (consumption terror), and *Ellbogenmentalität* (dog-eat-dog mentality) are cruel. Nevertheless, they describe life in a capitalist society and through their use a socialist society becomes more attractive, even in hindsight and as a utopian version. The audience of 2003 and onwards, specifically East Germans, is reminded that it chose to live in a capitalist society and was instrumental in bringing down the GDR through a peaceful revolution, an achievement to be proud of. During the broadcast, Christiane keeps looking at Alex and smiles, because she knows that his efforts are what she asked him to do in the beginning of the film. Then, during the fireworks for the official reunification celebrations at midnight, she wakes up and smiles. Alex's voice-over states that she died happy three days later. Christiane's funeral reunites her family, neighbors and friends on the rooftop of her apartment building. Alex's final act for his mother is spreading her ashes via a rocket that bears the flag of the GDR. This send-off connects Jähn's 1978 space travel to the mother and their utopian endeavors for and within the GDR as well as Alex's utopian GDRs. The archival footage and home video shot are part of the film's final sequence wherein Alex recognizes that his scheme was more about him preserving the memory of his mother than about preserving the GDR. With its the end, Christiane's death and his father's return, Alex no longer needs to mediate between fiction and reality, the private 79qm GDR and the public West Germany, and he can fully transition into a united Germany.

## Conclusion

My project has discussed the various forms of suspension – *Dazwischen* – of the protagonists. Although there is a trajectory and progress throughout my discussion the term is highly self-reflexive and (self)-critical. At once it serves as a tool for the protagonists, authors and readers to create a space, whether spatial, temporal, psychological or in another form, to allow for examination, questioning, criticism and evaluation of the past, Third Reich and/or GDR, literature, language and censorship, colonialism, capitalism and *Ostalgie*, identity, and other more or less discussed topics. Yet, this space, and the term itself, is unstable and continues to evolve throughout the various texts. Indeed, the majority of the works remains open-ended pointing to towards the need to further examine the *Dazwischen* as a means for GDR citizens to continue to examine their role in a united Germany.

My research has also allowed me to view other themes and topics prevalent in post-1989 German literature and film with a focus on the GDR, its demise and the German unification process. For example, aside from the protagonist in my work, there are other marginalized figures. First, women in my chosen and other works are figures that seem to have an easier time (re)settling and transitioning into a united Germany. There is, for example, Julia Lobek from Sparschuh's *Der Zimmerspringbrunnen* who has seamlessly transitioned into a capitalist society working for a bank. Another successful woman is *Good Bye, Lenin!*'s Ariane Kerner, who immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall withdraws from her prestigious universities studies to work in a Burger King. She also readily rejects any East German

consumer goods and prefers to dress and consume Western goods. Thus, one has to question how and why female figures are abler to adapt to a united Germany whereas most male figures struggle to come to terms with their new identity.

Additionally, many of the works discussed in this project either have absent fathers or father figures which has a drastic effect on the wives/mothers and their children. Further works to consider in addition to Hilbig's *Das Provisorium* and Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!* are Julia Franck's *Das Lagerfeuer* and Markus Goller's film *Friendship!*.

In recent years, popular media has heavily focused on the role of the Stasi in the GDR. Films and TV productions such as Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *Das Leben der Anderen*, *Weissensee* (produced by ARD) and *Deutschland 83* (produced by UFA Fiction) and books like Wolfgang Hilbig's *Ich* or Thomas Brussig's *Helden Wie Wir* in combination with Stasi files have garnered considerable attention and are an interesting stepping stone for a more nuanced research of GDR literature and film. In closing, more than 25 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and German Reunification, GDR research continues to flourish and proves to be a fertile research area.

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